

# Ethnography of a Land-deal

A Village Perspective on the Addax Bioenergy Project

Master Thesis  
of  
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Revised edition of my master thesis, submitted on July 20, 2014



## Abstract

Large-scale land acquisitions (LSLA) are a relatively new phenomenon that started to attract academic interest since the end of the first decade of this millennium. Despite an increasing output of publications on such land acquisitions, elaborated data on concrete land-deals and their local impacts remain rare so far. However, such data would be of great importance for a better understanding of how LSLA affect people that have been living on and from the acquired land previously. As part of the research project “Ethnography of Land-deals” I addressed this research-gap by analyzing impacts in a village affected by LSLA in Sierra Leone. Based on data from in-depth social anthropological research conducted from June to August 2013, I describe how the Addax Bioenergy Project affected different local people heterogeneously. Moreover, I illustrate how impacts caused by this investment project were also affected by the specific complex local context. The analysis focus on impacts concerning access to land and other land-related resources and – as it was of great importance in the village in which I conducted my research – on emerging wage employment. This study reveals not only how the Addax Bioenergy Project affected different local people, it also contributes to the academic debate on LSLA by pointing out which aspects need to be considered to analyze local impacts of LSLA and engaging in the discussion whether such projects contribute or harm broader equitable development.



## Acknowledgement

First and foremost I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Tobias Haller for the intensive and thorough supervision of our research project and my master thesis. Additionally I own deep gratitude to the people in Mabilafu. Without their great assistance and hospitality, I would not have been able to conduct my research. Thereby I would like to highlight the generous support of Senasy S. Jalloh, Albert B. Sesay alias Clever, Abdul Kabia, David Koroma, Francis Kanu, Ba Osman Fornah, Aliou S. Jalloh and Mariatu Jalloh.

Further, I would like to thank Franziska Marfurt and Samuel Lustenberger for the great collaboration in our research team for Sierra Leone and reviewing parts of my master thesis. Moreover, I would like to thank Yvan Maillard, Abass J. Kamara and John of Bread for All and SiLNoRF for the provision of information and documents, the facilitation to access the research-field, the great hospitality in Makeni and the interesting exchange during the whole research process. In addition, I would like to thank my other colleagues in our research project, Romy Scheidegger, Leonie Pock, Anna von Sury and Elisabeth Schubiger and all the other students and staff at the Institute of Social Anthropology that supported me in one or the other way. Additionally, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Stefan Rist and the team of the research project “Sustainable Soil Governance and Large-Scale Land Acquisitions Originating in Switzerland” for the interesting and supportive collaboration.

For reviewing, I would also like to thank Rebecca Raybin, Simon Joncourt and Zaira Esposito. Finally, a special thank is devoted to my family, my girlfriend and friends for their enormous support during the whole time of my studies.

## Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgement.....	ii
Contents .....	iii
List of Maps .....	v
List of Figures.....	v
List of Tables.....	v
Acronyms.....	vi
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Large-Scale Land Acquisitions: Perspectives on Land-deals in Academic and Other Discourses.....	2
2.1 Drivers of Large-Scale Land Acquisitions.....	3
2.2 Terms to Describe the Phenomenon.....	4
2.3 Large-Scale Land Acquisitions and Discourses of Development .....	6
2.4 Large-Scale Land Acquisitions from a Labor Perspective .....	9
2.5 Large-Scale Land Acquisitions from a CPR-Institutions and New Institutionalism Perspective ..	12
2.6 Large-Scale Land Acquisition from a Land and Property Rights Perspective .....	18
2.7 Large-Scale Land Acquisition and Resistance.....	20
3. The Research Project and Methods .....	25
3.1 The Research Project “Ethnography of Land-deals” .....	25
3.2 The Sub-project “Ethnography of a Land-deal in Sierra Leone” .....	26
3.3 My Part in the Sub-project “Ethnography of a Land-deal in Sierra Leone” .....	27
3.4 My Research Process.....	27
4. The Research Context.....	33
4.1 Sierra Leone.....	33
4.2 The Addax Bioenergy Project .....	39
5. Description of Mabilafu.....	45
5.1 General Description of the village .....	45
5.2 (Mis-)reading the Landscape: Two Different Approaches of Reading a Landscape.....	48
5.3 Social Organization and Demographic Structure .....	51
5.4 Religion: Monotheist Religions, Animism and the Secret Societies .....	53
5.5 The Local Political Organization Embedded in the Larger Setting .....	54
5.6 Subsistence Farming, Land Rights and Access to Land-related Resources .....	58
5.7 Recent History of Mabilafu.....	62

6. Impacts of the Addax Bioenergy Project in Mabilafu and Strategies to Act in the New Situation ...	65
6.1 Perceptions of the Arrival and the Emergence of High Expectations Towards the Company ....	65
6.2 Perceptions of Impacts by the Addax Bioenergy Project: An Overview .....	70
6.3 Impacts on Access to Land and Associated Resources, and Direct Compensation.....	74
6.4 The Farmers Development Program .....	77
6.5 Working for Addax Bioenergy and its Contractors.....	79
6.6 Other forms of Monetary Income: The Informal Economy .....	86
6.7 Perceptions of Possibilities to Deal with the New Situations.....	90
7. Conclusion .....	95
7.1 Theoretical Debate on Large-Scale Land Acquisition .....	96
7.2 The Addax Bioenergy Project and its Local Context.....	98
7.3 Local Perspectives on the Addax Bioenergy Project and it's Local Impacts.....	101
7.4 The Performance of Addax Bioenergy.....	109
7.5 A New Perspective on Large-Scale Land Acquisitions .....	110
8. Epilogue .....	112
9. Literature .....	113

## List of Maps

Map 1 Administrative Division in Sierra Leone .....	33
Map 2: Chiefdoms of Sierra Leone .....	45
Map 3: Surrounding of Mabilafu .....	45
Map 4: Area of the Mabilafu .....	46
Map 5: The Village of Mabilafu .....	46

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Modeling Change.....	15
Figure 2: Schematic illustration of land use in the research area .....	49
Figure 3: Diagram of gender distribution .....	51
Figure 4: Diagram of “tribes” .....	51
Figure 5: Diagram of places of birth .....	51
Figure 6: Diagram of reasons to move .....	52
Figure 7: Diagram of profession .....	52
Figure 8: Diagram of Successful Strategies to find a Job.....	82

## List of Tables

Table 1: Design Principles of Robust CPR Institutions.....	14
Table 2: Customary land rights institutions on the national level .....	38
Table 3: Political organisation in Mabilafu and its embeddedness in the regional and national political organisation.....	57

## Acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank
AOG	Addax & Oryx Group
APC	All People's Congress
CDE	Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Berne
CPR	Common Pool Resources
CSOPaD	Coalition for Civil Society Organisation for Peace and Development
CSS	Conservation Support Services
ESHIA	Environmental, Social and Health Impact Assessment
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FDP	Farmer Development Programme
FDS	Farmer Development Service
FFLS	Farmer Field and Life School
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts
ILC	International Land Coalition
ILO	International Labour Organization
LLA	Land Lease Agreement
LSLA	Large-scale land acquisition
MADAM	Makeni's Development Accreditation Movement
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NASSIT	National Social Security and Insurance Trust
NEC	National Electoral Commission
NGO	Non-government organization
RUF	Revolutionary Unite Force
RSB	Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials
SEMP	Social and Environment Management Programme
SGAS	Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Afrikastudien (Swiss Society of African Studies)
SILNoRF	Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food
SLIEPA	Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
UNO	United Nations Organisation
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
Unicef	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme of the United Nations
WTI	World Trade Institute at the University of Berne

To be congruent all figures in this report are quoted in Euro (EUR) and the metric system. If necessary, they were translated by Google Converters. Accordingly, 1 EUR corresponds to roughly 5'900 Leones, the local currency, and 1.36 USD. By comparison, a 40 kg bag of rice, the staple food, could be bought for about 25 EUR at the time of my research and an average daily salary of villagers employed was, according to workers' statements, between 1.6 EUR per day for a help-worker and a maximum of 4.8 EUR for skilled workers from the village.



## 1. Introduction

Since the end of the first decade of this millennium, the topic of an accelerating pace and scale of land-acquisitions in the global south appeared increasingly in public media and scientific publications. Depending on the author's background, this phenomenon is perceived and labelled differently: Adherents of a neo-liberal development discourse describe such land-acquisitions as long-awaited investments to develop the backward agriculture in underdeveloped countries. Representatives of this discourse declared these foreign direct investments in the agricultural sector as development option that can – if managed well – benefit everybody. It is assumed that the modernization of the agriculture in underdeveloped countries helps to cover rising global demands for agricultural products and to kick-off broad development that benefits everybody in target countries. Critics of this discourse on the other side highlight that such land-acquisitions suppress the poor rural smallholders, herders and other subsistence producers. Such impacts are deplored as violation of Human Rights and thus rather a cause of development problems such as uncontrolled urbanization, malnutrition or tensions than a solution. Especially the cultivation of crops for the production of agro-fuel is criticized harshly as *“feeding machines instead of people”*.

Besides and within this heated debate, such land-acquisitions became a topic of scientific analysis. However, elaborated data on concrete land-deal processes and their impacts from a local people's perspective remained sparse so far. Nevertheless, such data is important and also increasingly called for by a growing number of authors as it reveals important aspects of such land-deals that were not yet analyzed (e.g. the role of previous land tenure and access to other land-related resources). With my master thesis, I aim at contributing to fill this research-gap together with other master students of our research project “Ethnography of Land-deals”. Thereby, the goal of my master thesis is to understand how a concrete LSLA affects local people within their specific local context.

In the following chapter, I deal with different approaches to analyze LSLA to provide an overview of the current academic debate about this phenomenon and further possibilities to analyze impacts of such land acquisitions. Therewith I prepare the theoretical basis for analyzing impacts of the Addax Bioenergy Project in Mabilafu – the village in which I conducted my research – from a project affected people's perspective. In the third chapter, I describe our common research project and my approach within this project. Subsequently, in the fourth chapter, I provide an overview about Sierra Leone to present the larger context in which Mabilafu is embedded. In addition, I describe the Addax Bioenergy Project to provide background information about the company, which's impacts I analyze in my master thesis. The fifth chapter deals with the local context itself – the village in general and some aspects more in detail – in order to understand in the sixth chapter how impacts of the company affected people in Mabilafu. Finally, in the seventh chapter I discuss the findings of my research.

## 2. Large-Scale Land Acquisitions: Perspectives on Land-deals in Academic and Other Discourses

Acquisitions of land or access to it are an on-going phenomenon in human history but by the end of the first decade of this millennium reports about an increase in acquisitions of enormous areas of land became a topic of media-attention. At the same time, scientists from different disciplines started to talk about a new and particular wave of increasing land acquisitions by national and international investors. Suddenly a rush in publications on this topic emerged (Oya 2013 and Locher and Sulle 2014). These large acquisitions of land are labeled differently, according to the authors' backgrounds and perspectives as "large-scale land investment,"<sup>1</sup> "large-scale land acquisition,"<sup>2</sup> "large-scale land transactions"<sup>3</sup> or "land grabbing,"<sup>4</sup> but basically describe "the acquisition or long-term lease of large areas of land by investors" as defined by Olivier de Schutter (2011: 249). Thus, this new phenomenon is not primarily about the acquisition of land tenure but rather about the control of land to make profitable investments – also called "control grabbing (e.g. by Borras et al. 2012). Hereafter I use the term large-scale land acquisition (LSLA) to refer to this new wave in land acquisitions. Despite extensive efforts to collect data about such LSLA<sup>5</sup> there is a great uncertainty about the effective areal extent of this new phenomenon due to its non-transparent nature methodological constraints as well (cf. Anseeuw et al. 2012a, Edelman 2013). However, it is generally agreed that the magnitude of deals to acquire control over large areas of land to make profitable investments have increased astonishingly since the food, finance and fuel crisis started in 2005. Two peaks of acquisitions or planned acquisitions were recorded in 2006 and 2009 but a great number of planned deals were ultimately not implemented.<sup>6</sup> Most land acquisitions concern land in Sub-Saharan Africa, but also extend to Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe (cf. Anseeuw et al. 2012a: 6, Saravia et al. 2013: 13 and the Land Matrix for the newest trends).

Various authors from different schools analyzed this new phenomenon from different viewpoints. With this chapter I provide an overview about the current academic debate on LSLA, how this phenomenon is described and which aspects are analyzed. Thereby, this chapter reveals the research-gap I address with my master thesis. First, I describe drivers of LSLA mentioned in the current debate about this topic. Then, I discuss methods of describing and measuring the phenomenon and its appearance in different development discourse before I approach the topic from a specific labor perspective. Later, I discuss LSLA from a CPR-

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<sup>1</sup> Mainly used by the World Bank (cf. Deininger and Byerlee 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Used by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) at the University of Berne and others (cf. Anseeuw et al. 2012a, HLPE 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Used for example by Saravia-Matus et al. (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Used by authors and organizations that are critical of this phenomenon (cf. Anseeuw et al. 2012a, De Schutter 2011, Borras and Franco 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See for example the "Land Matrix", an open database which visualizes data on LSLA from various sources for comparative reasons (research papers, policy reports by international and local organizations, NGOs, government records, media reports, company websites, etc.): <[www.landmatrix.org/](http://www.landmatrix.org/)>, accessed April 11, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Such non-implemented projects are sparsely examined. An interesting analysis of a failed project was undertaken by my colleagues who analyzed projects in India (see 3.1).

Institutions and New Institutionalism and from a land- and property-rights perspective. Finally, I briefly address local resistance in regard to LSLA.

## 2.1 Drivers of Large-Scale Land Acquisitions

The growing body of literature on LSLA describes different drivers to invest in the agricultural sector. Despite an increased demand for food, fuel and plant-based raw materials that results from higher demographic pressure (Saravia-Matus et al. 2013: 17), the growing search for a vertical integration of global supply chains in agrifood companies is also described as driver (De Schutter 2011: 251). Ever since prices for agricultural commodities rose, investments in this sector have become more profitable and, especially with the financial crisis in 2008 and 2009, investors discovered the agricultural sector as secure and profitable for investments (Cotula 2011: S102, Cotula et al. 2009: 52, Grain 2008, Saravia-Matus et al. 2013). According to a critical report by the International Land Coalition (ILC),<sup>7</sup> these investments also attracted speculations on land (Anseeuw et al. 2012b: 28). Other investors, mainly food-import dependent countries, reminded of their subjection to volatile global food prices by the food price crisis of 2007 and 2008, started to invest in the agricultural sector to overcome food-import dependency. As some of these countries have insufficient suitable land for agricultural development, they sought appropriate land abroad to produce agricultural products for their domestic market (Deininger and Byerlee 2011: 1, De Schutter 2011: 251-253, Anseeuw et al. 2012b: 24, Cotula et al. 2011: S101, Robertson and Pinstrip-Andersen 2010: 271, Saravia-Matus et al. 2013).

Another reason to invest in this sector is the search for alternative energy sources. Since fuel prices rose with the 2007-2008 fuel crisis and climate change is discussed widely, the dependency on fossil fuels is a cause for concerns (Anseeuw et al. 2012b: 26, Harvey and Pilgrim 2011). In the search for alternatives, some leading energy consumers have appointed agro-fuels, also described as biofuels, as suitable alternative energy source.<sup>8</sup> Saravia-Matus et al. argue that about one fourth of land-deals registered by the Land Matrix are destined to grow crops that can be used to produce agro-fuels (2013: 19).

The imprecisely-used term “green grabbing” refers to land acquisitions for ecological goals such as biodiversity conservation or carbon offsetting, driven by carbon markets (Anseeuw et al. 2012b: 27, Fairhead et al. 2012). Even though some authors call LSLA for carbon

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<sup>7</sup> The International Land Coalition (ILC) is a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organisation that promotes secure and equitable access to and control over land for poor to reduce poverty through advocacy, dialogue, knowledge sharing and capacity building (<<http://www.landcoalition.org/>>, accessed March 31, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> E.g. the European Union has decided to cover 10% of its transport fuels by renewable energy sources, mainly agro-fuels, by 2020 (cf. EC 2009). Despite critics that fear the EU policy leads to changes in land-use with negative ecological and social impacts through the promotion of agro-fuels, policy makers in Brussels struggle to consider these impacts adequately (cf. Palmer 2014). However, in 2013 the EU Council debated whether to reduce the 10% target or to limit agro-fuels in their mix of renewable energy sources, but so far, no decision has been made (cf. Keating 2013).

offsetting “green grabbing”, land acquisition for the production of agro-fuels should not be labeled “green grabbing” as the disparity with biodiversity conservation projects is too great.<sup>9</sup>

In the ILC Report tourism is mentioned as further driver for land acquisitions (Anseeuw et al. 2012b: 27-28). As Anseeuw et al. mention in the ILC Report, at least some of these drivers will not disappear soon, thus it has to be expected that such investments will continue to occur in the foreseeable future (2012b: 28).

Nevertheless, such investments are not only driven by international investors but are also attracted by national government agencies of target countries. Reasons to attract such investments can be to overcome food crisis, to create employment or to benefit from foreign exchange (Lavers 2012, Anseeuw et al. 2012a). These efforts are heavily supported by the World Bank and other neoliberal development agencies (cf. World Bank 2005) for reasons that are discussed in section 2.3. However, as Saravia-Matus et al. argue, most host countries are in an unfavorable position to negotiate terms of such LSLA because they are in competition with other countries similarly seeking to attract such foreign direct investments. Besides that, many target states have rather weak capacities to manage such investments and to regulate impacts that these investments produce. Further it has to be considered that these countries already have pre-existing obligations that may preclude the adoption of measures which would ensure that such investments also benefit the country and the affected population (2013: 20).

To summarize, the recent rush of LSLA can be explained and distinguished from former land acquisitions by rapid growing and volatile prices for food and a higher demand for agro-fuels that make it attractive to invest in the agricultural sector. Not only the role of investors is important to understand the increase in this type of agricultural investment, but also the critical role host countries play by attracting such investments.

## 2.2 Terms to Describe the Phenomenon

From the beginning of the debate about LSLA, diverse authors engaged in a discussion about terms to describe the dimension of the LSLA trend adequately. The initial definition of such LSLA as deals concerning large areas of land, or more precisely, the definition of LSLA by the “Land Matrix” project, as “*a transfer of rights to use, control or own land [...] that cover 200 hectares or larger*” (Anseeuw et al. 2012a: vi), enable interesting comparisons but are also a matter of constant criticism. According to Borras et al. (2012: 850), Edelman (2013: 485) and Scoones et al. (2013) the restriction on the extents of land, measured in hectares, is insufficient to describe such land-deals adequately as “*one hectare may not be equal to another.*” Land-deals are not primarily driven by the size, but rather by the economic value of the target land. This value is determined mainly by resources tied to an area or more precisely, the possibility to gain a commercial benefit from the use of some of these resources (cf. Peluso

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<sup>9</sup> LSLA for carbon offsetting or biodiversity conservation aim at conserve or recreate a specific natural environment while land acquisitions for biofuel production replace the pre-existing fauna with specific crops to produce biofuel (in order to reduce carbon dioxide emission).

and Lund 2011). Therefore Borrás et al. (2012) and Edelman (2013) argue for a scale based on the involved capital, i.e. the economic value of land. To highlight the aim of deriving benefits from allocating access to land, Borrás et al. call the phenomenon “‘*control grabbing*’: *grabbing the power to control land and other associated resources such as water*<sup>[10]</sup> in order to derive benefit from such control of resources” (2012: 850).

However, if not only drivers of this phenomenon should be considered, the restriction to the size of acquired land and economic value of associated resources falls short to describe LSLA. Various authors call for a consideration of power-relations between the investors and those who provide the land (e.g. Mabikke 2011, Peluso and Lund 2011). As described above, most host countries are in an unfavorable position to negotiate terms of such LSLA. On the local level, Locher and Müller-Böcker analyzed power relations between investors and project affected people. Their study points out that the different involved actors (i.e. the local project affected people and the company) have different access to strands of power such as formal land-laws, influential government authorities, knowledge on land rights, financial resources, but also treats of illegal actions against the investing company and different legitimizing discourses etc. The variation in access to different strands of power defines the power-relations between different actors and therewith the respective bargaining power of each involved actor (Locher and Müller-Böcker (n.d.)). Regarding LSLA on the national as well on the local level, legal and institutional pluralism generally leads to unequal power-relations in favor of the investing company. Moreover, power-relations between local actors are not equal as well. However, LSLA have a great potential to alter existing power-relations in favor of already powerful local actors what can lead to the exclusion of weaker former users. These power-relations need to be considered as well in the analysis of LSLA (see 2.5 and 2.6).

However, the question of power has not only to be asked in the analysis of LSLA but also in the definition of LSLA. A claim to define LSLA is a claim to frame the topic – to decide which aspects of the topic are to be considered and which not. To understand how definitions of LSLA determine how the phenomenon is perceived and how such definitions are linked with power relations, the reflections of Michel Foucault about the role of discourses seems fertile. According to Foucault the ability to define the official discourse, i.e. to define the way a phenomenon is framed, described and evaluated in the general public, generates power. Thus, claims to define a phenomenon are claims to power.<sup>11</sup> In this way disputes on how to

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<sup>10</sup> If a special focus shall be laid on water, mainly for irrigation, in the context of LSLA some authors refer to such acquisitions as “water grabbing” or “blue grabbing” (Mehta et al. 2012). Rulli et al. show in their recent article that “water grabbing” has increased with the increase of LSLA and has potentially further negative impact on affected people (2013).

<sup>11</sup> According to Foucault a discourse is a system of knowledge that frames thinking and comprises a set of rules on how to make statements that are true or false and in large part they determine what is possible to know or even what is possible to conceive. Most of these rules are followed unconsciously. The ability to determine discursive rules generates power to frame the possibilities in which a topic is discussed. Knowledge allows the creation of discursive rules, but is also determined by discursive rules, and thus knowledge is inextricably related to power. As Lewellen summarizes Foucault’s assertion: “*Claims to specialized knowledge are therefore claims to power, claims on the right to classify, to analyse, to observe, to experiment*” (2003: 192). Other

label, describe and evaluate LSLA are struggles for power. In other words, proclaiming a definition of LSLA can be seen as a claim to determine which aspects of this phenomenon are to be considered and which are to be neglected.

If land-deals are discussed only in terms of their physical size, differences in the quality of the land and motivations to invest remain neglected. If the economic value of land serves as scale, the economic value of the land and its resources can be analyzed but the role of power relations remain unrevealed. If local impacts of LSLA are to be considered, further aspects need to be analyzed in combination with LSLA. Especially the previous use of acquired land and associated resources need to be considered to analyze impacts of LSLA adequately. Such previous use cannot necessarily be expressed in monetary terms as they may include non-monetary communally, complexly interwoven and flexible uses of land and resources (this will be further analyzed later in this chapter). Thus, local evaluations of land and associated resources are needed. If local evaluations of land and associated resources should be considered, local actors' scales or terms to describe land and resources need to be regarded and included for analysis. An interesting example in this context is the definition and labeling of targeted land by investors and national states. These actors, eager to lease land, describe target land as "*underutilized*", "*uncultivated*", or "*available*" because such ascriptions legitimize the assignment of this land to investors (cf. Robertson and Pinstrip-Andersen 2010: 271, Da Via 2013). With this labeling evaluations of land and associated resources by local actors are not only neglected, their use by local actors or their entitlement to them are even negated.<sup>12</sup>

To consider all aspects of LSLA, especially with regard to local impacts, I argue for a definition that involves power relations and local appreciations of the land and associated resources besides the physical size and the volume of involved capital. However, analysis that consider all these aspects to provide elaborated data on impacts of land-deals remain sparse so far and authors with distinctive theoretical approaches highlight alternative aspects of the phenomenon.

### 2.3 Large-Scale Land Acquisitions and Discourses of Development

Authors from different development discourses analyze, rate and label the phenomenon of LSLA from a range of perspectives and thus highlight different aspects of the phenomenon. From a neoliberal point of view, represented for example in the numerous reports by the

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discourses exist outside the dominant discourse but they are subordinated and subjugated to it (cf. Lewellen 2003: 190-192).

<sup>12</sup> Such misreading of landscapes by external actors is not restricted to the realm of LSLA. Fairhead and Leach (1996) describe in their book how the forest-savanna landscape in Guinea was misread by scientists and policy makers for decades who assumed that forest patches around villages were the last vestige of a huge degraded forest. Fairhead and Leach described that these forest patches were actually planted by the villagers. Thus, the forest patches were not the last vestige of a huge forest that had been degraded by human activities but rather the product of them. Therefore, human activities were not a treat to these forest patches but the basis of their creation. To avoid such misreading of the landscape Fairhead and Leach call for an interweaving of historical, social anthropological and ecological data.

World Bank, the food and financial crisis in 2007-2008 led, as mentioned above, “to a ‘rediscovery’ of the agricultural sector by different types of investors and a wave of interest in land acquisitions in developing countries” (Deininger and Byerlee 2011: xxv). These investments, called hereby “large-scale land investments”, are seen as an opportunity to finally develop the “underdeveloped agricultural sector”<sup>13</sup> in these countries by making better use of underutilized land. It is argued that, if they are managed well, these new investments can be a vehicle to reduce poverty through the generation of wage employment, opportunities for contract farmers and the payments for the lease or purchase of land. Hence, these investments are assumed to help to create the precondition for broad-based development in target countries (cf. Deininger and Byerlee 2011).

Even if these investments are seen as a great opportunity, the authors agree, that such investments can have negative impacts on local people and the environment. Therefore, they postulate and support the design and implementation of principles or terms of conduct to prevent or mitigate negative impacts (cf. Deininger and Byerlee 2011). So far many principles remain voluntarily (cf. FAO 2012) and, some argue, useless or even destructive, as they promote and legitimate a type of agricultural development that is harmful to broader and equitable development (Borras and Franco 2010, Borras and Franco 2014). Thus, this neoliberal perspective is criticized by authors from different schools and civil society organizations.

Above all, the idea that such agricultural investments will bring development and thereby alleviate poverty and food insecurity is strongly criticized. For example, Oliver De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, points out that authors who emphasize the possible development brought by such large-scale land investments neglect the opportunity costs associated with such investments. Together with others, he stresses that such investments do not only target abundant land, as it was argued by many investors, but in fact frequently acquire land that was previously used. Therefore, they compete with small-scale farming, pasture or hunting and gathering activities that constitute important local food systems and enhance resilience of rural residents (De Schutter 2011, Cotula et al. 2009, Anseeuw et al. 2012a, Lavers 2012, Robertson and Pinstруп-Andersen 2010, Messerli et al. 2014, FAO 2013).<sup>14</sup>

De Schutter argues that improved access to land and water for local farming communities would have a greater poverty-reducing impact than the large-scale land investment type

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<sup>13</sup> An “underdeveloped agricultural sector” is thereby defined in comparison with the industrialised and monetised agricultural sector in western countries (USA, EU, etc.). Thus, the description by Deininger and Byerlee resembles in many ways the modernization theory based development discourse in which development is described as an unilinear economic evolution (cf. Rostow 1960). However, this development discourse is criticised by various authors for neglecting the negative impacts of the dependency of these “underdeveloped countries” from “developed countries” (cf. Frank 1969, Cardoso and Faletto 1977) and the depoliticised hegemonic terms in which leading development agencies, such as the World Bank, define development and describe underdeveloped countries (cf. Ferguson 1990, Escobar 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Such critics on neoliberal development ideas were already brought up by dependency theorists in the 1970s (see for example Frank 1969).

promoted by the World Bank (De Schutter 2011).<sup>15</sup> Especially, but not exclusively, in the context of the production of agro-fuels, the impacts of such LSLA are seen by many authors as a great threat to local as well national and international food security (e.g. Eide 2008, Robertson and Pinstrip-Andersen 2010, Fortin 2013). It is a longstanding, on-going debate as to whether large-scale agriculture with high technology and monetary input or small-scale, labor intensive, family unit based agriculture will better meet development goals, such as poverty reduction or food security (cf. Saravia-Matus et al. 2013: 27-34). From the neoliberal point of view, only large-scale agriculture with high technology and monetary input leads to development and modernization which will improve the living condition of the poor. It is also assumed that the growing needs for food and other agricultural products such as agro-fuel, construction material or cotton will be better met in this way (cf. Deininger and Byerlee 2011, World Bank 2008). From the other side, the human rights perspective,<sup>16</sup> it is argued that the promotion of equitable access to land for small-scale, family unit based farming will have a stronger poverty reduction-impact as millions of rural residents rely on access to land as part of their livelihood and risk-mitigation strategies. Therefore securing access to land for small-scale family unit based farming would transfer idle lands to family farms and land would be used more intensively and efficiently.<sup>17</sup> Thereby the overall level of production and the domestic food security is assumed to increase and productivity gains are expected to be distributed more equally. Further, it is argued that large-scale agriculture with its high dependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides for vast monocropping is less ecological (cf. De Schutter 2011: 258, Häberli and Smith 2014, HLPE 2013, Lipton 2006, Peters 2013: 555, to name a few). Last but not least, some adherents of this development perspective harshly criticize the plantation of agro-fuels instead of food (cf. Ziegler 2011). However, as mentioned above, LSLA are implemented to produce commodities on large, mechanized, monocultural farms and are legitimized with the neoliberal notion that only this type of farming will produce the necessary output to meet growing needs and development goals.

In sum, from a neoliberal development discourse perspective, applied in numerous World Bank reports, LSLA are analyzed in terms of how they could best contribute to economic development and how this economic development could best benefit the people. From a

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<sup>15</sup> In this context, Cotula's and Leonard's edited book on alternatives to land acquisitions discusses the potential of contract farming or joint venture models to promote a more equitable integration of small-scale farmers into market oriented production (2010).

<sup>16</sup> Development approaches based on the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights are here subsumed under the label of "human rights perspective". They differ from neoliberal perspectives on development and dependency theories that describe economic development as basis for further development that allows to achieve the goals of the Universal Human Rights, whereby neoliberal authors promote an evolutionary economic development and dependency theorists call for a disengagement from or changes in the exploitative global economy. The human rights approach instead appoints the individual and collective Human Rights ("Universal Human Rights" and "The Right to Development") as the basis for development, also for further economic development (cf. Sengupta 2001, World Bank 2005, Frank 1969).

<sup>17</sup> Various anthropological and other studies have shown that small-scale farmers are able to develop means of production and rules to govern land and associated resources in order to efficiently produce food and increase food production, even on arid land, if the political environment allows them to establish their own rules and if their (communal) property rights are acknowledged by external actors (cf. Boserup 1965, Netting 1993, Ostrom 1990, Haller 2001).

human-rights perspective, threats of LSLA to small-scale farming and other subsistence oriented activities, which are seen as the most suitable to reduce poverty and increase equal food systems, are evaluated. If we come back to the question of scale or terms to describe LSLA it seems that the neoliberal perspective mainly focuses on economic aspects (involved capital and possibilities to gain profits for all) while the human-rights perspective focuses on food production and equitable redistribution of gains. However, neither of these discourses pays much heed to perceptions and evaluation of the phenomenon by those affected by such land-deals. This is in spite of claims made in recent decades to also consider local perspectives and ideas on development goals and measures (cf. Escobar 1992) that even found its way into the political sphere (e.g. the concept of 'buen vivir' promoted by the Bolivian president Evo Morales).

## 2.4 Large-Scale Land Acquisitions from a Labor Perspective

Other authors analyze LSLA from a labor perspective. Thereby the well-tried concept of primitive accumulation provides a beneficial approach to understand how LSLA affect rural people (Baird 2011: 11). Karl Marx described primitive accumulation<sup>18</sup> as the forceful process with which people are separated from their means of production. Thereby, they become proletarians, workers who do not own any capital or property to invest in production and thus are left with no choice but to sell their labor power to survive (Marx 1962 [1867]: 741pp). In this situation, the proletarians are exploited as the capitalists, those who own the means of production, can appropriate their surplus production (Marx 1962 [1867]: 230pp). According to Marx, the expropriation of the peasantry in Great Britain in several waves beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century represents the first and purest form of primitive accumulation that formed the first class of proletarians (Marx 1962 [1867]: 745pp). Processes of primitive accumulation are generally backed or promoted by the state (Marx 1962 [1867]: 779).

David Harvey demonstrates that the processes and features of primitive accumulation have remained powerful up to the present day. While new forms of primitive accumulation or in his term "*accumulation by dispossession*" have emerged,<sup>19</sup> processes of primitive accumulation as described by Marx, still exist (cf. Harvey 2003: 145-150). Based on the concept of primitive accumulation it is argued that LSLA lead to the expropriation of rural residents<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> German: "ursprüngliche Akkumulation"

<sup>19</sup> E.g. "*patenting and licensing of genetic material*" or "*the corporatization and privatization of hitherto public assets*" (Harvey 2003: 147-148). According to Sassen today's primitive accumulation goes even further by consolidating an advanced capitalism that strengthen the dominant position of capitalism and excludes people from traditional forms of capitalist production for example through adjustment programmes imposed on countries by debt-service regimes (2010).

<sup>20</sup> Rural residents are people that live in rural areas and earn a living through the use of land and associated resources. The economic organization can range from self-sustaining means of production (hunting and gathering, pastoralism or peasantry) to cash generating forms of income (production of cash-crops). It can be assumed that in most rural areas a combination of these two types is practices. Further it can be mentioned that access to land and associated resources for these different strategies of earning a living and enhancing resilience can be organized in complex overlapping rights (see 2.5 and 2.6). If the livelihood strategies of these rural residents were mostly based on self-sustaining subsistence means of production the process of primitive accumulation goes hand in hand with a transformation into the capital system of production.

from their land and resources, i.e. from their means of production (Baird 2011, Li 2011, Peters 2013). In this context, Baird shows that the state plays an important role by accomplished the separation of rural people from their means of production. Based on a case study in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, he describes how the state redefined commonly used land as 'public' or 'state' land and therewith expropriated previous, mainly subsistence oriented users from their land. With the aim of general development, this land was given to investors and integrated into capital production. Meanwhile the expropriated people were separated from their means of production (Baird 2011). This indicates that LSLA can lead to primitive accumulation if previous users of the acquired land are separated therefrom and therewith from their means of production.

Sometimes the dispossessed rural residents are incorporated loosely into capitalistic production as workers for the investing company. Others may find wage employment in an existing or emerging industrial sector, if it is capable of absorbing the landless rural population. Thereby the rural residents are forced into wage labor and become proletarians (cf. Baird 2011, Li 2011, Peters 2013, Harvey 2003). However, by analyzing the above discussed World Bank report "The Rising Global Interest in Farmland" by Deininer and Byerlee (2011) from a labor perspective, Tania Li (2011: 282) argues that the creation of employment through LSLA is very low and Saravia-Matus et al. (cf. 2013: 23) add that other employment possibilities are mostly sparse in areas where such land-deals occur. Thus, many authors are very skeptical about the possibility that these newly formed proletarians find wage employment that enables a living. Thus, they argue that such LSLA integrate land and associated resources into the capitalist system of production (see definition of "control grabbing" by Borras et al. mentioned above). Meanwhile, the expropriated rural residents are not, or only loosely integrated into the capital production because their labor power is not needed by the new capitalist production (cf. Li 2011: 281, Baird 2011, Peters 2013).

Li states that most rural people would welcome a transition from more subsistence-based production to well-paid secure wage labor, but, as she writes, "*what makes it hard for landless people to accept their de facto proletarian status is that there is no sign that they can move into a proletarian future*" (2011: 296). In Marxist terms these new formed proletarians can be described as a "reserve army of labor", a group of people that is not working, or just sporadically working, for the capitalist production because the need for labor is replaced by improved capital production through investments of accumulated capital in technical means of production.<sup>21</sup> According to Marx, this reserve army of labor contains employable and no longer or not yet employable people. The existence of a reserve army of labor leads to competition among the proletarians and thereby forces active workers to accept rigorous exploitation by the capital production, i.e. maximal working hours for minimal salary (Marx 1962 [1867]: 657-672).

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<sup>21</sup> According to Marx the reserve army of labor (German "industrielle Reservearmee") is not only fed by the excluded workers but also by rural people that were expropriated from their means of production (Marx 1962 [1867]: 671).

As Claude Meillassoux, known for his Neo-Marxists theories, shows, the exploitation by capitalist production went even further during the capitalist expansion in the colonial times. Based on findings from his research in the Ivory Coast, he describes how the remaining rural subsistence sector<sup>22</sup> subsidizes the capitalist production. According to him, the rural subsistence sector produces labor forces for its own perpetuation. These labor forces are appropriated by the capitalist sector as cheap employee that can be even periodically expelled from the capitalist sector. Since the capitalist sector does not support non-producing people, those who are periodically or permanently expelled from the capitalist sector, they have to find other sources to sustain themselves. These people feed themselves by sustaining the subsistence sector. Thus, the subsistence sector offers social security<sup>23</sup> to the laborers that is not provided by capitalist production. Therewith, the subsistence sector produces and maintains a pool of laborers available for capitalist production. As a result, the subsistence sector subsidizes capitalist production (Meillassoux 1973: 89).<sup>24</sup> According to Elwert this subsidize of capitalist production can go even further as sometimes the subsistence sector also feeds active laborers. This allows the capitalist producers to pay wages that are even below the costs of sustaining a labor force (1982). In this way, the subsistence sector produces the labor force, feeds it and offers it social security. These laborers are appropriated by the capitalist sector that further suppresses the rural sector by its on-going expansion through the acquisition of land<sup>25</sup> and labor force. Thus, following Rosa Luxemburg's arguments capitalist accumulation is based on a constant drawing upon non-capitalist or not yet capitalist areas that support the capitalist economy (1913).

Another important subsidizer of the capitalist production is the informal economy. According to Smith *"the primary participants in this sector are producers of goods and services who provide some marketable commodity that for various reasons escapes enumeration, regulation, or other type of public monitoring or auditing"* (1989: 294). This definition distinguishes the informal economy from the subsistence sector as goods are not produced for self-consumption but rather as marketable commodities. From the formal economy, it can be distinguished as it evades public monitoring and therefore is not regulated or taxed by the

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<sup>22</sup> Hereby I refer to a rural peasant self-sustaining sector as it is described by Meillassoux. This self-sustaining sector consists of peasants, people that produce for their own consumption. To sustain this production, the maintenance of labor force through reproduction is required. This self-sustaining rural sector as described by Meillassoux also contains forms of exploitation. Through the control of marriage and access to land for cultivation the elder men exploit younger men and women (Meillassoux 1973, Meillassoux 1978: 92-99).

<sup>23</sup> Meillassoux uses the term "collective security" whereby he refers to "social security", as described by von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann. Social security describes efforts of individuals of a group to cover basic needs also for people of the group who are not or no longer capable of covering these basic needs by themselves. Reasons that prevent the self-promotion of basic needs could be physical or mental constraints, social or economic deficits or social or cultural requirements. Strategies to cover basic needs mostly combine different mechanisms that provide social security (Von Benda-Beckmann and Von Benda-Beckmann 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Authors from gender studies argue that this subsidy of the capital production through the subsistence production persists even in western societies. They describe housework, cleaning, taking care of offspring, cooking etc., as subsistence production. This subsistence production subsidizes the capital production as it produces and maintains the labor force (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1981).

<sup>25</sup> As it can be seen with the contemporary LSLA.

state. The absence of governmental regulations and protection in the informal economy makes working conditions precarious (cf. Smith 1989: 293).

Although the informal economy differs from the other two forms of economic activities, it is interrelated with them. People who are engaged in the informal economy are not employed by the formal economy, temporarily or permanently, either because of a lack of employment or because they are not allowed to work in the formal economy (foreigners for example). Thus, the informal economy can be seen as another sector to sustain the reserve army of labor. Further, through the interrelation, the formal economy benefits from commodities that are produced cheaply in the informal economy (Elwert et al. 1983: 282). Therewith the informal sector subsidize the formal capitalist production as it absorbs and sustains surplus labor forces and produces cheap commodities that also benefit the formal economy.

This labor-based approach to LSLA has shown that such land-deals can lead to a suppression of rural-based economies, or – in Marxist terms – to primitive accumulation. Land and associated resources are appropriated and included into a new form of production. Thereby rural residents who have been using this land and resources previously are expropriated from their means of production and forced into wage labor. This process is usually backed or even promoted by the state. As the emerging large-scale agricultural projects seldom offer much new wage employment, the rural population is not included into the formal capitalist system of production. Thus, the rural population is transferred into a reserve army of labor and, if not absorbed by other formal capitalist sectors, has to sustain itself either through maintained agricultural subsistence production or the production of commodities and services sold in the informal economy. Thereby both the subsistence sector and the informal economy subsidize the capitalist production. This reveals, as it is also described splendidly by Ferguson (2006), that the inclusion of, for example African countries, into capitalist production does not necessarily benefit its population as neoliberal development agencies assume, but can be as exploitative and exclusive as were colonial practices.

## **2.5 Large-Scale Land Acquisitions from a CPR-Institutions and New Institutionalism Perspective**

The labor-based approach can be used to describe how rural residents are forced into an exploitative dependency if they are expropriated from their land as means of production. But so far, little attention has been paid to prior patterns of land use and access to related resources as source of production. To understand how LSLA affects local residents, it is important to understand how their activities were structured before such a deal took place and how these former structures are affected by a LSLA. Such structures control the distribution of resources and wealth and also influence impacts caused by LSLA.

Rules and regulations that structure people's life and economic activities, such as access to land for example, are called institutions. In many contexts where LSLA occurs such institutions are interwoven into complex, overlapping, sometimes competing institutional settings. Studies of such institutions that structure human actions and interactions are subsumed under

the label of New Institutionalism (Haller 2013: 16). According to Haller these institutions “include constraints, norms, values and rules as well as regulations and laws” (2013: 16). They can be formal, i.e. defined by the state and written down as laws, or, informal, also labeled as “customary laws”. Such customary laws are developed by local communities and embedded in their culture (2013: 16). The ability of institutions to structure interactions enables people to anticipate the other’s action. Thereby, they reduce transaction costs. If people assume they will benefit from the induced cooperation, they tend to accept institutions (cf. Ostrom 1990).

As mentioned above, institutions regulate access to resources such as land. Access to resources is organized not only in the form of private property or governed by the state, but also as common property. In the context of collectively used resources, the American political economist Elinor Ostrom described, on the basis of anthropological studies, how various local communities were able to develop institutions that allow a sustainable, and thus in the long term more profitable, use of these so called common-pool resources (CPR). Such institutions help to avoid a “tragedy of the commons” as it was described by Garrett Hardin (cf. Ostrom 1990). According to Hardin the tragedy of the commons is as an inevitable outcome if resources are not privatized or controlled by the state but used collectively by communities. Following his argument commonly used resources are open to all and users tend to overuse these resources as they are locked into the “Prisoner-dilemma” situation<sup>26</sup> that dooms them to maximize their individual gain, even if this leads to the Nash equilibrium, the destruction of the commonly used resource (cf. Hardin 1968).

With her analysis, Ostrom (1990), as has already Acheson (1989), criticized Hardin’s notion that commonly used resources are open to all. They have shown that such resources are not necessary open to all but communally owned and governed by various institutions that prevent a tragedy of the commons. In certain circumstances resources are preserved better if they are used commonly as CPR governed by local institutions than if they were controlled by the state or privatized.<sup>27</sup> From her descriptions Ostrom condensates eight “design principles”

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<sup>26</sup> The Prisoner-dilemma describes a hypothetical situation in which two actors interact onetime only. If both actors would act commonly (in compliance) they would have a great pay-off. But, if one does not act in compliance he will even have a greater pay-off on the costs of the one who acts in compliance. As there is no possibility to sanction the other actor if he does not act in compliance, in each situation the individual actors are better off if they do not act in compliance as they have the greater pay-off if the other actor acts in compliance, but also if the other actor does not. This lead to the so called Nash equilibrium, the situation in which both rational acting actors do not act in compliance and thus do not obtain the great pay-off they would get if they would act in compliance.

<sup>27</sup> The control of resources by the state can be effective in certain circumstances but it also bares the risk of being ecologically and socially poorly adapted to the local setting. As Becker and Ostrom and the exemplary account of the traditional ecological knowledge of the Cree by Berkes for example show, local institutions are often better adapted to the local ecosystems than scientific based rules that struggle to consider the variability of the ecosystem and to determine its carrying capacity, the maximal use of a renewable resource beneath its capability of renewability – thus, the maximal exploitation of a renewable resource that does not deplete the resource basis (cf. Berkes 1999, Becker and Ostrom 1995). Further, as described by Haller, the state may lack means to enforce its laws. This can lead to a paradox situation of a present absent state (cf. 2013). The monitoring of private property can be expensive and difficult if resources are scattered over large areas or if they are mobile such as fish or herds for example (cf. Ostrom 1990). These insights are sometimes adopted to show that the promotion small-scale farming can be a better adapted to provide equitable development (as it

that characterize robust CPR institutions that allow a sustainable use. These design principles include:

- (1) Clearly defined boundaries of the group that is appointed to use a clearly defined CPR.
- (2) Rules have to be appropriate to the local context.
- (3) Further, they have to be open to modification through the affected users to adapt them to new contexts.
- (4) The users must be monitored in a way that is accountable to the users themselves.
- (5) Rule violation must be sanctioned gradually.
- (6) There have to be mechanisms that allow conflict-resolution among users and between users and monitorers.
- (7) The institutions must be recognized by external governmental authorities.
- (8) Finally, they have to be nested into larger systems, thus in tune with institutions on a larger scale.

Table 1: Design Principles of Robust CPR Institutions

(Ostrom 1990: 91-102)

Ostrom's notion that robust CPR institutions allow groups to avoid a tragedy of the commons and therefore to use CPR sustainable and, on a long run, more profitable is generally recognized by New Institutionalists. But, her depoliticized underlying idea that motivations to develop institutions are the benefits they create for all members of a relative homogenous group, is criticized by some authors and some of her notions described in the eight design principles can be further criticized by applying social anthropological theories. In the following part, I describe how the formation of groups and boundaries are already a highly politicized and also exclusive process and that the formation of institutions that govern the use of CPR is heavily impacted by power relations, their legitimatization and changes in external aspects that influence relative prices. Thus, established institutions are not those that serve the people's needs best but rather those that serve particular political interests.

Ostrom explains with her first design principle that institutions are robust if the group that uses a CPR and the resource itself is defined clearly. While her explanation why groups and resources have to be defined clearly is reasonable, little attention is paid on how boundaries of these groups and resources are constructed. As Frederik Barth (1969) notes, groups are not homogenous and group boundaries are not natural and clear. With his constructivist concept of ethnicity Barth describes that groups and group boundaries are constructed through mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. According to him, socially relevant factors that distinguish the own group in contrast to other groups are selected and emphasized to create and maintain boundaries. Thus, ethnic boundaries between groups are not the sum of fix objective differences but socially constructed and therefore fluid and flexible. Further, according to Cohen (1978), ethnic boundaries are multiple and include overlapping ascriptions that are situational and contextual. *"The same person can be categorized according to different criteria of relevance in different situations"* (Handelman 1977: 192 in Cohen

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is called for from the human-rights perspective, see 2.3) but generally neglected by adherents of the neoliberal development discourse (cf. De Soto 2000)

1978: 388). Ethnicity also bears a political dimension due to its ability to structure inter-group relations. Therefore, it can serve as a basis for political mobilization (Cohen 1978). Thus, ethnicity can play an important role to structure and legitimize claims to access scarce resources. Similarly, descriptions and analysis and thus boundaries of resources are nothing objective, naturally given but something socially constructed (Berkes (1999) and Turnbull (1968) describe for example how different people perceive and evaluate the environment in other ways). Thus in many contexts a closer analysis reveals that boundaries of such resources are much more complex than it would be initially assumed. For example, as I will describe later in the context of land rights and access to resources in Africa, boundaries of such resources are not always congruent with land-plots.

Further, group and resource boundaries are not only socially constructed and thus a product of negotiation and power relations, institutions that govern the use of resources are socially constructed as well. Jean Ensminger (1992) provides a valuable model to analyze the construction of institutions by the influence of ideologies, bargaining power and organizations which themselves are again affected by external changes that alter relative prices. Thus additionally to the design principles of Ostrom, Ensminger also considers aspects of power and ideology that legitimate claims to power. According to her model, changes in the social and physical environment, in the population and technology affect relative prices (changes in prices for goods and services) and are themselves affected by social, political and economic behavior. Changes in relative prices influence ideology, institutions, bargaining power and organizations which are also influenced by each other (see Figure 1).

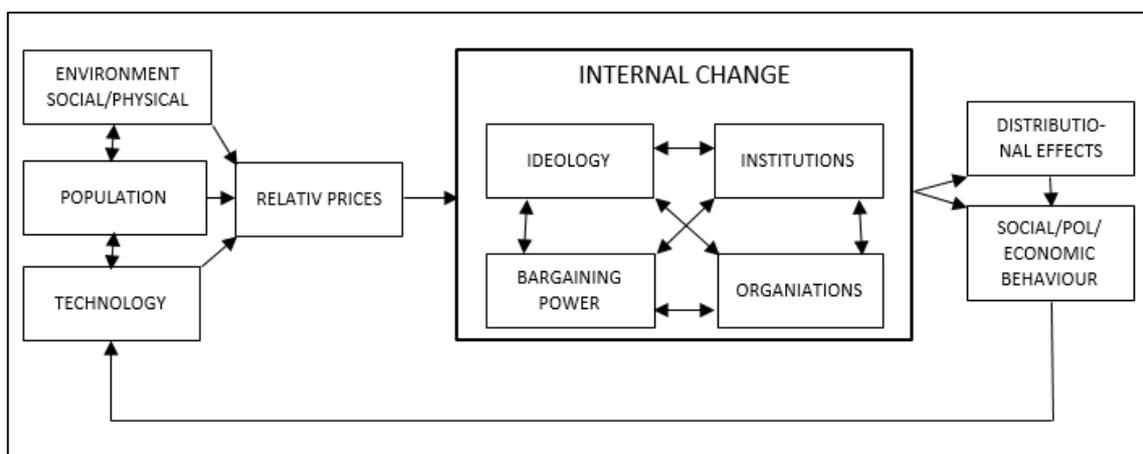


Figure 1: Modeling Change

(Ensminger 1992: 10)

With the model she combines “*the individual-actor approach of economics, anthropology’s appreciation of institutional constraints, incentives, and ideology, and the attention to power that we associate with Marxist analyses*” (Ensminger 1992: 1). At the center of her analysis are individual economic actions and not groups like in the Marxist’s or Ostrom’s analysis presented above. These individual behaviors are described by Ensminger as influenced by the above mentioned aspects of her model while these individual actions also manipulate these aspects (cf. Ensminger 1992).

In her model, she describes rational choice actors, whereby “rational choice” is used in its wider sense. Rational choice actors are not seen as a pure “homo economicus”, acting in his narrow economic short term self-interest, making rational choices in an unconstrained environment based on complete information to cover as much ends as possible by investing as few means as necessary. Instead, decisions of these actors, driven by means-ends considerations, are influenced by a broad palette of constraints from lack of accurate information and cognitive limitations to ideological and institutional constraints (Ensminger 1992: 12-16). Thus, as Elster sums it up: “*When faced with several courses of action, people usually do what they believe is likely to have the best overall outcome*” (Elster 1989: 22 in Ensminger 1992: 15). In other terms: human behavior depends on self-interests, that are already influence by culturally determined values, and ideology and institutions that promote or prevent specific actions.

These influences are described in Ensminger’s model as “ideology”, “institution”, “bargaining power” and “organization”. Ideologies are “*values and beliefs that determine people’s goals and shape their choices*”. Such goals can be inconsistent and include values from narrow economic self-interests to concerns of well-being of others (Ensminger 1992: 5). Such ideologies are not fix or immutable but influenced by institutions, bargaining power, organizations and relative prices (1992: 11). Here, Haller makes a claim for complementing this notion of ideology by the role of discourse and narratives that phrase such ideologies as such an enlarged concept leaves more space to describe the way ideologies are framed and used to alter legitimatization and bargaining power (2013: 23). Institutions are seen, as described above, as the rules of the game that help to structure people’s interactions and thus reduce transaction costs. But, Ensminger further notes that institutions are not selected on the basis of their aptitude to provide the best outcome for the group as a whole (as assumed by Ostrom), but rather to serve personal goals of the ones who lobbied for them (1992: 20-21). At this point, the importance of bargaining power comes to play: actors with more bargaining power are able to implement institutions that serve them the most. Thus, as Ensminger outlines splendidly: “*Given that some actors have more bargaining power than others, as well as diverging goals, it is not surprising that the institutions they promote rarely represent the most efficient outcome for society as a whole*” (1992: 22). In this way, bargaining power describes the ability to get desired things from others and stems from “*greater wealth or social position or the ability to manipulate the ideology of others*” (1992: 7). However, bargaining power can be altered by external and internal changes (1992: 10). Even though Ensminger’s analysis focus on individual actions rather than groups, collective action plays an important role in her study. Organizations are seen as the body of collective action, “*the groups’ people form to achieve their goals*” (1992: 6). Such organizations can be formed to campaign for changes in the institutional structure or the underlying ideology or to implement and maintain institutions (1992: 6). Problems of collective action can arise over imbalances among contributions and benefits, known as the “free rider problem” (1992: 30) but Ostrom’s design principles show that these problems can be overcome. However, as Haller notes, cooperation does not has to be as apolitical as Ostrom’s concept indicates. Doubtlessly

cooperation can be based on reciprocal altruism, if the various people involved benefit equally from the cooperation. On the other hand, if the power relation is unbalanced and people benefit differently, cooperation is called asymmetric altruism. Thus, as it was already indicated with the importance of bargaining power, power relations are of great importance in these studies (2013: 17).

In sum, Ostrom has shown that commonly used resources can be governed sustainable and efficient – thus, on the long run, more profitable – if certain design principles of robust CPR institutions apply. According to her analysis, CPR institutions are in some contexts better adapted than private property institutions or state regulations. However, her depoliticized description of CPR institutions can be criticized. Barth's concept of ethnicity shows that group membership – that has to be clearly defined for robust CPR institutions, according to Ostrom – are socially constructed and highly politicized. Additionally, boundaries of resources are seldom as clear as assumed by Ostrom. But overall, Ensminger's model of institutions as dynamic and contested social construct rather than fix, most profitable for the community as a whole institutions is valuable to understand how institutions are formed and altered. Ensminger's model describes institutional change as a dynamic process that relates property rights and user rights with external factors. This is a dynamic interplaying process in which ideology, institutions, bargaining power, and organization are related to external factors that influence relative prices but also affect those external factors. Thus, such customary institutions are not always rules and regulations that benefit people equally, nor those that are best adapted to a local context, as it could be assumed by reading Ostrom's book. Institutions implemented are rather those that primarily benefit actors with more bargaining power in a current situation. Nevertheless, most of these institutions are better adapted to the local social and ecological environment than other institutions would be (e.g. national or international laws based on natural science knowledge).

This theoretical background enables to understand how access to land and associated resources has been organized previously to a LSLA and to interpret how impacts of LSLA affect this previous use. LSLA have the potential to greatly transform the previous institutional setting. With the acquisition of land to derive economic benefits therefrom, relative prices are changed (value of land, food, labor etc.) because land and associated resources that have been used previously by local actors – often within a locally administered institutional setting – are appropriated. Thereby, new institutions to organize access to land and associated resources (e.g. new forms of reciprocity like rent) and new forms to organize labor force (e.g. wage labor instead of kin-based organization) are implemented. Additionally, new discourses to legitimize actions and claims of different actors are provided. As described in section 2.2, usually unequal power-relations are in favor of the investing company, thus they have most bargaining power to alter institutions, legitimation and organizations. Thus, LSLA have a great potential to affect the internal aspects of the organization of access to land and other land-related resources.

However, the way LSLA impact internal aspects has to be analyzed from case to case by examining how former institutions worked, how they were embedded in the larger institutional setting, how they were legitimized, who had the bargaining power, and how they were already transformed by former changes in relative prices and vice versa. Nevertheless, scrutinizing land and property rights in sub-Saharan Africa, where most land-deals take place and where I conducted my research reveals some interesting aspects of these institutions and how they are altered by LSLA. Thus, the next part deals with these aspects.

## 2.6 Large-Scale Land Acquisition from a Land and Property Rights Perspective

As in Marxist theories, likewise in the New Institutional approach, property rights play an important role. They are seen as rules, thus institutions that govern the use of resources. By their nature to govern the use of resources they are a major determinant for the distribution of resources within a society. Like other institutions, they “*provide incentives for some to seek changes in the rules of the game, while others have a vested interest in preserving the status quo*” (Ensminger 1992: 29). In the following part I will undertake a deeper analysis of property rights, especially land tenure, and their descriptions in Sub-Saharan African areas where LSLA occurred predominantly and where I conducted my research.

Camilla Toulmin (2008) analyses the role of local institutions to secure land and property rights in sub-Saharan Africa states. As institutions, property rights can be either formal, thus legitimized by the state, or informal and thereby recognized on a local level by neighbors and other people in the vicinity. According to her, governments have a legitimate role in regulating and administering land rights, but customary authorities also play an important role in land relations in many parts of Africa. Especially if the state engages only marginally in recognizing and enforcing land rights and the performance of informal institutions is strong, the role of the customary authorities to secure land rights is important.<sup>28</sup> Even though recognitions of land rights through customary authorities may be more accessible to local property holders, they bear the risks of not being recognized by formal legislation, not being effective, if customary land management systems have eroded, or bear the problem of insufficient accountability, if local authorities discriminate or exclude subgroups or co-opt the institutions for personal gains<sup>29</sup>. Typically customary authorities draw their legitimacy from reference to tradition as something “*that has always been like that*”. But as it is shown by Peters (2009: 1317pp) and Toulmin (2008: 13pp) and can be assumed when recalling Ensminger’s notion of institutional change, these “*traditional*” institutions have been subjects to profound modification over time as a result of internal changes and external impacts like “*cultural interaction, population pressures, social-economic change, political processes and manipulation by colonial and post-independence governments*” (Toulmin 2008: 14). Thus, in the context of colonial and post-colonial Africa such institutions have often been altered to

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<sup>28</sup> In the light of decentralization strategies that were mostly implemented from above since the 1990s with the aim to reduce government expenditures, efforts were made to increase the role of local institutions (cf. Duffy 2009).

<sup>29</sup> E.g. if they lease out land to investors without considering users and “owners” of that land.

serve particular external interests (Peters 2009: 1317). Further, religion is often of great importance for customary institutions. Religion serves as legitimatization but also provides institutions that go beyond the sacred sphere that is often inextricably entangled with other aspects (Lewellen 2003).

Current rights to land in the Sub-Saharan Africa can stem from different sources<sup>30</sup> and can be embedded in different social and political contexts. Therefore, as mentioned before, rights to land can involve legal pluralism, thus overlapping claims that depend on various factors, such as customary and formal tenure, seasonal variations, bargaining power, etc. (Toulmin 2008, Locher et al. 2012). Such legal pluralism leads to a situation of contradictions and insecurity as people cannot predict which legal structure will be paramount and whose rights count and will be supported in the event of contests. People seeking judgment over land disputes have several systems they can refer to. Thus, what is called “institution shopping”, people evidently try to choose the institution that most likely rule in their favor (Toulmin 2008: 13).

These constraints in the current land rights situation in many sub-Saharan countries lead, together with the notion of increased pressure on land in this region and neoliberal ideas about the advantages of privatized land rights, to the claim for more formalized and privatized land rights. Toulmin (2008) and Peters (2009) examine in their texts, if such a formalization and privatization of land rights would benefit people who have no formal land title and how such an undertaking should be designed to benefit them most. Depending on the funds, people can mobilize various methods to secure land and property rights. Formal bureaucratic validation are possible at various levels but, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, they bear the risk of being slow, expensive and prone to corruption (Toulmin 2008). Thus such a formalization and privatization of land rights would clarify the situation but by the nature of overlapping contested claims to land and associated resources such a formalization also bears the risk of suppressing secondary rights holders<sup>31</sup> and locally adapted institutions that allow for overlapping and reciprocal rights that are not fragmented with borders that exist, but remain permeable and flexible to respond to changes in the manmade environment (see Ostrom).

In sum, land and property rights in sub-Saharan Africa stem from different sources and can be embedded in different legal systems (local, informal customary systems or formal state-laws). This leads to legal pluralism and overlapping claims what creates situations of contradictions and insecurity. However, the formalization of land and property rights bears the risk of

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<sup>30</sup> Toulmin (2008: 11-12) lists five sources:

- (1) first settlement: reference to cultivation of the land by oneself or ancestors
- (2) conquest: depending on the political context this can be a source of legitimate claims
- (3) allocation by government: as mentioned above, governments have a legitimate role to allocate and distribute land
- (4) long occupation: legitimatisation of rights through reference to invested efforts in the land, this rights can particularly be in contradiction with claims based on first settlement
- (5) market transactions: also transactions of land have a long history in Africa

<sup>31</sup> Secondary rights holders can use specific resources even the land does not belong to them. Secondary rights holders are mostly vulnerable groups such as nomads, ethnic minorities or women.

suppressing certain former users – often the most weak – and to fragment and fix institutions, no longer capable to react on ecological and social changes.

In the context of LSLA sometimes efforts are undertaken to formalize former land rights to compensate former property holders (see for example the Addax Bioenergy Project in Sierra Leone AfDB (n.d.)). However, if such a formalization focuses too much on land and does not consider adequately overlapping and contesting claims on land and secondary rights on associated resources such as water, pasture, fisheries or wildlife they bear the risk of neglecting rights of vulnerable users and enhancing power differences within communities (Toulmin 2008). Thus if rights are to be formalized to compensate former rights holders adequately, dominant property rights but also overlapping and contested claims, constant and seasonal user-rights, the permeability and flexibility of borders and the possibilities of variations need to be considered what makes an adequate formalization virtually impossible.

## 2.7 Large-Scale Land Acquisition and Resistance

Before I complete this chapter I would like to mention a last topic that deserves attention. Up to now I have shown that LSLA and broader changes brought about by such LSLA impact affected people differently. People are not powerless subjects to such impacts but also perform resistance against LSLA or changes brought by them. Such resistance can be expressed openly as use or threat to use physical violence or as non-violent open resistance like street demonstrations, unionization or the resistance movement of Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela (cf. Lewellen 2003: 111-128). In the context of resistance of indigenous people against oil production Haller et al. (2000) have identified that massive open resistance is affected not only by the extend of ecological-impacts that affect livelihood strategy of affected people but also by endogenous aspects like the composition of local institutions and knowledge and information of these people about relevant topics. But also external factors like repressions by the government or the application and constitution of national laws, the role of NGOs and the national and international Media to support the resistance movement and to exert pressure against the company and the state are important (cf. Haller et al. 2000: 611-637). Mc Keon emphasize in this context that resistance is more likely to be successful if local movements have international allies and manage to embed their claims in an international NGO's political agenda (cf. 2013). All these aspects described by Haller et al. and McKeon influence each other and finally determine whether open resistance against oil production or LSLA occurs or not.

Even though forms of such open resistance can be spectacular and attract broad attention, everyday hidden forms of resistance are also very important, especially if power differences are high and thus open resistance is impossible or entails mortal danger. James Scott describes in his 1985 published book "Weapons of the Weak" and following articles such forms of everyday resistance by peasants. Such forms of resistance include acts like "*food dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, poaching, arson, slander, sabotage, surreptitious assault and murder, anonymous threat, and so on*" (Scott 1989: 5). Even though such forms of resistance avoid to call attention on themselves

their goals are similar to open forms of resistance but are relatively save, promise vital material gains and require little or no formal coordination. If only few engage in above mentioned forms of everyday resistance they remain with little impact but if such actions are common they constitute a real threat to the ones they are aimed at. Such forms of resistance can or could be addressed to a local elites, colonial rulers, state control, employers or newer forms of external control like companies that acquired vast tracts of land (cf. Scott 1989). His findings about every day forms of resistance by peasants can also be transferred to other subordinated groups. This reveals *“that power belongs not only to the chiefs or to the state or those that control official discourses, but also inheres in the general populace”* (Lewellen 2003: 127).

## Summary

LSLA as described and defined in this chapter are a relative new phenomenon that can be distinguished from former land acquisitions by the scale and pace that have increased astonishingly since the food, finance and fuel crisis starting in 2005. Price booms for agricultural commodities, especially food and fuel, made investments in the agricultural sector worthwhile. Thus, the agricultural sector attracted more investment and speculation, especially in Sub-Saharan, South-American, Asian and East-European countries. Moreover, countries where such land-deals take place play an important role by attracting such investments in the course of their neoliberal development efforts.

Depending on the perspective of analysis, LSLA is labelled and rated differently. From a modernization theory based neoliberal development perspective, such land-deals – also called large-scale land investments – are praised as a new form of investment that fosters development in the undercapitalized agricultural sector in target countries. Thereby – if managed well – such investments are assumed to stimulate broader economic development that finally benefits the population.

However, critics from a Marxist perspective compare LSLA with primitive accumulation. Accordingly, such land-deals lead to the separation of previous users from their land as mean of production. Thereby, these previous users are transferred to proletarians that lack own means of production and therefore have to sell their labor force. Many would welcome a transformation from a mainly subsistence-oriented production to well-paid secure wage labor but only few previous users are actually absorbed by the emerging capitalist production. Thereby, a reserve army of laborers evolves. In this new situation, the new capitalist production, brought by LSLA, can exploit its labor force. Meanwhile, people who are not employed have to sustain themselves by maintaining subsistence productions or engaging in informal economic activities. Thereby, these two sectors subsidize the capitalist production with the maintenance of a pool of potential laborers and the production of cheap goods and services for the capitalist sector. Thus, it is criticized that such a transformation does not necessarily benefit the affected local people – as assumed by neoliberal development agencies – but may be as exploitative and exclusive as were colonial practices.

Despite the exploitative character of LSLA – emphasized in the Marxist perspective – their suppression of small-scale farming and other subsistence-oriented activities is criticized from a Human Rights perspective. Oliver de Schutter and others designate the promotion of small-scale farming activities as opportunity for equitable development with better poverty-reduction impacts and food production outputs than the large-scale land investment type promoted by neoliberal development agencies. Accordingly, the suppression of such activities by LSLA impedes alternative development opportunities.

However, to understand how LSLA may suppress small-scale farming activities a closer look at rules and regulations that govern these activities is indispensable. Thereby especially rules and regulations, so called institutions, that govern access to land and associated resources are of great importance. Such institutions link small-scale farming activities with other forms of land-use and they are interwoven into a complex overlapping, sometimes competing institutional setting. Access to land and associated resources can be organized as private property, it can be governed by the state or as common property. Institutions can be formal, backed by the state, or informal, so called customary institutions that are developed by local communities and embedded in their culture. Ostrom has shown that private property and state governed organizations have limitations and that the organization and use of CPR can be cost effective and sustainable, if certain criteria of robust CPR institutions apply. Thereby, as illustrated in section 2.5, affiliation with socially constructed groups is important for the administration of access to land and land-related resources. Moreover, boundaries of land and resources are socially constructed as well and often more complex than previously assumed. Further, Ensminger shows that institutions are not uncontested nor immutable and do not necessary represent rules and regulations that benefit people equally, nor those that are best adapted to a local context. Accordingly, individuals use ideologies, organizations and their bargaining power to shape the constitution and application of institutions to serve their needs best and external changes alter relative prices and influence the internal interplay.

In Sub-Saharan Africa increasing pressure on land, cultural interactions, socio-economic changes, political processes and neoliberal ideas about the advantages of privatized land rights affected and still affect local institutions that govern access to land and associated resources. Further, the co-existence of different legal systems, such as diverse informal and formal institutions or state regulations with no state power to enforce them can lead to legal pluralism, insecurity and open access situations. Even though locally adapted institutional settings have limitations as well, they are generally better adapted to the local social and ecological environment. They allow for overlapping and reciprocal rights, also including secondary rights holders and they are flexible to respond to changes in the manmade environment.

LSAL have the potential to transform relative prices greatly (e.g. commodification of land and labor or reduction of available land and associated resources) and internal aspects with the provision of new ideologies to legitimize certain claims for example. Especially in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa were most property and user rights are organized by informal

institutions that involve complex, overlapping and sometimes contested claims with constant or seasonal user-rights and permeable and flexible borders that allow variation, impacts of LSLA are manifold and complex due to the above mentioned aspects.

However, people are not powerless subjects to impacts brought by LSLA but perform resistance against LSLA or changes brought by them. Such resistance can range from violent open confrontations to forms of hidden everyday resistance, described by Scott as weapons of the weak. Which form of resistance is applied depends not only on the severity of impacts and internal factors, but also on external aspects such as repressions by the government or private actors, the role of NGOs or the media. If open forms of resistance are not possible or too dangerous, forms of everyday resistance provide relatively safe alternatives to perform resistance.

Consequently, to understand how LSLA affect local people, it needs to be analyzed which changes are brought by LSLA and how this affects different local people. In order to analyze that, the previous constitution of the local context as well as impacts of LSLA on this context have to be considered. Therefore – as this chapter has shown – an analysis of the institutional setting that governs access to land and associated resources seems beneficial. In order to scrutinize the local institutional setting, it needs to be analyzed, how this has been constituted previous to the LSLA and how it became to be so. Further, it is important to understand, how the institutional setting was legitimized and who benefited therefrom. Similarly, changes in the institutional setting brought by LSLA need to be analyzed in a manner that asks, how this change is legitimized and who has the power to alter rules and regulations and who benefits therefrom. Changes seldom happen without resistance. Thus, it is also interesting to pay attention to different forms of resistance, such as, who is resisting and how this resistance is embedded in a broader context.

Further, – as the theoretical analysis has shown – the labor situation brought by the LSLA project should be considered. Therefore, it needs to be analyzed whether LSLA leads to primitive accumulation and if a proletarian class emerges. If this happens, the labor condition and how people deal therewith needs to be scrutinized as well. Thereby, the Neo-Marxist theories have shown that a special focus should be laid on subsidizes of the capital production by informal economic and subsistence oriented activities. These transformations affect the local institutional setting as well.

Addressing these questions further allows to determine whether LSLA promotes broader economic development in a specific context – as it is generally assumed from a modernization theory perspective – or, if LSLA is an obstacle to broader equitable development due to its exploitative character and its suppression of small-scale farming activities. Finally, approaching LSLA and its local impacts, vested with this theoretical background, enables deducing answers to the question, which aspects of LSLA need to be considered to analyze its local impacts adequately and to formulate a well-elaborated definition of LSLA.

This chapter has shown that dealing with the topics indispensable to understand local impacts of LSLA adequately, requires elaborated knowledge about the specific local contexts and impacts of LSLA thereon. Most currently available data on LSLA was produced for the first rush of publications focusing mainly on the physical size of acquired land for a global picture of the phenomenon is not appropriate to address the topics that are important to understand local impacts adequately.<sup>32</sup> Thus, elaborated data on LSLA, based on proper research and analysis is increasingly called for (cf. Edelman 2013 and Scoones et al. 2013). Addressing this research-gap with our research project, we aimed at providing such data on selected LSLA. How we accomplished this task will be described in the following chapter.

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<sup>32</sup> Recently, the data produced for the first rush of publications is even criticized as being inadequate to draw a global picture thereof as it is based on inaccurate sources and methodological procedures (cf. Locher and Sulle 2014)

### 3. The Research Project and Methods

The description of LSLA from different perspective and the research questions deduced therefrom in the theoretical chapter have shown that understanding the concrete implementation of LSLA and their local impacts requires elaborated data that have so far been sparse. In this chapter I describe our common research project “Ethnography of Land-deals” and my part therein. Moreover, I illustrate how I acquired elaborated data on impacts of the Addax Bioenergy Project in the village where I conducted my in-depth research.

#### 3.1 The Research Project “Ethnography of Land-deals”

With in-depth comparative research on various land-deals occurring in different parts of the world, this project aims at addressing this research-gap. Seven master’s students, supervised by Prof. Dr. Tobias Haller<sup>33</sup> and Prof. Dr. Stephan Rist,<sup>34</sup> are producing elaborate comparable ethnographies of such land-deals in Kenya, India and Sierra Leone. These ethnographies are based on ethnographic fieldwork data and human geography based in-depth field studies. On the one hand we aim at analyzing how concrete land-deals were realized or why they were abandoned. On the other hand we explore how differently affected heterogeneous local actors perceive such land-deals and how they deal with changes brought by them. Therefore, we examined the topic from both a horizontal and a vertical approach which were developed collectively in the research group.<sup>35</sup>

On the vertical level we analyzed exactly how a specific land-deal was either implemented or abandoned in its particular context and which role various actors played in this processes. Thus, we analyzed which actors are involved in the concrete land-deal projects. Further, it is important to know how the various actors influenced the project implementation process and how various agents acted as brokers, translators or facilitators. Thereby it also needs to be considered how ideologies and discourses produced legitimacy on several levels.

On the horizontal level we aim at understanding effective local impacts of a specific LSLA project. Therefore, we have chosen the perspective of local affected people to approach this topic. Such an approach is well-suited to address the topics to be considered to understand local impacts of LSLA adequately but yet sparsely applied (see last chapter). In order to do so, we examined how different local actors perceived the project implementation process. Further, we explored how such a project affects local people directly (e.g. economic displacement, income generation) and indirectly (e.g. reinforcing of social hierarchies, emergence of new values) and how these people experience and assess these impacts heterogeneously, based on their age, gender, economic position etc. Moreover, we analyzed

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<sup>35</sup> A description of these commonly developed approaches can be found in the project description by Prof. Dr. Tobias Haller on the webpage of the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Berne (cf. <[http://www.anthro.unibe.ch/content/forschung/research\\_projects/index\\_eng.html](http://www.anthro.unibe.ch/content/forschung/research_projects/index_eng.html)>, accessed May 1, 2014). The present description of this approach is taken from this description and thus contains great similarities.

how different local actors deal in practice with such a project and its direct and indirect impacts and how they react on companies' and government's strategies.

### 3.2 The Sub-project “Ethnography of a Land-deal in Sierra Leone”

My research illuminates, together with another piece of social anthropological research done by Franziska Marfurt, the horizontal level of this approach on the specific case of LSLA by Addax Bioenergy in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone. We conducted social anthropological research in two different villages that are affected by this LSLA. The vertical level approach to this specific case in Sierra Leone is conducted by Samuel Lustenberger, a human geography student. We have chosen the Addax Bioenergy Project in Sierra Leone for this comparable research on the basis of information from the Land-Matrix database that indicated that the project was already implemented and not still in the planning phase as many others are.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, there was already some data available on this project and Bread for All and the Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food (SiLNoRF),<sup>37</sup> their partner organization in Sierra Leone, provided a valuable access to the field.

We worked in close collaboration in our research group but every student carried out his own analysis with specified research goals to write an individual master thesis. Findings from my research, presented here, and data from the other two researches on the Addax Bioenergy Project are combined in a common paper submitted to the Journal of Homo Oeconomicus and in common presentations at the 8<sup>th</sup> ECPR General Conference at the University of Glasgow from September 3 – 6, 2014 and at the Conference of the Swiss Society on African Studies (SGAS) from October 17 – 18, 2014 at the University of Berne. Further, we plan to compare these findings with the insights from the other researches on LSLA conducted by the other master's students from the research group on cases in Kenya (Anna von Sury and Elisabeth Schubiger) and India (Romy Scheidegger and Leonie Pock).

Our data about the Addax Bioenergy project in Sierra Leone will also allow interesting comparison with other research projects on this specific case, such as the CDE project “Sustainable Soil Governance and Large-Scale Land Acquisitions Originating in Switzerland”.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> cf.: <[www.landmatrix.org/](http://www.landmatrix.org/)>, accessed April 11, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Bread for all is a development organisation of the Protestant Church in Switzerland. It is engaged in development politics, the information and sensitization to north-south inequalities and the support of development projects. Within their programme of the right to food, one project is the empowerment of communities affected by the Addax Bioenergy Project. Therefore Bread for all supports the SiLNoRF and campaigns against the company in Switzerland (cf. <<http://www.brotfueralle.ch/>> accessed April, 26 2013). SiLNoRF was founded in 2008 as a national coalition of civil society organisations promoting the right to food. The coalition is raising awareness on the right to food and advocates against the Addax Bioenergy Project in Makeni by monitoring the project independently and supporting affected farmers with they're claims against Addax Bioenergy. The coalition publishes independent study reports on the Addax Bioenergy Project and human rights violation occurring within the project realization to appeal on the responsibility of the company (cf. <<http://www.silnorf.org>> accessed April, 26 2013).

<sup>38</sup> cf.: <[www.cde.unibe.ch/Pages/Project/6/62/Sustainable-soil-governance-and-LSLAs-originating-in-Switzerland.aspx](http://www.cde.unibe.ch/Pages/Project/6/62/Sustainable-soil-governance-and-LSLAs-originating-in-Switzerland.aspx)>, accessed May 12, 2014.

Further, insights by our research in Sierra Leone can be used for campaigns by Bread for all and SiLNoRF.

### 3.3 My Part in the Sub-project “Ethnography of a Land-deal in Sierra Leone”

In order to operationalize the horizontal level approach my particular research goals were to understand how heterogeneous actors are affected differently, how they experienced the process of the land-deal arrangement-making and how this process was affected by power relations and ideologies that were used to legitimate requests to get access to land. Further, I was interested to get narratives from affected people describing the implementation process and the later performance of the project. In order to do so I analyzed how people perceived social and environmental impacts and conflicts that occurred in relation with the project. Thereby I focused particularly on the role of land rights and access to other land related resources, how they had been organized previously and how they were affected by the project implementation. Additionally, I was eager to understand how people perceived potentially positive impacts such as the creation of wage employment or other mitigation measures. Finally, to analyze how people deal with the project and its impacts, I aimed at observing strategies various heterogeneously affected actors applied based on their evaluation of the affected complex cultural and socio-economic environment, which they in turn affected through their performance.

### 3.4 My Research Process

Based on these research goals I developed a catalogue of research questions. I followed a combined approach of a deductive and a “grounded theory approach” based proceed.<sup>39</sup> This combination allowed me to start my analysis with previously developed assumptions based on theoretical implications but to remain flexible for newly emerging topics discovered by approaching the topic from the yet sparsely applied perspective of affected local people. Accordingly to this procedure, I adapted my focus slightly during the research. Especially wage employment appeared to be a particular focal topic in the village in which I conducted my research and thus, I paid special attention to this topic, especially to the access to this new source of income. However, this shift had no impact on the overall research goals.

For my research I analyzed accessible literature on LSLA and about the specific project in Sierra Leone, but the majority of information I gathered during a nearly three months field research in Sierra Leone from June 12, to September 1, 2013. During this time I spent nearly two months in Mabilafu, a village that lies within the Addax Bioenergy Project area (see chap. 5). To access this extraordinary research field I received support from Bread for All and SiLNoRF. This access was advantageous as I was given further valuable information about the Addax Bioenergy

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<sup>39</sup> A grounded theory approach seeks to analyze a topic from within itself and not from received and preconceived theory. Thus, as Emersons et al write: “*Grounded theorists give priority to developing rather than to verifying analytic propositions*” (1995: 143). Critics of this approach emphasize that researchers shouldn’t assume to be without theoretical background but rather being aware of it and being but open to topics that newly emerge during the research process (cf. Emerson et al. 1995: 143-144).

Project and Sierra Leone and was supported as needed during my research stay but left relatively free to conduct my research. To avoid accessing the field via the company appeared to be a good decision as they tried vehemently to influence research activities on their project by other researchers (e.g. the research by Millar (cf. Millar 2013a), or as I was told by researchers of the CDE and Marfurt).

### **Analysis of Literature and Research Preparation**

To become acquainted with the topic of LSLA I analyzed available literature and participated in the seminar “Land Grabbing: New Trends and Debates” organized by the Institute of Social Anthropology and the CDE at the University of Berne. Further I attained the stakeholder workshop “The Right to Food: Need for Action in (Swiss) Policy and Research” April 11, 2013, organized by the WTI and CDE at the University of Berne and the conference “Land Rush or Development by Investment? The ‘Land Grab’ Debate in Africa” October 11, 2013, organized by the SGAS, Institute of Social Anthropology and CDE at the University of Berne.<sup>40</sup>

In order to get an overview about the Addax Bioenergy Project I analyzed available literature and conducted various interviews with experts from Bread for All and SiLNoRF. The reports and information given by Bread for All and SiLNoRF describe the project from a specific critical perspective but together with reports written by Addax Bioenergy and commissioned analysts and scientific reports from various perspectives they provide a contrasted and broad picture of the Addax Bioenergy Project in Sierra Leone.

### **Research Stay in Mabilafu**

Most data on which this paper is based stems from the ethnographic research I conducted during the two months I lived in Mabilafu. I chose this village because it is a relative large one within the research area and its proximity to the factory construction site makes it a good place to explore effects of the factory construction that was part of the Addax Bioenergy Project. As mentioned above, SiLNoRF provided a valuable support to select access the village in which I conducted my research. Thereby I could rely on their knowledge about the project affected area and contacts to villagers. A staff member of SiLNoRF brought me to Mabilafu for preliminary visits and explained in a brief community meeting my intention of conducting research in their village. Fortunately the persons in charge were in favor of my research and intend to stay in their village for the two months. The head teacher of the village hosted me in his house and supported my research greatly by introducing me to community life, teaching me the local language and being the first contact for questions about topics envisaged. This allowed me to conduct my research nearly as planned. During my research I applied various ethnographic methods that are described hereafter.

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<sup>40</sup> cf. < <http://www.wti.org/events-overview/the-right-to-food-need-for-action-in-swiss-policy-and-research/>>, <[http://www.anthro.unibe.ch/content/conference\\_on\\_land\\_acquisition\\_debate\\_in\\_africa/index\\_ger.html](http://www.anthro.unibe.ch/content/conference_on_land_acquisition_debate_in_africa/index_ger.html)>, accessed June 24, 2013.

## Research Methods

Social anthropological methods call for long research stays (up to several years) in which the researcher resides among the people being studied (cf. Rivers 1913: 6-7, who was the first to call for this type of research method). Despite some profound changes within the discipline and severe criticism of this method (cf. Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fischer 1986), it remains important up to the present day. To live for a long time within a community being studied allows for conducting participant observation. Participant observation is a typical social anthropological method established by Bronislaw Malinowski (cf. 1992 [1922]). Thereby, the researcher participates in everyday activities and special incidents in order to directly observe how people perform in different situations. Therewith this method enables to study the different social, economic or cultural behavior of people in diverse situations. Such a study reveals how people do things they describe in interviews and thus enables comparison between their statements and observed actions. But it also allows for observing things that were omitted in interviews or that were not asked. Thus this method can reveal to the researcher previously unanticipated aspects. Furthermore, the application of participant observation leads to a multitude of opportunities for interviews that could not be planned in advance (e.g. interviews about specific incidents directly after the incident or other coincidental interviews with various people).

Additionally to participant observation that can be broad or focused and range from passive observation to active participation, different kind of interviews are important for social anthropological research (cf. Hauser-Schäublin 2003, Schlehe 2003). Interviews open access to the emic perspective and the construction of reality from the perspective of the interviewed and his or her subjective interpretation, for example their interpretation of a specific incident observed through participant observation (Schlehe 2003: 73). Such interviews can range from informal unstructured interviews that allow the interviewed person to influence the course of the conversation to highly structured questionnaires that ask specific quantifiable information (cf. Bernard 2002, Schlehe 2003).

Informal and unstructured interviews resemble open talks and give maximum space for the interviewed person to develop his or her own narrative in own terms, at his or her own pace. Such interviews allow for the discussion of topics that are of importance to the interviewed persons and thus enable the discovery of new topics that might have been overlooked otherwise. Thus, sometimes such interviews provide unanticipated information of which the researcher did not even had thought previously.

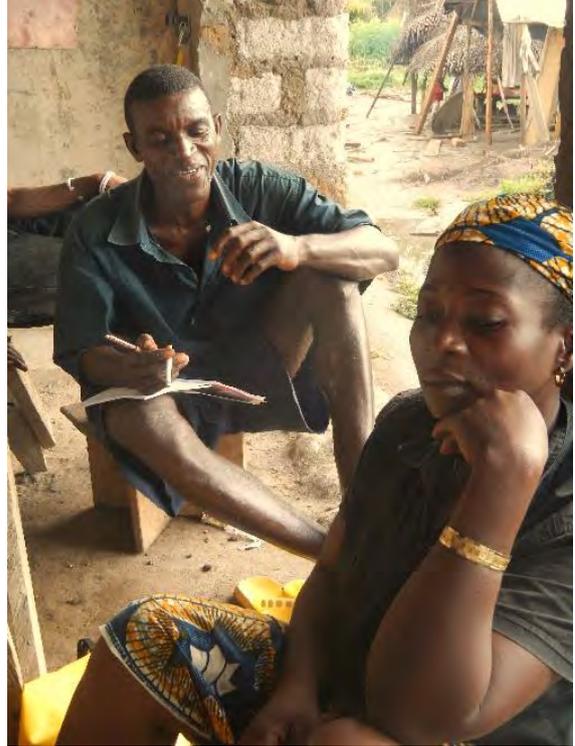
Semi-structured interviews are based on an interview guide but keep the qualities of unstructured interviews because the interviewer notes the topics he or she wants to address but does not try to exercise excessive control over the interview (cf. Bernard 2002, Schlehe 2003). Schlehe also counts biographic interviews in this form of interview techniques. Biographic interviews give insight into the conscious, memory, interpretation, structuring and concepts of identity of the interviewed person (2003: 79-80).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For further information on biographic interviews see also Rosenthal (1995) and Bourdieu (1986).



Collecting data for the household-survey



Collecting data for the household-survey



Discussion of papers, the community was given by Addax Bioenergy



Explanations about farming technics



Focus group discussion with women



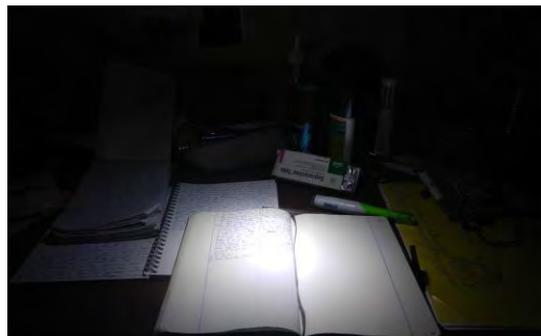
Active participant observation: participating in rice-seeding on the FDP field



Active participant observation: participating in rice pounding



Focus group discussion with village elders



Research Diary writing after a long day

All pictures were taken by the author or by people in Mabilafu using the author's camera.

Structured interviews follow strict parameters for the interview. They can also be carried out with questionnaires. Such interviews are performed to collect precise data for quantitative evaluation and are also part of the list of social anthropological methods (cf. Sökefeld 2003, Bernard 2002).

A final method are focus group discussions, whereby a group of people meets to discuss a specific topic. This method opens insights to the interests of a specific group about concrete topics (cf. Chrang and Cook 2007).

Anthropological research contains a broad mix of these research methods and it is left to the researcher to apply a combination of these methods most appropriate to the given context.

During my research I conducted participant observation ranging from passive observation to active participation and from broad to focused observation. Additionally I made good use of the countless opportunities for occasional interviews that were less structured for the most part and sometimes I insisted on more formal interviews with persons that appeared to be of great importance for my research questions. Thus I applied all four types of interviews described above. However, in practice they could mostly not be distinguished clearly and I could and did not want to insist on specific techniques. Sometimes when I was prepared to conduct a semi-structured or biographic interview the interviewed person was eager to relay something else that seemed important to him or her and so his or her remarks went beyond my catalogue of questions. Based on my grounded theory approach such digress were not only possible but even desirable. Most interviews were recorded and later transcribed before they were analyzed by the latter described method. In addition to interviews with villagers in different socioeconomic positions I conducted interviews with the staff of SiLNoRF. I also conducted some interviews with the Social Manager of Addax Bioenergy to get insight into his side of the story.

In addition to unstructured and semi-structured interviews I conducted structured interviews, based on a questionnaires, and focus group interviews in the second half of my research stay as they require sufficient previous knowledge to be effective. Based on preliminary findings from my research and a template by Prof. Dr. Tobias Haller I designed a questionnaire with various topics. Before conducting this survey I discussed the questions with local people and after some pretests I slightly adapted the questionnaire to facilitate the inquiry. Information on a total of 504 persons was collected by 3 interviewers from Mabilafu. Notwithstanding the elaborated preparation of the survey, the questions on food security had to be omitted from the analysis as people avoided admitting to have surplus food supply because they anticipated negative consequences doing so (they feared that neighbors or relatives would come to “beg” them for food). Simultaneously with conducting the survey, I ran three focus group discussions with strangers, youths and women. The aim of these discussions was to commonly formulate the problems with which the villagers are confronted since the arrival of the company and to elaborate solutions on how to deal with these problems.

Best practice of participant observation and interviews requires, as already claimed by Malinowski, the understanding of locally spoken languages (cf. 1992 [1922]). As my research

stay was rather short for social anthropological research I was not able to fully learn Temne, the main local language, and therefore relied on interpreters. Two villagers, the head teacher and his brother supported my research as the main interpreters. Because they also had their own position within the community and their own agenda, their presence and translation affected statements by interviewed people. This became obvious especially because these two interpreters had, even though they are brothers, very distinct social positions within the village and thus interviewed people sometimes responded differently depending on the person that translated. Therefore it was helpful to have two interpreters with different positions within the community. Sometimes I also conducted interviews without them to get further perspectives. This was possible because other people spoke some English and could be interviewed without interpreters or translated for me when I was without one of the main interpreters. Despite the inability to fully learn the local language, I was able to learn some words and sentences and thus was able to understand and communicate in basic discourses.

Besides the impacts of interpreters on statements of interviewed people, the role and the attitude people have towards the researcher have even greater impacts on statements and behavior of people (cf. Hauser-Schäublin 2003, Senft 2003). As my arrival in the village was facilitated by SiLNoRF, the local NGO, I constantly had to oppose the assumption that I would be an NGO worker. This assumption fostered the notion that if I could be convinced of the problems caused by the company I would later campaign to support the community's claims for more assistance by the company. Even though I opposed this assumption strenuously I could not completely remove it and by reviewing my data it became apparent that some of the statements and topics brought up by people were made with the aim of convincing me to recount their hardship brought about by the company.

### **Data Evaluation**

Ultimately I spent nearly a year analyzing and describing the results gathered during the research stay. Coding and memoing is a famous anthropological method to analyze the data collected with the different methods. Coding and memoing allows for data analysis with a grounded theory approach. As described by Emerson et al. (1995) written data is categorized line by line with tags or codes to analyze them in an inductive manner, thus developing the framework of data-analysis on the basis of the data itself and not from preconceived theory. However, contrary to the grounded theory approach's assumption that data gathering and analyzing are two distinct tasks, Emerson et al. argue that data cannot be taken as uninfluenced raw material because the data gathering itself was already influenced by analytical processes and theoretical commitments of the researcher. Thus, they describe ethnographic research as both, deductive and inductive (1995: 143-144). For the analysis of the data I coded the transcribed interviews and written field notes from participant observation. This method allowed me to find patterns within the data. In the interest of triangulation, the data from different methods and persons were tested against each other to test the validity of information and to compare statements from different actors (cf. Fetterman 1998: 93-96).

## **Summary**

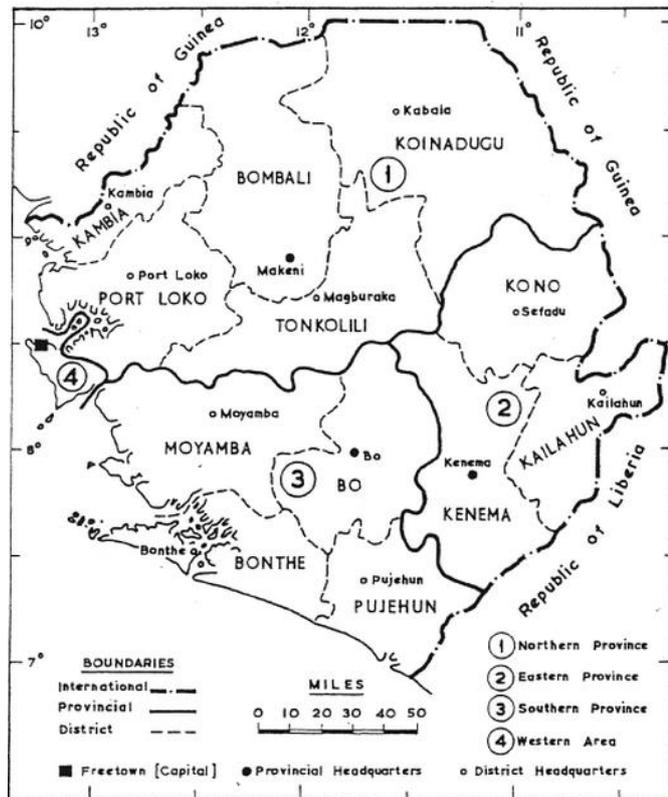
The analysis of the literature has shown that despite an incredible output in literature and research activity on LSLA in the last years, elaborate data on specific land-deal processes and their impacts remains sparse. Aim of our joint research project was to address this research-gap. Therefore, we analyzed on a vertical level the implementation process of three selected LSLA projects in various countries and, on a horizontal level, their heterogeneous impacts and perceptions in project-affected villages. As part of this research project, my master thesis provides an in-depth analysis of the specific LSLA project of Addax Bioenergy in Sierra Leone on the horizontal level. This study is complemented by another research on the horizontal level and an upscaling on the vertical level. By living for several months within a project affected village and applying the above described methods I could analyze perceptions of such a LSLA project and its heterogeneous impacts by local project affected people. Further, it allowed to understand how people deal in practice with changes brought by such a project.

## 4. The Research Context

Following, I describe the larger context in which the village where I conducted my research is embedded. I give a brief overview about Sierra Leone and I describe the LSLA project that is implemented in the region around the village in which I conducted my research.

### 4.1 Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is a small West African country with a total land area of approximately 45'000 km<sup>2</sup>. In the north and north-east it is bound by Guinea, in the south-east by Liberia and in the west it borders the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>42</sup> Administratively, Sierra Leone consists of four regions of whom three are further divided into twelve districts. The fourth region, the Western Area, is distinguished from the others because of strong impacts of its particular colonial history and it's intermix of all ethnic groups of the country. The other three districts are further divided into 149 chiefdoms. Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone is by far the largest city and the center of economic activity. Other regional centers are Bo, Bonthe, Kenema; Koidu and Makeni (Renner-Thomas 2010: 6-7, Conteh 2013).



Map 1 Administrative Division in Sierra Leone

(Source: Fyle 2006: xiv)

According to a population census by the Sierra Leonean government, the country's population reached nearly five million inhabitants in 2004 when the census was completed (Statistics Sierra Leone 2007: 6). As stated in this census, 47% of the total population was male, with the lowest percentage in the Tonkolili district (43.5%). Roughly one third of the population lived in urban localities with more than 2000 inhabitants (2007: 11, 14). Further, the census describes two major ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, the Mende (32.2%) and Temne (31.8%).<sup>43</sup> The Temne live predominantly in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone where I conducted my research while the Mende occupy most of the Southern and Eastern Province (cf. Renner-

<sup>42</sup> For further geographical description see Clarke (1969).

<sup>43</sup> Further ethnic groups are Limba (8.3%), Kono (4.4%), Koranko (4.1%), Fullah (3.7%), Susu (2.9%), Loko (2.6%), Kissi (2.5%), Madingo (2.4%), Sherbro (2.3%), Krio (1.4%) and others (1.6%) (Statistics Sierra Leone 2007: 54). These numbers differ slightly, depending on the source. As Fyle notes, these ethnic groups also intermingle (2011: 19) and as the examination with ethnicity in the theoretical chapter shows, such distinctions are not natural but socially constructed and affected by power relations. This however does not prohibit deducing rough trends.

Thomas 2010: xxxvi). Ethnic groups or tribes as they are called locally are of great importance for national politics (see below), but are also locally used as tools of inclusion and exclusion.

The population census further shows that only 4.5% of the population over ten years old are working as employed wage laborer whereby percentage of employed men is much higher than that of women. Some 42.9% of the whole population are described as self-employed, 22.7% as household workers or unpaid family workers and 22.7% as students. Thus, the majority of Sierra Leoneans is engaged in crop farming and other subsistence and informal economic activities (cf. Statistics Sierra Leone 2007: 68-75). Even though the amount of employed wage laborer is small, Sierra Leone has a law that protects employees through minimum standards (e.g. minimum salary or safety and pension acts).<sup>44</sup>

To give a brief overview about the country I briefly recount the history of Sierra Leone before describing the organization of land tenure in Sierra Leone.

### **Brief History of Sierra Leone**

Literature about the area of today's Sierra Leone prior to the first contact with Europeans is sparse. According to Magbaily Fyle, professor emeritus at the Ohio State University who wrote a president-friendly nationalist book for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of Sierra Leone (2011),<sup>45</sup> different ethnic groups immigrated to and migrated within the area of Sierra Leone for a long time. Before the fifteenth century, the Temne established the Banta Empire, a centralized political system in today's Moyamba, Bonthe and Tonkolili Districts. This empire became gradually Mende-dominated through their immigration in the fifteenth century (2011: 18). In early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Islam, brought by immigrating and trading Fulah, began to spread and amalgamate with pre-existing local spiritual beliefs (Fyle 2011: 31-38, see also Alie 1990: 43-46).

Sierra Leone had been strongly affected by slave-trade and the repatriation of freed slaves who were brought to Freetown by Brits. From 1808 to 1961 Sierra Leone was a British colony. The first years after independence were politically dominated by the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). After winning a small majority in 1967 the All People's Congress (APC) party installed, accompanied by various military coups, a one-party state (Fyle 2006, 2011, Alie 1990).<sup>46</sup> From 1991 to 2002 a violent civil war hit the country. At large, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) fought the government, but on the ground various governmental factions

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<sup>44</sup> cf. ILO: Basic Labor Law Information. Sierra Leone – Basic Law in NATLEX. <[http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/country\\_profiles.nationalLaw?p\\_lang=en&p\\_country=SLE](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/country_profiles.nationalLaw?p_lang=en&p_country=SLE)>, accessed May 23, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> This book cannot be seen as objective. However also all following texts are written with some hidden or more obvious agendas and therefore all of them should be interpreted as describing certain aspects from a specific perspective with specific goals. For the analysis of these texts I considered that carefully.

<sup>46</sup> National politics are dominated by these two political parties, the SLPP and the APC. While the SLPP originally and presently has its support in the Mende-dominated south of Sierra Leone, the APC is backed by the Temne-dominated north (cf. Kandeh 1992, NEC 2007). The harsh differentiation of these two parties can be explained by the virulent struggle for supremacy since the end of the colonial era (cf. Fyle 2011, Alie 1990, Kandeh 1992). Since the rifts between these two parties are fierce, each president is expected to favor the respective area of origin and the people of the defeated party feel neglected and blame the contemporary government for adversity (cf. SLPP: <<http://slpponline.com/>>, APC: <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/APC-All-Peoples-Congress/122456425777>>, both accessed May 21, 2014).

and rebel groups fought each other and formed intersecting alliances in their struggle for resources to sustain their power. However, the United Nations peace keeping troops finally overthrew the rebels and in 2002 a restored SLPP-led government declared the end of the war that brought mutilation and death to tens of thousands and forced millions to flee (Ehret 2007, Shaw 2008). Following the civil war the SLPP constituted the majority of the parliament and won the election of the president. But, in 2007 the APC recaptured the majority of seats in the parliament and instated the actual president (cf. Fyle 2011: 246-249).

Since the civil war Sierra Leone is ranked among the last in the United Nations Human Development Index.<sup>47</sup> Efforts of international governmental and nongovernmental organizations to foster social reconciliation and to rebuild a functioning state and civil society are large but are also highly criticized (cf. Ehret 2007, Fanthorpe 2005). In particular, fast tracking decentralizing programs and neoliberal development programs are strongly supported by the international donors such as the World Bank, UNDP and EU. These organizations support the devolving of central government functions to newly developed locally elected authorities (e.g. district councils) with the rationale that they open up space for popular participation in the government process (cf. Zhou 2009). However, Fanthorpe shows that despite these newly implemented governmental institutions, chieftaincy, the “traditional” political organization with the town as smallest official political unit that ties its members by bond or affinity, still remains the focal political institution for control over the Sierra Leonean countryside (2005: 45). Richards (2005) warns that these “traditional” political organizations maintain the exploitation of young people that had led to the civil war and as Fanthorpe (2005) writes, many development agencies now see them as an obstacle to development. But, Fanthorpe (2005) and Fanthorpe and Maconacie (2010) argue contrarily that the “traditional” local elite is preferred by rural people because they are more downwardly accountable than the newly elected politicians and bureaucrats. Fanthorpe (2005) therefore calls for political reforms on the chiefdom level (the level of the “traditional” political organization) rather than on the new implemented district level. Whether these newly developed local authorities or the “traditional” political organization are more supportive to poor people and to foster development is a hotly discussed issue by various involved actors but will not be further argued here.

However, since 2004 the new elected Town and District Councils and Chief Administrative Officers are assigned with increasing responsibility. Meanwhile the “traditional” political organization, based on chiefdoms, sections and towns with their corresponding leaders, the paramount chief, the section chief and various people on the village level, remain important. But, due to this overlapping political organization between the new and “traditional” political organization conflicting responsibilities emerge (cf. Fanthorpe et al. 2011, Renner-Thomas 2010).

Aside from internationally-supported decentralizing efforts, neoliberal development programs are a further focal point of international assistance. As part of that in 2007 the Sierra

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<sup>47</sup> Today Sierra Leone is ranked 177<sup>th</sup> out of 186 (UNDP 2013).

Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) was founded “*to stimulate domestic and foreign investments and encourage the diversification of traditional exports and value addition capacity building*”<sup>48</sup>. The SLIEPA promotes foreign direct investment (FDI) in the agricultural, marine resources, mining and tourist sector. The agency is supported by the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, the International Trade Centre and the Foreign Investment Advisory Service of the World Bank (UNCTAD 2009: 29). While some praise these efforts (e.g. the World Bank),<sup>49</sup> these neoliberal development promotion activities are also subjects of harsh criticism from various sides. The Oakland Institute (2011, 2014) for example criticizes the tax exemptions granted to willing investors or the accompanying negative impacts of such investments like the deprivation of local communities from their resources and the undermining of “*human, social, and environmental rights in Sierra Leone*” (2014).

### **Land Tenure in Sierra Leone**

As my master thesis deals over large parts with issues concerning access to land, the larger setting of land rights in Sierra Leone is described hereafter. This section is predominantly based on a detailed book on land tenure in Sierra Leone, written by Ade Renner-Thomas, a lawyer and former Chief Justice of Sierra Leone. According to him, land tenure differs in the Western Area to a great extent from the land rights in the provinces (2010). Because my study focuses exclusively on an area in the Northern Province, land rights in the Western Area are not discussed here. The legal analysis of Renner-Thomas allows for describing the formal part of statutory and customary land rights. The application of land rights within the village of my research will be discussed in sections 5.5 and 5.6.

Sierra Leone has a dual legal system with two sources of law, the “General Law”, locally called “English Law”, based on received English laws and the “Customary Law” as “*rules of law which by custom are applicable to particular communities in Sierra Leone*” (Constitution Act No. 6, Section 170 in Renner-Thomas 2010: 36). As described in section 2.5, customary laws are developed by local communities and embedded in their culture. The dualism between general and customary law also characterizes land tenure and land rights that can be categorized as “traditional” customary land rights and English legal institutions that have been established in the colonial era (Renner-Thomas 2010: 26).

As described by Toulmin (2008) and Peters (2009), customary rights are often legitimized by reference to tradition or nativeness but in fact have been subjects of profound changes and external impacts that altered them to serve particular external interests (see also 2.6). However, in rural areas of Sierra Leone, informal or so called customary institutions are of great importance for the legal and political administration or generally the organization of the society. Thereby, the prevalent monotheist religions, but also animist beliefs and secret societies play important roles for the constitution of the customary institutions (cf. Fanthorpe 2007). According to Renner-Thomas, the today’s “traditional” system of land tenure in the

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<sup>48</sup> <<http://www.trade.gov.sl/departments/sliepa>>, accessed May 21, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> cf.: <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sierraleone>>, accessed May 21, 2014.

Provinces of Sierra Leone consist of three types of land tenure: “family tenure”, “communal tenure” and “individual tenure”. “Family tenure” is the most common land right in the Provinces of Sierra Leone and prevalent in the Northern Province where I conducted my research. A “family” is defined as a group of persons that trace mostly – in the Northern Province solely – patrilineal descent from a common ancestor that received a title to lands within a chiefdom. “Communal tenure” is a title that is claimed by, or on behalf of, a community as a whole and not by families as sub-groups of a community. However, this type of tenure is only known in the Kono, Koranko and Yalunka chiefdoms. “Private tenure” can be acquired by various individual endeavors such as clearing virgin forests, acquiring title by purchase or as a gift, through long occupation or via succession. The emphasis on the concept of permanent individual ownership increased recently due to urbanization processes, the spread of the cash economy and English legal ideas. However, individualization of ownership was already common in previous times as it was merely individual ancestors who originally acquired the land that later became family or community land. Among the Temne, the Family Head could allocate *family land* to his various wives who subsequently held these plots individually (cf. Renner-Thomas 2010). Nevertheless, former individualization of ownership differs from current privatization of tenure and notions of private property because this former land and property rights – community, family and private tenure – enable other users who are not entitled with tenure to access and use this land and resources. According to Renner-Thomas, under customary law (community, family and private tenure), persons who are not entitled with land tenure can acquire land for agricultural or building purposes from those who have entitled tenure. Such “tenancies” can range from a seasonal grant to infinite grants that are even transmissible to heirs. According to Renner-Thomas this process of acquiring land is labelled locally “begging” or “loan,”<sup>50</sup> depending on the arrangement but in most contexts differs greatly from notions of tenancy as it is known in the English law (2010: 145-158, 214-222). Therewith, the customary regulation of land-rights bears great similarities with CPR institutions as described by Ostrom in section 2.5 and tenure in this sense has little to do with exclusive rights but mere with the duty to administer access to land and resources.

In the “traditional” setting paramount chiefs watched over land issues as custodians of the land. Larger issues, such as the alienation of lands to outsiders, had to be discussed with all the village elders, section chiefs and other officials that served as the paramount chief’s advisors. Recently the power of the paramount chief has been increasingly transferred to an elected Chiefdom Council of which the paramount chief is merely a chief executive. Thus, presently the lease of land to non-natives requires the consent of the Chiefdom Council. Therewith the Chiefdom Council became the new custodian of the lands that negotiates land leases on behalf of the landowners within a given chiefdom. Moreover, since the paramount

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<sup>50</sup> „Begging“ or „loan,“ explained more in detail in the context of Mabilafu (see 5.6), entails the recognition of a subaltern position of the person requesting access to land but also the right to do so. Thus, such requests can nearly not be denied.

chief is no longer allowed to collect taxes and paid by the central government he is increasingly seen as the government’s arm (Renner-Thomas 2010: 13-16, SiLNoRF 2011: 23-24).

Since 2004 district officers and provincial secretaries, both on the province level, were vested by the Provinces Act with the authority to control these “traditional” institutions:

*“A district officer shall have power and authority to inquire into and decide as hereafter provided and matters which have their origin in poro laws, native rites or customs, land disputes, including land disputes arising between paramount chiefs, or any other disputes which, if not promptly settled, might lead to breaches of the peace.”*

(Renner-Thomas 2010: 12)

Thereby they play a key role in the implementation of the governments land policy because they can control the “traditional” institutions that govern land tenure. With the Local Government Act 2004 some of their duties were transferred to the Local Council Chief Administrator. The district officers and with the new act the Chief Administrators are further required to give approval if land is occupied by non-natives within the district (2010: 12). However, according to Renner-Thomas the legal division of the roles between the district officer and the chief administrator remain ambiguous (cf. 2010: 13).

<b>former customary organization</b>	<b>new customary organization</b>
Paramount chief as custodian of the land.	Elected chiefdom council of whom the paramount chief is merely the chief executive. Today’s custodian of the land.
Village elders, section chiefs etc. as advisors of the paramount chief	District officers and provincial secretaries can control the chiefdom council (Since 2004 local council chief administrator take over parts of the role of the district officers and provincial secretaries)

Table 2: Customary land rights institutions on the national level

Although power is continuously transferred away from the “traditional” authorities (the paramount chief and land-owning families), they remain powerful in governing land tenure. Even though previously the customary organization was more downwardly accountable than the newly implemented decentralized authorities who are more central governmental obedient, the customary organization are discriminatory as women cannot inherit land and property (cf. Safilios-Rothschild 1985, Sesay and Rabe 2013). This is as much criticized by various national and international NGOs as is the transfer of land rights to more governmentally accountable institutions that help to promote the central government’s efforts to allocate land for FDI (cf. Sesay and Rabe 2013 for example).

### Summary

In sum, Sierra Leone was strongly affected by the slave trade and the following British colonialization that influenced the pre-existing political organization and customary institutions through indirect ruling. The struggle for supremacy between the SLPP and the APC that followed independence consolidated the political division between the two major ethnic groups. The chaotic civil war from 1991 to 2002 caused thousands of deaths and left the

country with a legacy of thousands of mutilated and millions of displaced people. The following international efforts to rebuild a functioning state and civil society promoted a fast-tracked decentralizing program and a neoliberal development agenda. However, these efforts are not accepted without harsh critics from various sides.

Sierra Leone has a dual legal system with a “General Law” and “Customary Laws”. Even though the customary laws are subordinate to the “general law” they remain powerful in guiding land tenure in the Provinces. However, it has to be kept in mind that these “traditional customary laws” are not traditional in the sense that they always have been like that. They have been transferred and adapted by external impacts. Various NGOs criticize the way the customary laws discriminate women as harshly as they criticize efforts of the government to control access to land allocate it for FDI to forward their neoliberal development agenda.

## 4.2 The Addax Bioenergy Project

The Addax Bioenergy Project is attracting a significant academic and public interest. Beside reports about the project commissioned by the company and investors themselves,<sup>51</sup> various scientific studies about the project from different disciplines have been published or are under investigation.<sup>52</sup> In addition, international, governmental, non-governmental and private organizations have delved into a discussion about this project.<sup>53</sup> Since 2010 the Addax Bioenergy Project also appears in the media in Sierra Leone and, mostly in a negative light, in Swiss and other European media.<sup>54</sup> The following description and analysis stems from these various sources with careful consideration of their limitations and biases.

Addax Bioenergy is a Swiss company with its legal domicile in Geneva. It was formed in 2008 to develop a sustainable bioenergy investment model in Africa as a subsidiary of the Addax and Oryx Group (AOG). The AOG was founded 1987 as an investor company in the energy sector, commercial real estates and other capital investments. In 2008 Addax Bioenergy initiated a project in Sierra Leone to produce sugarcane agro-ethanol. In May 2014 the production of agro-ethanol and electricity started.<sup>55</sup> After the start of full production it is assumed that the project will produce an estimated 85'000m<sup>3</sup> of ethanol per annum to be exported to the European market and 15 MW of electricity to supply the national grid of Sierra Leone (Addax Bioenergy 2013, AfDB (n.d.), Coastal & Environmental Services 2009a, 2009b). This several hundred million Euro project is financed by the AOG and diverse development

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<sup>51</sup> e.g.: AfDB ((n.d.)), Coastal & Environmental Services (2009a), (2009b), Driver and Bisset (2012) etc.

<sup>52</sup> e.g.: Millar (2013a), (2013c, 2013b), Bauner et al. (2013), Da Via (2013), Englund et al. (2011) or the CDE project “Sustainable Soil Governance and Large-Scale Land Acquisitions Originating in Switzerland” (cf.: <[www.cde.unibe.ch/Pages/Project/6/62/Sustainable-soil-governance-and-LSLAs-originating-in-Switzerland.aspx](http://www.cde.unibe.ch/Pages/Project/6/62/Sustainable-soil-governance-and-LSLAs-originating-in-Switzerland.aspx)>, accessed May 12, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> In a rather positive description of the project (e.g. FAO 2011, RSB 2013: etc.) and more critical (e.g. Bread for All 2011, SiLNoRF 2011, 2012, 2013, Oakland Insitute 2011, Action Aid 2013 etc.)

<sup>54</sup> e.g.: SierraExpress Media April 13, 2013, State House Press Release February 11, 2010, SRF Eco June 20, 2011, Radio RTS Hautes Fréquences March 10, 2013, Ticinonline March 27, 2013, Heute.at April 11, 2013 or the VCS Magazin May 2013 etc.

<sup>55</sup> cf.: <<http://www.addaxbioenergy.com/>>, <[http://www.moneyhouse.ch/en/u/addax\\_bioenergy\\_sa\\_CH-660.7.848.008-4.htm](http://www.moneyhouse.ch/en/u/addax_bioenergy_sa_CH-660.7.848.008-4.htm)> and <<http://www.aoginvest.com/>>, all accessed May 5, 2013.

finance institutions.<sup>56</sup> The project is located in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone in the Bombali and Tonkolili District approximately 15km west of Makeni, the largest city in the Northern Province, and consists of sugarcane plantations, an ethanol refinery, a biomass power plant and related infrastructure. Therefore, Addax Bioenergy has leased a total of 57'000 hectares for a period of 50 years. Approximately 12'000 hectares are used for the sugarcane plantations, the construction of infrastructure and the maintenance of ecological corridors. The remaining land can be used by the local inhabitants (Coastal & Environmental Services 2009b, Addax Bioenergy 2013, 2014, AfDB (n.d.)).

During the time of my research, the Addax Bioenergy Project has been in its implementation phase. The irrigated circular sugarcane plantations, so called pivots with a diameter up to 1 km, were prepared and the agro-ethanol processing factory has been constructed. Addax Bioenergy has sourced out many tasks related to the construction of the factory and other infrastructure to subcontractors. These contractors came from various countries and some have had, at least partially, brought their own work-force. Many tasks related to the construction required manual work that could be performed by laborers with no specific technical knowledge.

Leasing agreements had been made with central government authorities and the paramount chiefs (cf. Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and Addax Bioenergy (MoU 2010)). However, Addax Bioenergy claims to have decided, beyond legal requirements, to also directly negotiate with landowners and to pay them directly an acknowledgement payment. According to a report by Clive English, Social and FDP Manager and Jörgen Sandström, Executive Officer (2014) Addax Bioenergy pays 9 EUR per hectare per year for the land lease of which approximately 5.8 EUR are paid to the landowner as lease and acknowledgement payment. The district council and the paramount chief are both paid about 1.3 EUR per hectare and year and almost 0.7 EUR per hectare go the national government.<sup>57</sup> This rent is paid on the gross village area surveyed by the company previously and therewith the rent does not depend on the areas actually used by the company. Furthermore, according to the MoU, 0.5 EUR per 1000 m<sup>3</sup> is charged for the unqualified use of water (MoU 2010: 10), and, as stated in the previously mentioned report, losses of local assets, such as cropped areas and so called "economic trees"<sup>58</sup> are also compensated by a one off payment by the company (English and Sandström 2014: 24). According to informants,

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<sup>56</sup> Depending on the source, the project's volume is quoted as 267 or approximately 400 million Euro (cf. Addax Bioenergy 2013, 2014). According to Illman et al. (2014: 44) the further investors are: Swedfund, the Dutch development bank (FMO), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund (EAIF), the Deutsche Investitions- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft (DEG), the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), the Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (BIO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

<sup>57</sup> Renegotiation of these prices are aspired by landowners and NGOs (cf. SiLNORF 2013). In most considered project descriptions the prices are defined in USD per acre per year but to be congruent all figures in this report are translated by Google Converters to Euro and the metric system. By comparison, a 40 kg bag of rice costs about 25 EUR and a laborer earns between 1.6 and 4.8 EUR per day (see annotation below the Acronyms).

<sup>58</sup> Economy trees are defined by Addax as "trees, shrubs or plants that are grown for their intrinsic value" (English and Sandström 2014: 24). This includes cropped areas and a range of fruit trees, such as wild and planted palm trees, mango, bananas etc.

these compensations are nearly 6 EUR for mature, naturally grown palm trees and more than 9 EUR for planted economic trees. Addax Bioenergy states to have been respecting complaints if villagers did not agree with the proposed land-take (English and Sandström 2014: 29). With these practices, Addax Bioenergy considers both the new governmental implemented organization of land rights and the “traditional” customary law land tenure institutions (see 4.1). However, according to the summary of the Environmental, Social and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) by the AfDB (n.d.), the lease is paid to the Chief Administrative Officer who is required to distribute the money to the various parties (cf. AfDB (n.d.): 2). With the payment of the lease to the Chief Administrative Officer, Addax Bioenergy strongly supports the new central government implemented, decentralized authorities whose role is not unquestioned (see 4.1). As the basis for the calculation of compensation-payments, Addax Bioenergy has produced maps from aerial photographs and GPS references on land tenure and assets, collected together with local authorities (cf. Millar 2013a).

The Addax Bioenergy Project is an investment model promoted by the Sierra Leonean government and the facilitation of the project was strongly supported by the Sierra Leonean president (cf. State House of the Republic of Sierra Leone 2010, MoU 2010, Oakland Institute 2011: 24). This kind of investments is assumed by the government to contribute to the recovery and growth of the country’s economy and overall development (see 4.1). International organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) or the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) praised the project as a best practice example (cf. RSB 2013, FAO 2011). However, critics of such direct investment models highlight that such investments have negative impacts through their exploitative character that are detrimental to development efforts (cf. Action Aid 2013, or for a broader critique cf. Ferguson 2006).

In accordance with different perspectives of authors, impacts of the Addax Bioenergy Project are analyzed differently on a local level as they are evaluated differently on the national and global level (as mentioned just before). The company and associated authors that describe the project from a neoliberal development perspective have presumed largely positive socio-economic impacts on the local level as well. From this perspective it has been assumed that the general income in this region – where “economically unprofitable shifting subsistence agriculture prevailed” – increases through the creation of jobs, the enhanced accessibility by newly constructed roads and the above mentioned lease and acknowledgement payments. It was expected that land rights will become individualized and the practice of renting houses or land will increase. Together with infrastructure and service development associated with the project, this was expected to stimulate economic growth (cf. Coastal & Environmental Services 2009a, English and Sandström 2014).

However, some potential negative impacts were identified by the company’s environmental, social and health impact assessments (ESHIA)<sup>59</sup>. In addition to physical displacement of rural

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<sup>59</sup> Here I focus on social and health impacts as the discussion of the environmental impacts would go beyond the scope of this study.



Google Earth Satellite Image of parts of the Addax Bioenergy Project in 2014

The circular sugarcane fields (pivots) can be seen very well

○ Mabilafu with the factory compound above



Google Earth 2014, amended by the author



Aerial Photography of pivots

<<http://www.addaxbionergy.com>>, accessed 20 June



A pivot with irrigation arm close to Mabilafu

Picture taken by the author



Mechanical harvesting of sugarcane

<<http://www.addaxbionergy.com>>, accessed 20 June



Pump-station at the Rokel River close to Mabilafu

Picture taken by the author



Construction site of the ethanol refinery, locally called "the factory" or "the site" Picture taken by the author



Aerial photograph of the ethanol refinery <<http://www.addaxbioenergy.com>>, accessed 20 June 2014



Agricultural machine on pivot <<http://www.addaxbioenergy.com>>, accessed 20 June 2014



Fence around the factory compound Picture taken by the author



Gate to the factory compound Picture taken by the author



Newly constructed road by Addax Bioenergy close to Mabilafu Picture taken by the author

residents that could be largely avoided, economic displacement through the use of land for the project's purposes were identified as potential negative impacts. Furthermore, some health risks and accident hazards were detected by these studies. Moreover, already this initial papers mention that the project may cause too high expectations towards the company among local residents (cf. AfDB (n.d.), Coastal & Environmental Services 2009a).

Various mitigation measures have been implemented through the Social and Environment Management Programme (SEMP) to reduce detected potentially negative impacts and to enhance the positive ones. To enhance positive impacts, Addax Bioenergy fostered that job opportunities benefit project affected people whenever possible. To mitigate potential negative impacts of economic displacement, Addax Bioenergy implemented the Farmer Development Program (FDP) that incorporates the FAO's Farmer Field and Life Schools (FFLS) concept. It has been assumed that *"the FDP will ensure PAPs [project affected people] have access to sufficient land and appropriate agricultural training to be able to produce enough rice to achieve food security and enhance their livelihoods"* (AfDB (n.d.): 7-8). According to the Social Manager of Addax Bioenergy the FDP shall help to overcome the low food production in this area that is caused by the *"old subsistence ideology to only produce enough food to eat"* and *"lack of knowledge, insufficient technical and institutional support, distance from markets and extreme poverty [that are] barriers to change and development."*<sup>60</sup> On the one hand, it has been believed that the FFLS empowers small and marginalized farmers through the participation in trainings in modern agricultural practice and techniques which are assumed to enable them to achieve higher crop yields. On the other hand, the FDP has been designed to provide agronomic services. According to that, the FDP staff ploughs and prepares land for rice plantation for each project affected person on which they can apply the skills taught in the FFLS. Every project affected person is entitled to an allocation of the plots designated by the community for the FDP (AfDB (n.d.): 7-8). The FDP has been designed to support the farmers in the first three years. Then, the responsibility for this project shall be handed over to the beneficiaries. Thus, after this period, the project is planned to be transferred into the Farmer Development Service (FDS) whereby the farmers can purchase the services previously provided free of charge in the FDP (English and Sandström 2014: 35). However, the Social Manager of Addax Bioenergy admitted some doubts about the success of this mitigation measure. Particularly in the village where I conducted my research, this project largely failed due to various constraints (see 6.3).

Additionally, to relieve the local health facilities a standalone health care facility had been implemented to cater for the workforce. These measures, together with the enhanced positive impacts, were assumed to mitigate possible detected negative impacts (cf. AfDB (n.d.)).

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<sup>60</sup> Statements made in an interview with the Social Manager and written in the report by English and Sandström (2014: 31)

However, various NGOs criticize the company's performance. Most salient are the criticisms of Bread for all, the Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food (SiLNoRF) and ActionAid.<sup>61</sup> But many other national, international and civil society organizations also made their comments on the Addax Bioenergy Project (e.g. Water Lex, NAMATI, ILC, Green Scenery, and, more positively, CSOPaD).

The explorations of these NGOs go beyond the company's neoliberal economic analysis of its project. Even though the NGOs admit that household income have increased in some parts of the project's area, their reports reveal that the project has negative impacts which are difficult to trace by pure neoliberal perspectives and which are difficult to mitigate by the implemented measures.

These NGOs emphasize the unequal sharing of the added value generated by the project. It is criticized that the company gets huge tax exemptions by the Government of Sierra Leone and thus keeps about 93%-98% of the value added. According to their reports only 2%-7% of the value added goes to the workers and only 0.2% benefit the landowners and the national government (cf. Bread for All 2011: 7-9, SiLNoRF 2012: 29). This type of criticism can clearly be classified as a product of a Dependency Theory perspective (see 2.3). Whereas critics from a human rights perspective note that this project compromises the livelihood of affected people as it exposes people *"to risks and shocks that threaten the overall food stability and hence food security"* (Wedin et al. 2013: 47). Especially because, as stated by SiLNoRF, the performance of the FDP and the FFLS was insufficient and did not fit local needs. Furthermore, it is feared that access to common pool resources may be reduced due to company's activities. Beyond that, it is pointed out that some people's access to water for irrigation and consumption has been compromised by suppressions of wells and because of water pollution accompanying the project (SiLNoRF 2012, 2013).

By considering power differences, it is argued that the negotiation of the land lease agreement (LLA) with the landowners was not in line with the standard of free and prior informed consent as described in the article 6 of the ILO Convention 169. Landowners and other residents stated to have been misinformed and further claimed that they had no say in the LLA. Therefore, the project affected people could not negotiate about the amount of compensations and acknowledgement payments (SiLNoRF 2012, 2013). Millar, who did extensive research in the project area, further revealed from a Foucaultian perspective that Addax Bioenergy has implemented a new basis for discourses on land issues. These new discourses are based on GIS maps and written contracts, soil quality tests and land cover survey and other such technologies newly implemented by Addax Bioenergy. These new discourses differ from *"traditional"* understandings of land that were based on views from *„walking through, living in and working on it"* (Millar 2013a: 15). With the implementation of this new basis for

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<sup>61</sup> Bread for all and SiLNoRF are already described in section 3.2. ActionAid is another international non-governmental organization that engages for a world free of poverty and injustice. They campaigned with reference on the negative impacts of the Addax Bioenergy Project for the reduction of the EU's target to cover 10% of the total amount of transport fuel by renewable fuel like agro-fuel (cf. <<http://www.actionaid.org/>>, accessed May 8, 2014).

discourses about land issues, the power to handle these matters has been transferred from the people and “traditional” custodians to those who can deploy such technologies, thus, to those who have access to GPS, maps, aerial photographs etc., hence to the company. In this way Addax Bioenergy has been creating a discourse about land issues in which the local people cannot participate anymore because they lack the ability to read the written contracts or to conduct GPS based maps by themselves as they do not have the necessary means and knowledge. Therefore, as Millar notes, *“as these technologies of power are wielded only by the incoming corporation and largely outside the understanding or control of local people those people are marginalized instead of empowered”* (2013a: 21). Similar is the change in discourse about communities (cf. Millar 2013a). Addax Bioenergy has been creating discourses in which they are the exclusive authority to produce legitimate data what gives them enormous power.

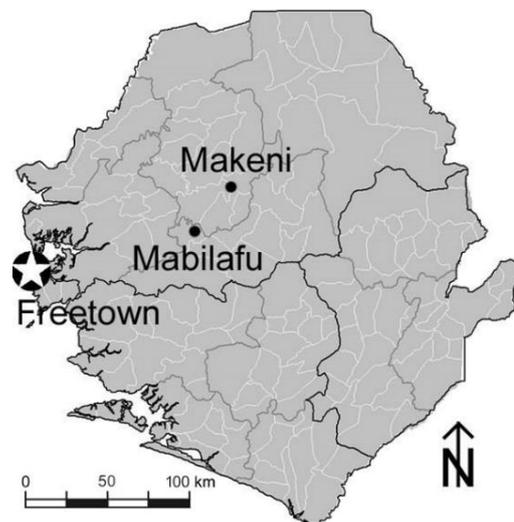
This analysis of the Addax Bioenergy Project in Sierra Leone reveals that from a neoliberal perspective, the project is largely described as having positive economic impacts for affected people. However, evaluations of the project from other perspectives highlight that the project also has negative impacts that cannot be identified through a pure neoliberal based analysis, like the unequal sharing of added value, deterioration of the livelihood of affected people and unequal power-relations between the people and the company.

## 5. Description of Mabilafu

To get an idea of the village in which I conducted my research I first provide an overall description of Mabilafu. Then I explore some topics more detailed to explain in the next chapters how the Addax Bioenergy project affected different people heterogeneously in this village, how they perceived these impacts and which strategies they used to deal with these impacts. To consider the critic on the ethnographic-present, discussed in the writing culture debate (cf. for example Clifford and Marcus 1986), I would like to highlight that the descriptions picture the current situation during the time of my research from June to August 2013. Even though it can be assumed that many aspects remain as described up to the present day, most descriptions are written in past tense. Most information of this part stem from participant observation and interviews conducted during my research stay in Mabilafu.

### 5.1 General Description of the village

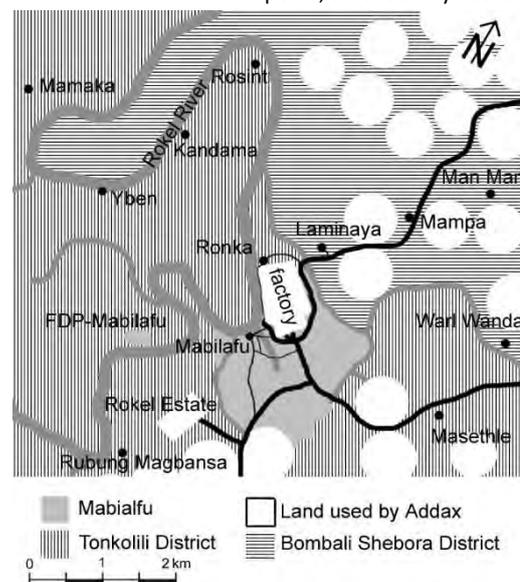
Mabilafu is located about 110km east of Freetown and about 30km south-west of Makeni (see map 2). It is on the bank of the Rokel River, the largest river in Sierra Leone. Mabilafu is the main village of the same-named Mabilafu Section, which contains six villages. The Mabilafu Section is one of the sections in the Malal Mara Chiefdom in the Tonkolili District in the Northern Sierra Leone Province (for a detailed overview see Table 3 page 57). Mabilafu is inside the Addax Bioenergy Project area and close by the construction site for the project's agro-ethanol processing factory that, now in 2014, started its operation.



Map 2: Chiefdoms of Sierra Leone  
Wikipedia, amended by author

During my research Mabilafu encompassed roughly 140 houses with a total population of approximately thousand people, according to Addax Bioenergy's census and villagers' statements. The large majority of them are Temne, the prevalent ethnic group in this area.

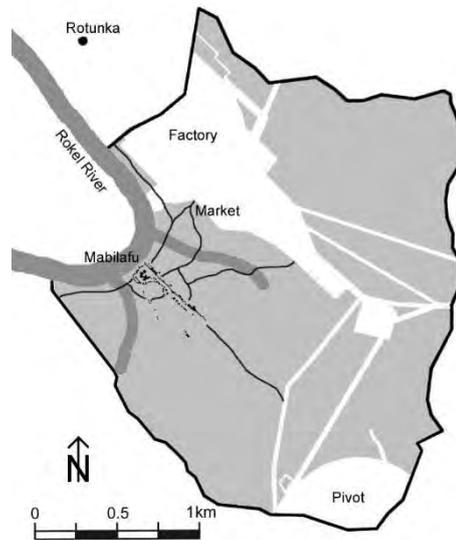
Since the construction of dirt roads for the Addax Bioenergy Project, it takes about a one hour bike ride from Makeni to Mabilafu. During my research the village could be approached from a recently constructed dirt road by a narrow path that barely allowed a car to pass. Large, water filled potholes made it adventurous for cars and the heavily loaded bikes to pass this path between the road and the



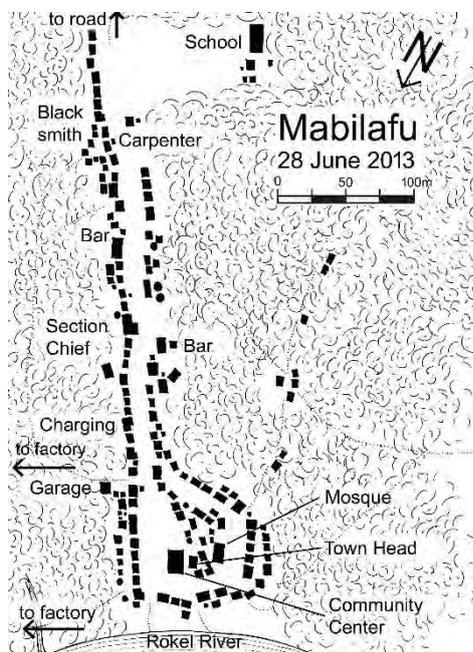
Map 3: Surrounding of Mabilafu  
Drawn by the author from aerial photograph and GIS information by Addax

village. Trudging through this path, after some hundred meters, the bush cleared. On the left hand side the blue and white painted buildings of the Evangelical Mission Primary School of Mabilafu behind the open soccer pitch caught the arriver's eye.

The village was surrounded by bush and palm copse. Some edible plants, medical plants and cola nuts were gathered in these bushes, where also smaller animals lived. Some of these animals were hunted sporadically by villagers but, according to my informants, larger mammals could not be found any more. Vast areas around the village were used to grow food through shifting cultivation, mainly for subsistence consumption. Some areas were occupied by the company for the construction of the agro-ethanol processing factory, infrastructure and parts of an irrigated sugarcane field (cf. white areas marked on the map on fig. 3).<sup>62</sup> Some low-lying areas were flooded during the rainy season. Beside the land marked on the map (see map 4), some land on the other side of the Rokel River also belonged to Mabilafu.



Map 4: Area of the Mabilafu  
Drawn by the author, based on information of CSS (2013)



Map 5: The Village of Mabilafu  
Drawn by the author from research information

On the map of the village (map 5), it can be seen that most houses of Mabilafu are along the dead-end dirt road that approaches the Rokel River approximately at the right angles. Closer to the river the road splits and the lower part of the village is wider. Villagers described the lower part of Mabilafu to be older while most of the houses in the upper part just had been constructed recently. Most of the houses in the village had been constructed with materials that could be found in the surrounding. While some had zinc roofs, half of the houses were covered with grass. Most houses had a road facing veranda where people used to sit in the evenings. Beside the houses, basically furnished fireplaces under low roofs made of sticks and plastic or palm leaves served as kitchens. Depending on the weather people also used to cook under the open sky.

<sup>62</sup> According to figures provided by Addax Mabilafu covers an area of 488 hectares within the Addax operational area of which 104 hectares or about 20% were designated to be used by the company (cf. CSS 2013).

In the lower part of the village the people had constructed a new village center, an open sided, zinc roofed cement building with a seed storage, a small stage and wooden benches. Some of the meetings and other events took place there. Because the village was within reach of mobile phone signals from the factory's aerial but had neither current water nor electricity, people went to charge their mobile phones for a small amount in the "Charging", the only house with a functioning generator. When the generator was running, almost every second evening, people used to sit under a flickering light bulb to play board games and sometimes watched movies. Further, a simple black smith had been installed behind some houses to produce tools for farming, constructing and pots for cooking. Behind another house a garage had been set up to repair motorbikes. A carpenter produced furniture and the town head used to repair clothes with a mechanically powered sewing machine. Some women had established small temporary shops to sell petty commodities like soap, sweets, salt, cigarettes, top-up cards, drugs, vegetables or fish and two shelters served as temporarily bars. There were two water-wells in the village but one had been closed after the civil war and the other was broken during the whole time of my study, so people used to get water from the Rokel River or a nearby stream. Residents told me that the proximity to the Rokel River allows to fetch water during the whole year but some assumed that the quality of that water, together with the lack of sanitary facilities, had been the cause for sicknesses like the cholera outbreak that distressed the village in early 2013. During the time of my research a bridge was built to pass a stream close to the Rokel River to shortcut the way to the factory site. To pass this bridge one had to pass close by the Poro-bush (see below) and during the rainy season the bridge was flooded, so, people preferred to take another shortcut where only slippery trunks allowed to cross the stream on dry feet. At most times the village was very lively, people chatted on the road or sat under the road fencing verandas, West African pop music sounded from mobile phones that were mainly used as music players, clattering bikes passed by, children played with self-made tools and everywhere sheep, fowls, ducks and lazy dogs roamed between the houses and the nearby gardens.

After giving this first impression I describe some aspects more in detail as they are of great importance to understand how the Addax Bioenergy Project affected people differently in Mabilafu, how they perceived impacts heterogeneously and how they reacted diversely in this situation. First, I describe briefly the natural environment that had already been transformed by human activities prior the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy project. Then I characterize the socially relevant factors that were highlighted to distinguish groups within the village. Further, I touch the topic of how religions and secret societies directed people's activities as they helped to structure people's perception of the world and legitimize claims to power. Thereafter, I explain the political organization in Mabilafu to show how the local organization was embedded in a larger context before I describe farming activities and the organization of land rights and access to other land-related resources. To finish I give a brief overview about the recent history of Mabilafu.

## 5.2 (Mis-)reading the Landscape: Two Different Approaches of Reading a Landscape

Following, I describe the environment in the area where I conducted my research. The description of the landscape and ecosystem reveals that the way in which Addax Bioenergy describes the environment differs greatly from local notions. After a brief picture of the landscape, I line out the description of the environment by Addax Bioenergy to contrast it with the description and use by villagers. The comparison of these two descriptions reveals that Addax Bioenergy misread the landscape by overlooking the use of specific patterns of the ecosystem.

Mabilafu lies within the gently undulating interior lowland plain in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone. This plain is sharply cut through by the meandering Rokel River. In this area it can be only crossed by boat because the nearest bridge in Magburka is inconveniently far. The landscape consists of low lying perennial swamps, seasonal flooded wetlands, so called bolilands<sup>63</sup>, and higher uplands that are well drained.

As elsewhere in Sierra Leone the tropical climate is determined by two seasons, the rainy season from around May to October and the dry season approximately from November to April. Most of the 2500mm average annual rainfall occurs by the end of the rainy season in July and August. During the rainy season rivers overflow their banks and flood bolilands but greatly reduce during in the dry season when most of the fauna parches. Sierra Leone has an average temperature of 26°C with hot temperatures in the dry season and colder weather in the rainy season.<sup>64</sup>

Before the arrival of Addax Bioenergy, the ecosystem in the surrounding of Mabilafu had consisted mainly of agricultural land, cultivated fields and fallow land that had been left to recover before subsequent use for subsistence oriented shifting cultivation. Various vegetation areas allowed different types of land use for the local food system. The low lying swamps and bolilands were described by villagers and in Addax Bioenergy reports as more fertile and better suited to grow rice, the local staple food, than the well-drained uplands. While the perennial swamps and the bolilands could be used to grow rice annually, the uplands had to be used in a type of shifting cultivation that allowed the soil to recover for about seven years before being used again. Thus, large parts of the uplands had to lie idle as fallow before they could be used again. Plantations and forest patches were sparse and mostly close to villages. Smaller animals like small monkeys, rodents, birds, snakes and insects lived in the bushes that grew on fallow land and in forests but, according to my informants, larger mammals were not found any more.

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<sup>63</sup> According to Kiepe, “bolilands” is a term to describe wetlands in Sierra Leone that are characterized by “a complex of seasonally-flooded wide and shallow depressions and low river terraces of negligible relief” (2006: 5). These bolilands were described by people in Sierra Leone as valuable because they are fertile and well irrigated to be used for rice farming every year.

<sup>64</sup> cf.: <[http://www.sliip.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&gid=46](http://www.sliip.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=46)>, <[http://www.addaxbioenergy.com/uploads/PDF/Addax\\_Bioenergy\\_FAQ\\_June\\_2013.pdf](http://www.addaxbioenergy.com/uploads/PDF/Addax_Bioenergy_FAQ_June_2013.pdf)>, both accessed May 15, 2014.

In reports by Addax Bioenergy this ecosystem is described as “*previously degraded through human activity*” (Coastal & Environmental Services 2009a: 60). According to their reports there was nearly no “original” vegetation as it had been cleared and burnt to make way for pasture, shifting subsistence farming and a former tobacco plantation (cf. 2009a). But, even though they make local residents accountable for the degradation of the natural environment, they deny their constant use of the land. As Millar notes, Addax Bioenergy describes the land as a snapshot and thus fallow land that is left to recover for subsequent use is defined as unused (cf. Millar 2013a: 17). This description of the land and ecosystems as degraded, mostly unused and ecologically futile helped to legitimize the acquisition of this land for other purposes. With the implementation of the Addax Bioenergy Project great parts of the land have been transferred to be used for round sugarcane plantations (see Google Earth Satellite Image of parts of the Addax Bioenergy Project in 4.2).

On the other hand, people in Mabilafu described the landscape and ecosystem in terms of how they used it (see illustration below). Bolilands (2) and swamps (8) where wet rice and sometimes cassava were grown were distinguished from the upland. On the upland, seasonal *farms* (10) where rice, pepper, ground nuts, cassava, beans etc. were grown in a type of shifting cultivation were further distinguished from patches of permanent crops and fallow bush (9) that lay idle to recover for subsequent use. Plantations of active planted permanent crops such as palm trees or mango trees that have been cultivated on smaller or larger plots were called *gardens* (3) and in turn distinguished from *plantations* of permanent crops that had not actively been planted but were nonetheless maintained and used (5). The village was interspersed with small fenced patches where corn, pepper and rice was grown (4). Further,

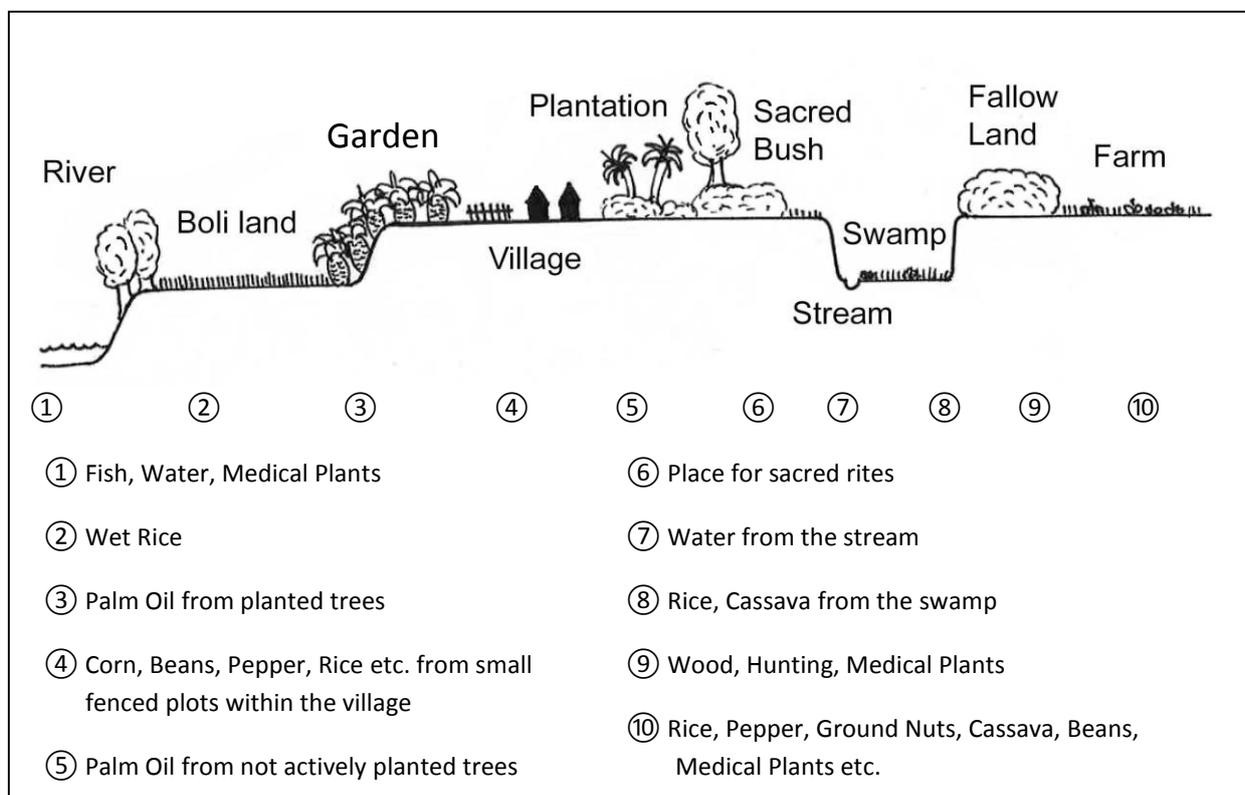


Figure 2: Schematic illustration of land use in the research area

Drawn by the author  
Based on information collected during the research.

some places had been defined as sacred places (6) which were only accessible for members of specific secret groups (see 5.4). Access to these different patches of the landscape were administered by a complex interlinked institutional setting that is described more in detail in section 5.5. What can be said here is that this institutional setting affects how the different patches are used and transformed thereby and how they are perceived by the local people.

By considering this villagers perspective it becomes evident that there was no *unused* land. Even though the fallow land that was left to recover for subsequent shifting cultivation was used for wood collection and hunting and gathering activities. Thus, every patch of this diverse landscape became part of an entire and interlinked use of this ecosystem that had been transformed by the villagers for a long time.

Obviously, the descriptions of the landscape and ecosystems in the reports of the company differ greatly from perceptions by local residents. From an economic and natural science perspective the land may be labelled as *degraded* and *underused* as it is done in the reports by the company. However, by considering the local descriptions and the use of the land as well, it becomes evident that it had been greatly transformed through the constant use and was not only *degraded* and *underused* but overall an important basis of the local food system. Thus, a description of the land, how the company formulates it, legitimizes the alternative use for the project's purposes but overlooks and thus negates the relevant aspects of the landscape and ecosystems for the local users. Therefore, it can be argued that the company misread or at least very selectively read the landscape and ecosystem with its predominantly economic and ecological perspective. This misreading bear similarity with the misreading of forest patches in the forest-savannah mosaic in Guinea as revealed by Fairhead and Leach (1996), described in section 2.2.

Through this selective description of the landscape and ecosystems, the company ignores impacts of their land acquisition that are of great importance to local residents. To see how the project implementation affected the local land use it is important to understand how use and access to land and other resources have been organized prior to the arrival of the LSLA project and how it evolved to be so. This in turn requires the understanding of the local political organization that will be described in the section 5.4. To understand the local political organization I draw my attention to the social organization and demographic structure of Mabilafu first.

### 5.3 Social Organization and Demographic Structure

The following description of the people that lived in Mabilafu focus on socially constructed groups. The differentiation of groups is not based on the sum of objective differences but socially constructed through the emphasis of socially relevant factors. Thus, such a differentiation is a fluid and flexible socially constructed product of negotiation and power-relations (see 2.5). As mentioned above Mabilafu was inhabited by approximately thousand inhabitants. The evaluation of the household survey<sup>65</sup> which I conducted during my research and from which most of the following information stem shows that 56.0% of the interviewed were women and 44.0% were men. 95.8% of the interviewed defined themselves as Temne, the largest tribe<sup>66</sup> in Northern Sierra Leone (see 4.1). Another 1.6% described themselves as Limba. The remaining people were members of other tribes (see fig. 3). Despite this kind of ethnic groups, based on tribe, other groups were distinguished by the use of different characteristics. An important attribute to define groups was the place of birth to distinguish people that were born in Mabilafu from strangers<sup>67</sup> that were born elsewhere. 54.2% of the interviewed were born in Mabilafu while 44.8% moved to Mabilafu during their lifetime. This had two reasons: 39.6% of the people who moved to Mabilafu stated to have done so to marry. Temne are traditionally organized virilocally, whereby a man can marry several women. Thus, if a man marries a woman from another village she moves to the man's village after marriage (cf. Dorjahn 1990). Therefore 56.6% of the interviewed people who moved to Mabilafu (moved: N=226) were women. Out of them 69.1% stated to have moved to Mabilafu to marry. The second main reason for people to move to Mabilafu was the job possibilities offered by the Addax Bioenergy Project. 39.2% of the people who moved to

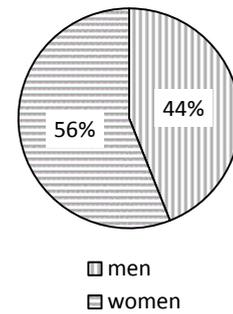


Figure 3: Diagram of gender distribution

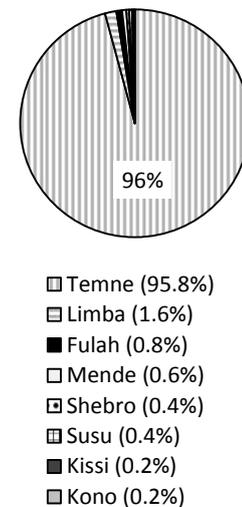


Figure 4: Diagram of "tribes"

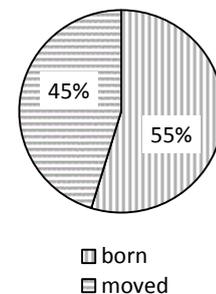


Figure 5: Diagram of places of birth

<sup>65</sup> A total of 504 persons were interviewed by 3 interviewers from Mabilafu with a questionnaire I developed on the basis of first results from participant observation and interviews. Questions concerned the following addressed aspects and further topics like "employment by Addax" or "expectations and wishes towards Addax" that will be discussed later. The listed numbers correspondent to the respective percent of known statements by the interviewed (unknown statements (not answering the question) were subtracted out). For further methodological implications see section 3.4.

<sup>66</sup> "Tribe" refers here to the official ethnic groups in Sierra Leone (Temne, Mende, Limba etc.). I use the local term "tribe" to refer to these groups to avoid confusion with the term "ethnic groups" used by Barth and Cohen to describe all kind of groups distinguished by emphasized socially relevant factors (see 2.5). Reference to tribe is one possible factor to distinguish ethnic group as described by Barth and Cohen. Further, the term "tribe" refers to groups with an uncentralized political organization, such as Big Man Systems (Lewellen 2003). The political organization in Mabilafu is described in detail in section 5.5.

<sup>67</sup> "Stranger" is a category used locally to distinguish people that were not born in Mabilafu from people born there. I use this category throughout my master thesis because it had been of great importance in Mabilafu.

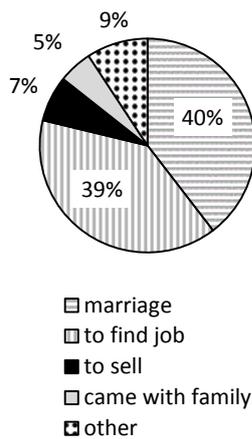


Figure 6: Diagram of reasons to move

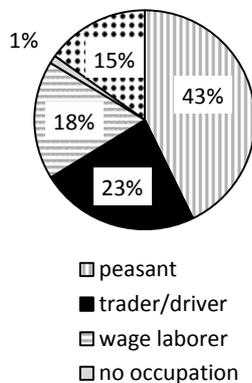


Figure 7: Diagram of profession

Mabilafu stated to have done so to find a job, most of them men (87.1%). Thus 78.7% of the men who moved to Mabilafu came to find a job while only 8.9% of the women made that statement. Further reasons to move to Mabilafu were to start an informal business (6.9%), family reunion (5.1%) or long term visits (4.6%). Therefore it can be summarized that most women who moved to Mabilafu came to marry while the majority of men who moved to Mabilafu came to find a job. As job possibilities that mainly attracted men were a relative new phenomenon the main reason to move to Mabilafu has changed from marriage to job opportunities and the gender specific immigration has changed from a female dominated immigration to a more gender-balanced immigration pattern.<sup>68</sup>

Further categories that were locally used to distinguish groups were profession, whether a person was a farmer (42.8%), a wage laborer (17.5%) or a trader (23.4%), family membership (association with one of the four land-owning families, see below) or political position within the village (“elder”, “landowner” etc.). Although these group memberships appear here as objective ascriptions that allow an analysis in exact numbers it has to be kept in mind – as mentioned in the beginning of this section – that such membership and the way groups are distinguished are flexible, socially constructed, contextual and thus a matter of negotiation (see 2.5).

In sum, the immigration pattern in Mabilafu has changed profoundly in the last years since the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy project because more people, especially men, moved to Mabilafu in search of employment. These people were distinguished by locals as strangers that were not born in Mabilafu. However, these ascriptions or their meaning were also used flexible. For example if a person had a good reputation it had been overlooked that he or she was not born in Mabilafu. Other attributes that were used to define groups were family affiliation or profession, whether a person was a peasant farmer, a contracted laborer or an independent trader, engaged in the informal economic sector. Other potential differences suitable to distinguish groups, such as tribe or religion, played a subordinated role in the distinction of groups within the village. Thus, socially relevant factors that were used to

<sup>68</sup> 80.0% of total people who moved to Mabilafu more than 3½ years before the research took place were women who mainly came to marry (92.7% of the women came to marry or 76.0% of the total people who moved to Mabilafu in this time came to marry and only one person came to find a job). While out of the total people who moved to Mabilafu in the 3½ years before the research took place 49.4% were women (55.2% to marry and 12.6% to find a job) and 50.6% were men (nobody to marry and 74.5% to find a job). I.e. out of the total people who moved to Mabilafu in the 3½ years before the research took place 50.3% came to find a job and 28.7% came to marry.

<sup>69</sup> Other categories were carpenter, teacher, student or pastor for example.

distinguish groups as described by Barth (see 2.5) were place of birth, family affiliation and profession. However, these ascriptions were used flexible and contextual. Later chapters will reveal why the differentiation using the place of birth was so important.

#### **5.4 Religion: Monotheist Religions, Animism and the Secret Societies**

Religion is an important part of people's life. Religion helps to legitimize claims to power or is an instrument of power itself. Further, religion helps to understand people's perceptions of the world, which influences, together with its legitimizing force, claims to power, people's activities and strategies (cf. Lewellen 2003: 65-79, Winch 1964). Based on data from participant observation and interviews, considering general social anthropological literature on this topic, I portray in the following section how monotheist religions, animism and the Secret Society framed people's perception of the world and how they provided tools for the political organization that direct people's activities.

With few exceptions, all people in Mabilafu were Muslims. Mabilafu had a mosque where people went to pray on feast days. Of the few evangelic and catholic Christians that lived in Mabilafu, some celebrated the mass on Sundays. Christians and Muslims lived together without problems and in some families even followers of both religions were united. Once I heard a man calling "Allahu Akbar – Jesus is great" before killing a fowl, just to make it right both ways. It seemed that the people in Mabilafu found a way to deal with these religious differences peacefully.

Beside these monotheist religions, animist beliefs that sometimes were amalgamated with attributes of the monotheist religions and secret societies played an important role in the people's everyday life. I noticed that accidents, illness or misfortune were explained with a mixture of natural science explanations and interferences by evil spirits. For example the death of a woman that was bitten by a snake was explained mainly by natural science arguments but the reason why the snake bit the woman was explained by interferences of evil spirits. Thus, the emergency care of the woman considered both, measures for medical treatment and measures to defend against the evil spirits.<sup>70</sup> However, witchcraft and sorcery were an important but difficult to investigate topic in the everyday life of the people.

The Poro and Bundu societies were the two secret societies that played a central role in the everyday life of the village. Such secret societies, that are pervasive in the Upper Guinea Cost of West Africa, are cultural institutions to master the power of the spirit world. In relation to this, they issue laws and protocols that have to be followed by members as well as by non-members. However, these laws and protocols go beyond the sacred sphere and guide many practical aspects of everyday life (Fanthorpe 2007). In Mabilafu, the Bundu Society (also called

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<sup>70</sup> As Peter Winch (cf. 1964) notes by analyzing Evans-Pritchards descriptions of the Azande's witchcraft, oracles and magic, such "supernatural" explanations that barely make sense nor are logical within scientific descriptions and assumptions about the world are nevertheless logical and coherent within the conception of reality of these people. Thus, such "supernatural" explanations are logical, even though they are not scientific, but science is as much a constructed model to describe and interpret the world and to judge whether a statement is logical or not as are other models used to describe the world and to judge statements.

Sande), the secret society for the women, was principally responsible for the initiation of young women. Therefore, they had a forest patch to which only members were allowed. Similarly, the men's secret society – the Poro – had its own secret place – the Poro-bush. These sacred places make part of the landscape as illustrated in section 5.2. I have been warned vehemently that an illicit entering or approach to the Poro-bush by non-members would lead to forced initiation to the secret society. I assumed that therefore people tried to avert the bridge that passed the small stream between Mabilafu and the factory close to the Poro-bush. Not all people in Mabilafu were members of these secret societies but most people that held a political position had to be member of the Poro. Thus, the Poro was important for political organization. As described above, also in Mabilafu, laws and protocols issued by the Poro were mandatory for members as well as non-members and concerned not only the sacred sphere, but also many practical aspects of everyday life. For example the Poro-stick that looks like a besoms turned upside down indicated a taboo and could be found regularly. Such taboos were the prohibition to pass a specific trail or to harvest from a specific tree. Thus, such taboos – legitimized by reference to Poro-laws – were important institutions to govern access to land and associated resources for example (see 5.6). In this light, the Poro is an important part of the local institutional setting.

In sum, monotheist religions were amalgamated with animist beliefs in Mabilafu. They provided, together with scientific schemes, frameworks to perceive the world. Religion and the secret society further provided underlying structures and tools for the political organization and the local institutional setting that governed access to land and associated resources.

## **5.5 The Local Political Organization Embedded in the Larger Setting**

The analysis of the political organization provides a framework to understand how decisions are taken and thus how institutions are organized and implemented. Thereby power-relations within this organization can be analyzed. Furthermore, the analysis of the political organization helps to understand how the local organization is embedded in a larger context. Based on data from my fieldwork I describe the local political organization as it was explained to me, how it took place in practice and how it was linked with the larger context.

The political organization in Mabilafu cannot be separated from the family organization within the village and also the above described secret society played, together with religion, an important role. Four families in Mabilafu were described as main families – labelled as landowners – the Kanu, the Kamara, the Kurma and the combined family of the Kargbo and Thula. People from other families were associated with one of these main families and the collection or distribution of needed resources was generally organized along these family lines (e.g. if something was needed, every family had to contribute one quarter of it. The collection of that amount from its affiliates was organized independently by every family). Every family had one or more male family heads that organized these issues and solved minor conflicts within the family. Everybody in the village was affiliated with one of the four families or a subcategory of these families. Heads of families or subcategories referred to affiliated people as

*“my people”*. This relation indicated that they assumed responsibility for them and in turn received prestige. Therewith, these families served as social security mechanism and the head of one family told me for example that they have stored a certain amount of rice for special expenses if somebody of the family urgently needs money. The Kanu Family, were the leader of the four families because *“they own the land and lead the village”* as it was explained to me by informants. The justification that the Kanu *“own”* the village will be explained in the next section. Following I describe the further political organization in Mabilafu on the basis of key-informant interviews and participant observation during the time of my fieldwork. A table by the end of this part provides an overview of the political structure in Mabilafu and its embeddedness in the larger context.

The elders, also referred to as village leaders, were a vague defined group of elder men that discussed political issues and solved problems in the village. People became elders gradually by *“assuming responsibility”* in the village and their reputation to *“develop the village”*. Some discussions of the elders were hold within the secrecy of the Poro-society. Thus most, but not all elders were members of the Poro. Most elders were born in Mabilafu, but some were also strangers who moved to Mabilafu during their lifetime (see 5.3). The heads of the Kanu-Family were the most important elderly men that had the last word when decisions were taken. Because of his position, the section chief of the Mabilafu Section (see below), who was also an elder of Mabilafu, had also an important voice when decision were taken. But nevertheless, as mentioned before, personal capabilities of elders largely influenced their bargaining power strongly. During the time of my research, one task of the elders was to negotiate and write the job-list, a list of people that should be employed by the companies (see 6.5). Decisions that were taken by the elders were announced to the villagers by the town crier or town head. The town head was also an elder. Announcements propagated by the town head could be invitations for community meetings or calls to work for the community, which was mostly accomplished by the Youth<sup>71</sup>. Further, the town head mediated conflicts between villagers that could not be solved within the family. A conflict that was solved by the town head during the time of my research was for example a woman who injured a boy when she stopped him wrangling with her daughter. Thereupon, the parents of the injured boy brought the conflict to the town head who listened to their accusation while the weeping boy, who was brought as evidence, calmed down slowly. After listening to the accusation and giving some advices the town head decreed that the family of the woman who flogged the boy had to pay 1.7 EUR<sup>72</sup> to him – the town head – and that the accused woman had to find medicine to treat the boy’s wound. With the demand that the girl who wrangled with the boy has to apologize for her bad behavior the arbitration was closed and the town head gave the 1.7 EUR to villagers, who helped to construct the above mentioned bridge, to buy lunch. This indicates that minor conflicts that could not be mediated within the family were solved by arbitration. But if conflicts were too fierce, they were solved by the section chief.

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<sup>71</sup> The Youth were the group of young men that were numbered among this group.

<sup>72</sup> The equivalent of the half of an average daily salary for labourers.

Anyway, if possible, conflicts were solved within the family because the solving of conflicts through the town head or the section chief – but especially if external actors, like the police, became involved – could become a very expensive and complicated endeavor that could get out of one’s control. It is therefore not astonishing that the threat to take a matter to the police had been used sometimes to convince somebody to relent into an issue.

Further official positions that could be found in the village were the ceremonial chief who was responsible for ceremonies related to political issues. The youth leader who advocated for the youth and coordinated their efforts in the village like repairing the road or digging a grave if somebody died. The chairlady of the market who managed the market, the place where people used to sell food and commodities to the workers of the companies (see 6.6) and finally, the Chairlady of the school who coordinated the efforts of the School Management Committee that was implemented by the government to deal with school affairs. Besides that, the Child Welfare Committee was implemented by Concern Worldwide and Pikin to Pikin, two NGOs, to protect the rights of the children. However these organizations did not play a vital role and some have not even appeared in action during the time of my research.

According to informants, the section chief, the chief of the Mabilafu Section, was a position that belonged to the Kanu-Family. However, the Kanu-Family lived not only in Mabilafu. Thus, members of both Kanu-Families, from Mabilafu and from Masethle, a neighboring village in the Mabilafu Section, struggled to field the section chief. Since they were not able to settle this dispute, the acting paramount chief of the Malal Mara Chiefdom appointed somebody from another family as acting section chief until this dispute would be settled. The section chief or in this moment the acting section chief represented the Section and arbitrated conflicts that were too fierce to be solved by the town head.

As noted above also the position of the paramount chief, the Chief of the Malal Mara Chiefdom was held by an acting paramount chief. He has been selected for this assignment by the senior district officer after the former paramount chief from the Kamara-Family in Rochin died. The paramount chief was the custodian of the land<sup>73</sup> and therefore was appointed to sign contracts concerning land-deals as representative of the local people, also in the case of the Addax Bioenergy Project, even the company further consulted the landowners. According to Renner-Thomas a paramount chief *“is traditionally chosen from one of the ‘ruling houses’, that is one of the descent groups whose ancestors are reputed to have ‘founded’ the chiefdom”* (2010: 14). Nowadays, sometimes paramount chiefs are elected that have no connection with *“ruling houses”* because of their wealth, personal influence or political connection (cf. Renner-Thomas 2010: 14-15, Conteh 2013). For the position of the paramount chief four families or *“ruling houses”* of the Malal Mara Chiefdom could appoint a candidate. The Kanu-family from Mabilafu were one of them. During the time of my research preparation for the election of the new paramount chief initiated. People from Mabilafu fervently supported the campaign of the candidate for Mabilafu and the Kanu-Family spent a lot of money to convince people to vote for him because it was known that the paramount chief gets a lot of money from Addax

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<sup>73</sup> This duty is already described by Byiy in his 1913 published article about land tenure of the Temne.

Bioenergy through the land lease payment (see 4.2) and privileges the village of origin. The villagers from Masethle linked this election with the struggle for the position of the section chief and requested the transfer of the right to appoint the section chief to their village as reward to vote for the Mabilafu's paramount chief candidate. But finally, Mabilafu could wrest the promise from Masethle to vote for their candidate without rewarding them with the position of the section chief. Thus, the struggle for the position of the section chief went on. However, as I have been told later, the nominated aspirant from the Kanu-Family from Mabilafu was finally not elected.

Further, the Councilors represented their chiefdom in the parliament on the district level and so called Honourables represented constituencies<sup>74</sup> in the parliament on the national level. On district level, a District Council, headed by the Chairman of the District Council, was implemented to decentralize the state's authority by the Local Government Act 2004.<sup>75</sup> The president of Sierra Leone came from Makeni and is Temne as most people in Mabilafu. Therefore, the villagers supported him and his political party, the APC.

Administrative Level	Positions
State (Sierra Leone)	President
District (Tonkolili District)	Chairman of the District Council
Constituency (Constituency 60)	Honourable
Chiefdom (Malal Mara Chiefdom)	Paramount Chief (vacant*) → acting Paramount Chief Councilor
Section (Mabilafu Section)	Section Chief (vacant*) → acting Section Chief
Village (Mabilafu Village)	Elders Town Crier Ceremonial Chief Youth Leader Chairlady of the market Chairlady of the school Child Welfare Committee
Families in the Village	Kanu (leading family) Kamara Kurma Kargob and Thula

\* vacant at the time of research (June-August 2013)

Table 3: Political organisation in Mabilafu and its embeddedness in the regional and national political organisation.

Based on key-informant interviews and participant observation during the time of my fieldwork.

<sup>74</sup> Constituencies are at the same level than chiefdoms but are not congruent with them as they are defined by population size.

<sup>75</sup> cf.: The Local Government Act, 2004: <[www.sierra-leone.org/laws](http://www.sierra-leone.org/laws)> and Tonkolili District Council: <<http://tonkolili.com/>>, both accessed July 9, 2014.

In Sum, elders, the town head and the section chief represented, together with others, the established local political organization that was linked with the regional and national administrative organization. These actors mediated conflicts within the village and acted on behalf of the villagers vis-à-vis third parties like the company or NGOs. This political organization has been a sphere for political struggles and enlarged some people's bargaining power while it restricted that of others. But, local political leaders' power was also limited as they had limited coercive force and their power was also restricted by national laws. However, the role and duties of political leaders and their power have not been stable but changed with transformations in the larger political, economic, social or cultural context (e.g. the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project).

## **5.6 Subsistence Farming, Land Rights and Access to Land-related Resources**

To understand how land acquisitions affected local people, it is important to understand how land rights and therewith access to land and associated resources have been organized previously. Following, I describe the organization of land rights and institutions that governed access to land-related resources. Thereby I also portray the prevalent type of subsistence shifting cultivation. Even though access to land and associated resources remained important, its importance had been reduced since the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project had brought further opportunities for economic activities such as wage employment or petty trade.

As mentioned above, four families were described as landowners in Mabilafu: the Kanu, the Kamara, the Kurma and the combined family of the Kargbo and Thula. Landowners were described in the local context as so called first-comers (see sources to legitimate rights to land in 5.6). Who had been the really first-comers remained a debated issue but for all of them control over land as handed down by the ancestors was legitimized by the early settlement story of Mabilafu. According to this story, told by one of the heads of the Kanu family, the Kanu were the first that discovered and settled the uninhabited place of today's Mabilafu. This settlement dated back in a mythical era and the rights over this land created by this first settlement were passed down from these ancestors through patrilineal inheritance to the contemporary heads of the Kanu family. Later the Kamara came to Mabilafu and when the Kanu gave them their daughters to marry, some of the land was given to the Kamara. Thus, the Kamara who married the Kanu's daughters could stay in Mabilafu without having to ask constantly for land to farm. Thereby, the Kamara became landowners through in marriage despite the rule of virilocality. An elder Kamara however, told me the first part of this story differently. According to him, the Kamara were actually the first in Mabilafu but had no sons to inherit the land to and as their daughter were married to Kanus, they became the figure heads of the land while the Kamara lost their supremacy. Anyway, later the Kurma came and brought the Koran to Mabilafu. Its force helped to drive evil spirits and the Kurma also became landowners. Finally, the Kargbo and Thula came and got their share of the land. Even though the Kanu had given some land to the other three families, they remained or became the chairmen of the land who were legitimized to give land to landusers to farm on it. In these

stories, it was further told that the surrounding villages were settled from Mabilafu what was used to explain the dominant position of Mabilafu in its vicinity.

People that settled in Mabilafu later on became so called landusers, people who did not “own” land. Through participant observation, various interviews with peasants and landowners and excursions with peasants to their farms I learned how people who did not “own” land or did not “own” enough land could get access to land and other land-related resources and how they exerted the locally prevalent subsistence farming. As described above, swamps and bolilands were seen as the most fertile lands but around Mabilafu these lands were sparse, resp. were occupied by a neighboring village (see 6.1). Thus, the prevalent farming in Mabilafu consisted of shifting cultivation on the uplands that were less fertile but more abundant (see no. 9 in fig. 2 on p.49). The peasants who did not “own” land had to ask landowners every year to be allocated a piece of land to farm. In order to do so, they had to go to the landowner to give him a small amount of money as acknowledgement (0.6-0.9 EUR, what corresponds to about the price of 1kg of rice) and to ask or “beg” him to be assigned a piece of land. “Begging” was used frequently if somebody was in need of something he or she did not had. This could be access to farmland, to other land-related resources, but also goods or food.<sup>76</sup> If landusers “begged” to be given a piece of land, the landowner who provided the land assumed their responsibility to take care of others who became associated with the landowner therewith. It was highlighted that payments that introduced such a request should not be understood as rent and the amount of money could be specified by the applicant who was required to give an amount that correspond to what he is able and willing to give. Similarly, already Biyi who analyzed land tenure among the Temne at the beginning of the last century described that applicants who desired to be given a piece of land could determine what ought to be given, although in those days such payments were handed in kind (1913: 417). Additionally to this small payment, some gave a share of their harvest to the landowner as acknowledgement. Others stated to have never given shares of their harvest to the landowner. Later the landowner assigned the plots to the peasants. I was told that everybody who intended to make a farm was assigned a piece of land by the landowners. Requests could not be denied, as there was still sufficient land available in Mabilafu and on the other side of the Rokel River. Thus, everybody who currently intended to farm was assigned a plot. The distinction of strangers and locals did not come to play in this situation, even though it was an important distinction in other situations (see 5.3 and 6.5). Some strangers had farms. Others explained that it would be no problem to get access to land to farm, if they would intend to do so. Plots were usually demarcated by paths, large trees, termite hills or sticks that were laid on the ground.

The plots assigned had lied idle for five to six years to recover before being used again for shifting cultivation. All tasks related to this cultivation were done manually, generally with

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<sup>76</sup> By saying “yemi rədi” (give me food) the requesting person acknowledges to be “begging” and thus entering a kind of a dependent relationship. Therefore “yemi” as “begging” was clearly distinguished from “zakami” as asking for something without being “begging” (e.g. “zakami anbuk” – asking to be given a book without being “begging”, because for example this book was lent to the asked person previously and is ordered back now).



Lively mainstreet in Mabilafu close to the „charging“



Upper and newer part of the town



House next to the school: Somebody is sitting on the “veranda” where people used to meet in the evenings.



Lower part of the town, close to the mosque



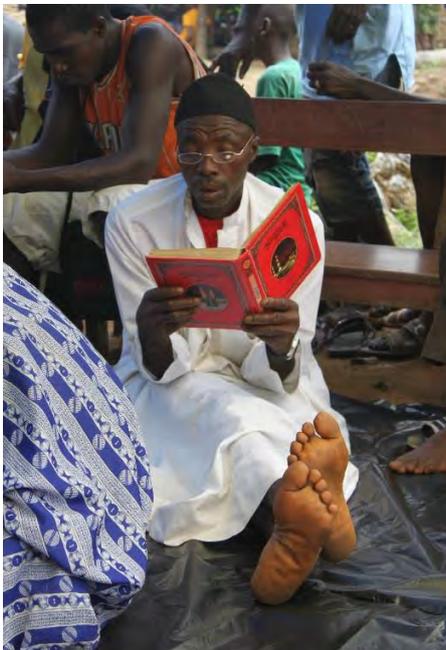
The main road in the direction of the lower part of town



Elders playing Draft under the veranda of the „charging“



Kids playing Draft



The Youth Leader reads from the villag's Coran



Praying night in the mosque during the fasting month



Party after praying night during the fasting months



Show for the celebration of the praying nights



A glance at the desired bolilands of the neighbouring village. Mabilafu had relinquished claims in a long lasting land-disput about this bolilands in order not to hamper the implementation of the Addax Project (see 6.1).



Fenced field in the village. The fences are built to keep out goats and sheep that roam about the village.



Ground nuts farm on an upland seasonal farm. Ground nuts are usually grown after rice, before the land is left idle again to recover.



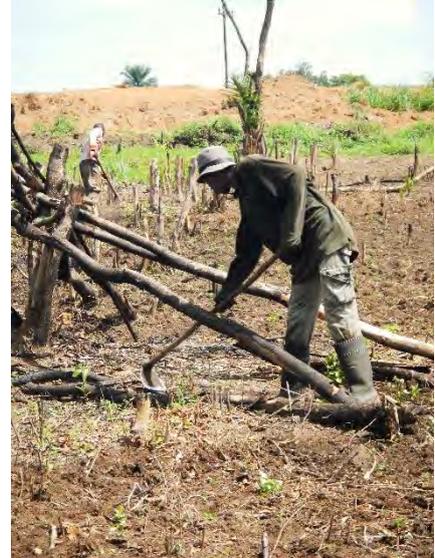
A boy hunting in the bush that covers fellow land



Women, carrying fuel wood to the village, cross the small swamp close to Mabilafu where people grow rice.



Stripe cultivation on a newly prepared field. The hut serves as shelter for the peasants working on the fields.



A man ploughing his field manually with a locally produced hoe.



A woman weeding the fields



Pepper nursery. Later the seedlings are transplanted to the field.



Kids helping with the weeding. Weeding is mostly done by women and children.



A woman working on the fields.



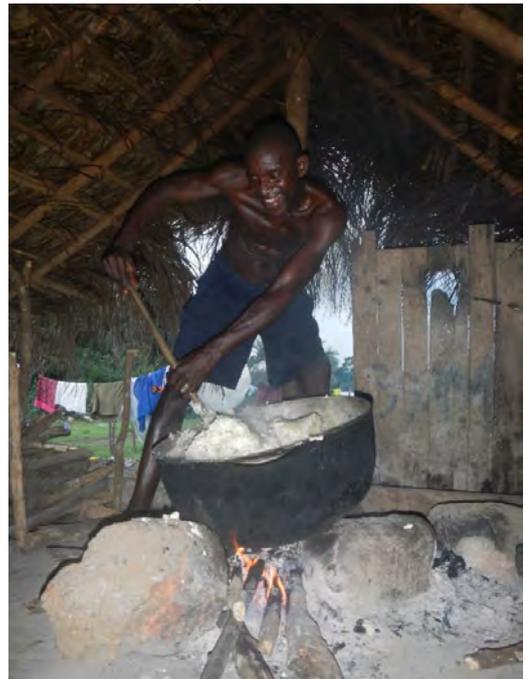
A woman winnowing threshed rice



A woman pounding rice in front of a kitchen-hut made of sticks and palm leaves.



A woman processing palm-oil from seeds of locally grown palm trees



A man cooking fufu, mashed cassava



Basically furnished kitchen-hut



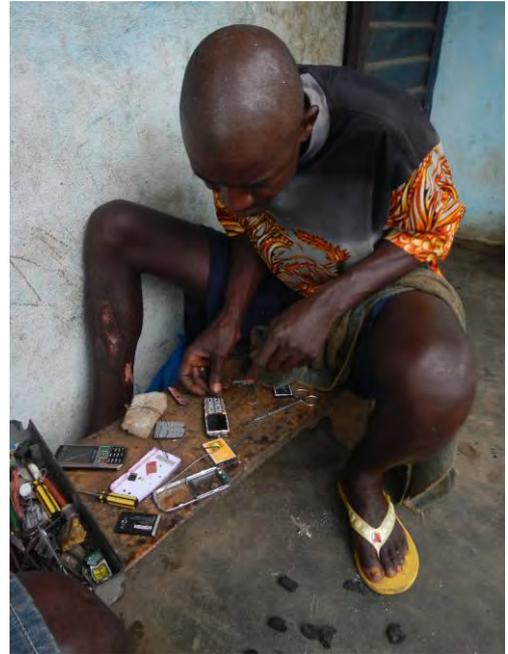
Blacksmiths producing farming tools



The carpenter



People repairing a motorbike in the garage



A man repairing mobile phones



A man climbing a locally grown palm tree to tap palmwine



A palmwine tapper with his equipment.

All pictures were taken by the author.

equipment produced in the village's black smith. Peasants first had to cut down and burn the bush on their farm. Then, they could plough the land to seed rice and other plants like corn, beans and cassava in a type of stripe cultivation. The clearing and ploughing was typically done in cooperative work. The peasants invited other people, mostly from their family, to help them to clear and plough their farm while they also helped others with these tasks. During these days, the peasant's wife had to provide food for the helpers and if they were not of the family, sometimes they were paid a salary, but most worked complementary. Seeds were exchanged among peasants to get the best mix of seeds for a mini-max strategy<sup>77</sup>. During the growth period the farm had to be weeded once or twice. This was a further exhausting task. Before harvesting, birds and other wild and domesticated animals had to be driven from the fields to avoid that they spoil the harvest. When ripe, the rice was harvested manually and the ears had to be dried in the sun before they could be stored, mostly for subsistence consumption. The variety of crops allowed to extend the harvesting season, especially to harvest early if only few food was left. Peasants told me that they did not sell their crop as they needed it to feed their family. However, I was told by one peasant that, if he is in need of money, he would "beg" somebody to give him money and after the harvest he would pay back the debts with rice. Following the rice harvest, groundnuts were planted on the same plot before the land was left fallow for the next years to recover. Beside these farms, vegetables and sometimes rice were planted on small plots inside the village (See no. 4 in fig. 2 on p. 49).

Another type of land-use were permanent gardens. Landusers could ask landowners to be given land to grow permanent crops such as so called white palm trees that were planted to produce palm oil or mango trees. These gardens were, according to an informant, kept for the whole life and even patrilineal inherit to sons. I was told that a landowner could not ask somebody out of a garden because the planted permanent crops belonged to the planter, even though, the land still belonged to the landowner. Mostly, owner of such gardens gave some of their harvest to the landowner and only richer households could afford this type of land-use (See No. 3 in fig. 2 on p. 49).

People who had come to Mabilafu and built a house in the village, told me that they got the land to build the house on similarly to land for farming. One farmer told me, when he had arrived to search for a job some years ago, he had met the elders and had given them money to ask for a piece of land to build his house. After consideration, they gave him some land in the village to build, together with his wife and children, a house from local materials. However, the owner of a bar told me, that he did not even had to give any money to get the place for his bar as the owner of this plot liked him since he had helped him to build his own new house.

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<sup>77</sup> A mini-max strategy is described by Lipton (1982) as a strategy that aims at maximise security of a minimum yield. Farmers forego a maximum yield by planting in stripe cultivation varieties that do not produce the highest yield but are robust to environmental constraints to enhance the certainty of a minimum yield.

Other farmers explained that they farm on land that belongs to Addax Bioenergy and therefore they did not had to ask any landowner for prior approval.<sup>78</sup>

Beside access to land, access to other land-related resources was also important. Trees and other naturally grown plants belonged to the landowner. Just, as mentioned above, if they had been planted by a landuser, they belonged to them. However, wood that lie on the ground could be collected freely, without asking permission form the landowner. Also so called bush jam an edible root that grew in the bush and the popular cola-nuts could be dug out without asking permission from the landowner. Equally, hunting of small animals and fishing was not restricted by local customs.

A further important source for resilience and the local food system were naturally grown palm trees. Their seeds were used to produce palm oil that served as an important food source or could be sold if money was needed. Naturally grown palm trees (to be distinguished from so called white palm trees that were planted (see above)) belonged to the landowner but others could harvest palm seeds to procure palm-oil if the landowner agreed. A landowner, if he was a member of the Poro-society, could put the above described Poro-stick to restrict the use until the seeds were ripe and the stick was removed after the release had been announced. The processing of palm-oil was a time consuming, dangerous and exhausting task but, especially for poorer people it was an appreciated source to enhance the resilience of their food security. Some told me, if they have nothing left to eat, they still could go to “beg” a landowner to harvest palm seeds to produce oil, either to eat or to sell it. Thus, it was their last source of food or income if they were on the rocks. Beside this use, naturally grown palm trees were also used for palm-wine tapping. This job was exclusively done by Limbas, a minority tribe in Mabilafu (see 5.3). Tapping sap to get palm-wine harmed the palm trees. I was told that the Limbas had to pay 3.4 EUR to the landowner to use a palm tree for one season. But, some Limbas that lived close to the school and were associated with the head teacher, which in turn was in good relationship with some landowners, therefore did not had to pay this charge.

Even though the four families “owned” the land and with few exemptions other land-related resources, they had no exclusive rights over them as the term “ownership” would indicate. The landowners had to share these resources with other users that did not “own” them. Thus in this context “ownership” did not describe exclusive rights. With the obligation to share, “ownership” described rather a duty to share and coordinate the use of this land and other land-related resources. Despite the possibility to gain prestige from giving access to land and resources, landowner could not benefit more from this resources than others. In this sense, these land and property rights bear more similarities with CPR institutions than with private property, even though they do not accomplish all eight design principles of robust CPR institutions described by Ostrom (see 2.5). However, as indicated by Ensminger, these

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<sup>78</sup> Even Addax Bioenergy had an agreement with the government that allowed them to acquire all the land, they negotiated the actual use of land with the local landowners. If the company did not use land already allocated from the landowners, it could be used by farmers (e.g. a strip of land along the fence around the factory area).

institutions were not invariable and rather the product of power relations. By considering the history of Sierra Leone (see 4.1) it becomes evident that the colonialization affected greatly, but not for the first time, on power relations that determine such institutions. More recently the civil war but even more the subsequent internationally supported efforts to rebuild a functioning state and civil society by fast tracking decentralizing programs altered again power relations, legitimatizations, organizations and institutions that govern access to land and other resources. The local perceptions of the recent history and the implementation of the Addax Bioenergy Project that bears again the potential to transform relative prices and thus the way institutions are applied and transformed will be described in the following section and the further chapters.

## **5.7 Recent History of Mabilafu: The Legacy of Civil War and the Arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project**

As most other places in Sierra Leone, Mabilafu was affected by the civil war that devastated the country from 1991 to 2002. Various people in Mabilafu told me traumatic experiences they had endured in this time and in whispers some people were still branded as ex RUF rebels. According to villagers, rebels visited Mabilafu repeatedly and beat and killed people, burned houses, stole property and food and chased the people out of the village. To hide from the rebels people lived in the bush or on the other side of the Rokel River but the rebels forced them back to live in the villages where they stole their harvest to bring it to Makeni by kidnapped youths. Further I was told that one of the two wells in Mabilafu was polluted by the rebels and so far remained closed since the war. By the end of the war some people in Mabilafu received material support, like food and cooking pots or blankets from Red Cross supplies.

Such supply have remained relevant up to the time of my research. As already mentioned above, many national, international and non-governmental organizations have, not always in accordance with others, implemented their program in Mabilafu. Among them were NaCSA, Concern Worldwide, Pikin-To-Pikin Movement, Plan, WFP and Unicef,<sup>79</sup> just to name some. These organizations provided funds to build the school, learning material, food supply for childrens and breastfeeding mothers, a bee keeping programme etc. Especially in the school – an Evangelical Mission Primary School – these, sometimes uncoordinated, efforts appeared obviously with the distribution of the daily meal for the children by the UN WFP, hygiene posters from Unicef and the mandatory Christian prayer and praises of the country every morning. In focus group discussions I could observe that this constant presence and material support fostered the notion that “development” can only be achieved by outsiders and if the village shall be “developed” this cannot be done by the villagers themselves but has to be

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<sup>79</sup> For more information on their programmes see:

National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA): <<http://www.nacsa.gov.sl/>>, Concern Worldwide: <[www.concern.net/where-we-work/africa/sierra-leone](http://www.concern.net/where-we-work/africa/sierra-leone)>, Pikin-To-Pikin Movement: <[www.child-to-child.org/ctc/worldwide/sierraleone\\_project1.htm](http://www.child-to-child.org/ctc/worldwide/sierraleone_project1.htm)>, Plan International: <<http://plan-international.org/where-we-work/africa/sierra-leone/>>, World Food Programme (WFP): <[www.wfp.org/countries/sierra-leone](http://www.wfp.org/countries/sierra-leone)>, Unicef: <[www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Sierra\\_Leone\\_COAR\\_2012.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Sierra_Leone_COAR_2012.pdf)>, all accessed April 26, 2013.

acquired by help from outside. Further, the idea spread that this help has to be provided for free by these organizations. Consequently, somebody who could acquire such help gained prestige within the village. This is important to understand the high expectations towards the Addax Bioenergy Project, but more on that in the following chapter.

By the end of the last decade villagers noticed the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project for the first time. How they experienced this arrival and the implementation and impacts of this project will be describe in the following chapters.

### **Summary**

Mabilafu is a village within the Addax Bioenergy Project area about 110km east of Freetown and 30km south west of Makeni. The natural environment around Mabilafu had been transformed in a long time by human activities through constant use. Even though Addax Bioenergy described the ecosystem as degraded, unused and ecologically futile, local people's descriptions and use of the land and resources reveal that the land and associated resources were constantly used by various local people. Thus, the land and ecosystem were an important source of the local food system.

Approximately thousand people lived in Mabilafu during the time of my research. Immigration patterns changed greatly with the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project. Previously, mainly women who married with a villager moved to Mabilafu. With the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project, also a great number of men, searching employment, moved there. Based on different criteria various groups were distinguished in Mabilafu. Corresponding to Barth's and Cohen's concept of ethnic groups and group boundaries described in section 2.5 socially relevant factors were emphasized to distinguish groups. The distinction of groups based on the "place of birth" was used to distinguish newcomers – people who came to Mabilafu in the last years in search for wage labor created by the Addax Bioenergy Project. Other attributes used to define groups were family affiliation or profession. Meanwhile, differences like tribe or religion were less important. However, ascriptions to distinguish groups and to include or exclude people were used flexible and contextual.

The local political organization consist of village elders, the town head and the section chief who mediated conflicts within the village and acted on behalf of the villagers vis-à-vis third parties. The political organization was assisted by religious and animist beliefs and also the secret societies provided important instruments for the political organization. This established local political organization was linked with the regional and national administrative organization. However, political leader's power was not unlimited and as described with Ensmineer's model their power and their role and duties were not stable but changed with variances in the larger political, economic, social and cultural context (e.g. the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project).

Even though land rights were describe in terms that refer to private property, a closer analysis of the land and user rights revealed that these rights corresponded more with CPR institutions, described by Ostrom in section 2.5 than with private property rights. Thus, so called "owners"

of the land and associated resources were not the exclusive beneficiaries but rather administrators. Thus, people who did not “own” land and resources could also benefit from their use in this institutional setting.

This chapter provided an overview of the local context on which the various impacts of the Addax Bioenergy Project hit. This context strongly influenced how these impacts affect different local people heterogeneously.

## 6. Impacts of the Addax Bioenergy Project in Mabilafu and Strategies to Act in the New Situation

After describing the Addax Bioenergy Project and the company's expectation of impacts in section 4.2, the broader context and the complex local context in section 4.1 and in chapter 5, following I analyze the clash thereof and resulting impacts therefrom from a local people's perspective. Therefore, I scrutinize how impacts of the project affected different people in Mabilafu heterogeneously. Too, I examine how people perceived the project and its impacts. At the same time, I describe strategies different people applied to act in this new situation. First, I recount how people experienced the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project. Thereby, I examine how the huge expectations towards the company emerged. Then I give a brief overview of the range of local perceptions of the project's impacts to analyze subsequently some of these impacts in depth. Finally, I describe perceptions and strategies of affected people to act in this new situation.

### 6.1 Perceptions of the Arrival and the Emergence of High Expectations Towards Addax Bioenergy

In this chapter I briefly describe how people in Mabilafu perceived the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project. Since I was not on-site during this time, my description relies on information from interviews only. Most descriptions of the arrival of Addax Bioenergy contained high expectations towards the company. Therefore, I also address the question of how these expectations emerged. The origin of these expectations is closely related to the local perceptions of this project. Thus, I also scrutinized the origin of these perceptions in this section. These latter parts are mainly based on information from participant observation and interviews conducted during my research stay in Mabilafu.

#### Arrival and first notions of the Addax Bioenergy Project

When asked "*when did you hear for the first time of Addax Bioenergy?*" the answer of the town head was translated to me as following:

*"One day helicopter flew over the village. Again and again. Some villagers even thought that this was the work of devils. Those who believed that are mostly dead now but those who are still alive know now that the helicopters that flew over the village and made noise, made surveys for Addax Bioenergy."*

This description is clearly rhetorically loaded but it condensates the first impression most villagers portrayed when they were asked this question. Most people mentioned the surveys as the first thing they noticed of the Addax Bioenergy operations but they mostly added that they did not understand what was going on at this time and just learned later that these activities were related to Addax Bioenergy surveys.

Beside these descriptions of aerial surveys, the taking of soil samples was mentioned by some as the first activities they noticed when Addax Bioenergy came around 2010, 2011. Various people told me that they had helped to dig holes to take soil samples that have been brought

to South Africa to test if the ground in Mabilafu is suitable to build the factory on. However, at the time they still did not know or dare to ask what they were taking the soil samples for.

Informants told me, that a Temne-women who worked for Addax Bioenergy finally introduced the project to the people in Mabilafu. According to the town head, *“she was the first Temne girl to come to Mabilafu to introduce Addax Bioenergy in Mabilafu and within the three chiefdoms.”* He annotated that she endeavored much to facilitate that the Addax Bioenergy project could be implemented but after four years she resigned from her job because she had earned enough money.

Simultaneously to first meetings, every family was registered by Addax Bioenergy. This happened according to the head teacher as following: *“Many people came to register. After which, every house had a number. This is my number 30784.”* Further, every Family Head got a card that indicates that he has a *“family household”*. Some people who had various families (i.e. men with various women with children) got a card for every family. With this cards people could participate in the FDP – described in following words by the head teacher: *“[With this card] they will supply you a plot of land. Then they give you rice. This is how it goes”*.

As recounted by villagers, Addax Bioenergy also came to the village to walk on the land with representatives from the village. Thereby they demarcated the boundaries of the community of Mabilafu within the Addax Bioenergy operational area and the land they intended to use for the construction of the factory. The so collected data were later given to the villagers in the form of maps that show the geo-referenced borders of the community. However, when I was shown these maps by the villagers in charge of these issues, I recognized that they were very unfamiliar with the use of these maps. Actually, they were not able to read the maps or to link the information given by these maps with references in the environment. For example they struggled to adjust the map so that it orientated with the physical environment. Further they were not able to locate the village within the map.

I was told, that many communities were eager to get the factory on their land but Mabilafu was chosen to host the factory as the soil samples have shown that it has a rocky ground and thus is the only suitable place to build the factory within the whole project area. All interviewed villagers told me that they were very happy when they heard that Addax Bioenergy came to build the factory on their land. Furthermore, the town head told me that they had endeavored to ensure that nothing hampers the progress of the Addax Bioenergy Project. Once, when I asked him why Mabilafu did not own bolilands, he told me, that they had relinquished claims in a long lasting land-dispute with Rubung Magbansa, a neighboring village, because they had been afraid that this dispute could change Addax Bioenergy’s mind to build the factory in Mabilafu. This fear was explained with references to rumors that Addax Bioenergy had relocated the place to build the staff houses due to a land-dispute in another village.

To lease the land Addax Bioenergy had to get the consent of the landowners of every community (see 4.2). Likewise, this process was described by various villagers. One villager, a

landuser, recounted that he had been happy when people came and explained in a meeting the intentions of Addax Bioenergy and the terms of the land-lease agreement. But he told me that he did not dare to say anything during this meeting because he had been afraid to speak in the presence of the elders and the authorities that were there. However, also one of the most important elders and landowners in the village, told me similarly that he had been happy that Addax Bioenergy had come to build the factory on their land and that they had agreed to give them the land but that the villagers did not had a say about the terms of the lease. He told me that the arrangement submitted had been issued by an office and only the president, honourables and the paramount chiefs could negotiate the terms of the arrangement. A further reason to agree in the proposed lease agreement was the support by the president of whom he was in favor since he is also a Temne.<sup>80</sup> Even though he could not negotiate the land lease agreement, he told me that the paramount chiefs were able to negotiate, opposite prior intentions of the company, that with the withdraw of Addax Bioenergy after the designated fifty years period, the houses built on the land and all property shall be transferred to the landowners. With this commitment Addax Bioenergy would be in accordance with the practice of customary law. Albeit, as his statement was translated, the paramount chiefs have no written contract that acknowledges this promise and because *“white men belief in document only, but there is no document in fact”* he was afraid to be left out after the company withdraws.

After the land-lease was signed, a ground breaking ceremony was hold on November 10, 2011. The president of Sierra Leone, attended this ceremony that left a lasting memory to the villagers.

### **Expectations towards Addax Bioenergy and Local Perceptions of the Company**

Besides the expectation of the landowners to be transferred the property after Addax Bioenergy leaves the area, many other expectations were raised towards Addax Bioenergy. Villagers expected the company to employ people, to construct houses, to maintain water-wells, provide electricity, build toilets, etc. In brief, in villagers' terms, *“to develop the community”*.<sup>81</sup> On the other side, if confronted with these expectations the Social Manager of Addax Bioenergy stated that the company is a profit-oriented enterprise that is not going to replace the government and never made such commitments (see also English and Sandström 2014: 43). As the Draft of the ESHIA Report indicates, Addax Bioenergy was aware of high expectations since the beginning of the project implementation (cf. Coastal & Environmental

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<sup>80</sup> This absolute support of the president has to be understood in the light of the fierce struggle for power between the two largest ethnic groups in Sierra Leone (see 4.1). During my research I could observe that representatives from Addax Bioenergy made use of this political ideology by referring to the president's support of the project when they appealed on villagers support (see accounts of stealing by the company in Cluster Village Liasion Committee Meeting in section 6.7 for example).

<sup>81</sup> “Development” in the eyes of villagers can described roughly as movement towards “modern” life. Such a modern life includes a housing in cement plastered buildings, electricity, wage employment instead of subsistence farming and this should be, at best, provided by *“the white man”* (see also 5.5).

Services 2009a: 156). The Social Manager supposed the cause of these expectations in rumors by local leaders and politicians that sparked these stories.

However, villagers claimed that in meetings they were promised all these great things they expected Addax Bioenergy to do. For example a villager said: *“When they [Addax Bioenergy] came here, they talked to us very very good. Telling us that they are going to make our houses, roads, water-well, latrines...”*. But especially the expectation that this project will generate good permanent wage employment that provides a good regular income and on the job training for workers was emphasized in many interviews. Similarly to the expectation that Addax Bioenergy will transfer all their properties to the landowners after leaving, the villagers had no evidence that Addax Bioenergy had made all these promises during meetings as nothing about this is stated in the thumb-print signed written agreements. Since most signer cannot read, they had to rely on what they were told. What they were actually told and how it was understood cannot be proven as one word stands against the other.

Furthermore, the villagers considered their claims to be absolutely legitimate because Mabilafu had agreed to give their land to the company – the only suitable land in the whole operational area to build the factory on. The community even waived their rights in the land dispute with Rubung Magbansa in order not to endanger the project. In their eyes it was particularly the community of Mabilafu that made the implementation of the project possible. Thus, all their consent in the agreements and sacrifices should be rewarded by fulfilling their expectations towards the company.

Moreover, it was argued that Addax Bioenergy is very rich and thus capable to help the people in Mabilafu who are very poor. Therewith, Addax Bioenergy would be obliged to support the villagers. To understand this notion I have to open the scope and refer to some notions made in the fifth chapter: In Mabilafu it was common, that people in need “begged”, be it access to land for subsistence farming, money or food. If one “begged” somebody, he or she entered a dependency-relation because he or she relied on the other person (see 5.5). Similarly the community of Mabilafu was seen as in need of “development” that can be provided by the rich investing company. The notion that Addax Bioenergy is rich is not astonishing when considered that a multi-million Euro project entered this rural area, built huge houses and expensive infrastructure, drove around in brand new white shiny cars and told in meetings how much money they have been spending on all that. Thus, according to the notion of some villagers, Mabilafu was seen as entering a dependency-relation with Addax Bioenergy. As their duty, Mabilafu has nearly given unconditional support and endeavored to remove obstacles that could hinder the advancing of the Addax Bioenergy project. In return people request Addax Bioenergy to take their duty to “develop” their community or at least to engage more in “developing” it.

Besides that, Addax Bioenergy is not the first non-African organization that entered this area. Many development agencies were active in Mabilafu. Most of these organizations came to provide goods or money to “develop” the village: blankets and cooking pots after the war, food supply for the children, money to build the school etc. (see 5.6). Further, people told me

during group discussions that other companies in Sierra Leone were doing much more for the affected people than Addax Bioenergy. Thus Addax Bioenergy, who also legitimized its project arguing to bring “development,”<sup>82</sup> was expected to perform similarly to other “development” organizations and portraits of other companies.

Last but not least, these claims can also be seen as a strategy to acquire desired support from Addax Bioenergy, such as the construction of a bridge over a stream, the provision of waterwells or access to wage labor. The acquirement of such things and the redistribution thereof within the village enhanced the prestige and social position of those who had been able to acquire it. The Youth Leader (see 5.4) for example was appointed to his position because “*he likes to move from one area to another to gather information to try to bring development to the community.*” Also the tead hecher became an important and powerful person in the village – even though he was not born there – because he had endeavored a lot to convince NaCSA to provide money to develop a nice school in Mabilafu. Furthermore, his ability to speak English and relationships with staff-members allowed him to negotiate with the Addax Bioenergy.

### Summary

This description of the perceptions of the arrival of this project in Mabilafu shows that the people were steamrolled by its implementation. However, villager endeavored to support the project by nearly unconditional agreement to the company’s demands and even relinquishing from a land dispute to not hamper the project implementation. Nevertheless, the statement of Addax Bioenergy, to have considered also the landowners by negotiating directly with them (see 4.2), has to be relativized as the landowners were asked consent but not allowed to negotiate the terms of the agreement. Furthermore, as already mentioned by Millar (2013a), their participation was limited as they lack capacity to engage in the new discourses that depict land mainly as GIS referenced maps and written contracts. But also their loyalty with the president who had given his approval to the project made it difficult or nearly impossible to withhold approval. Therewith, if scrutinized carefully, the practices of Addax Bioenergy dissent from principles of free and prior informed consent (cf. ILO Convention 169), as also claimed by Bread for All and SiLNoRF (see 4.2).

Furthermore, the descriptions of the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project reveals that its arrival had created high expectations towards the company. Partially these expectations can be explained by the notion, that the project will bring “development” and probably a too brilliant portrait of this “development” by representatives of the company, politicians and local leaders. However, a thorough analysis has shown that also other aspects contributed to the emergence of these expectations. First, the notion that Mabilafu had endeavored to support the project, something that should be rewarded in their eyes, is one of these

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<sup>82</sup> Project descriptions (cf. AfDB (n.d.), Coastal & Environmental Services 2009a: etc.), the sources of investments (see 4.2), the Memorandum of Understanding between the company and the state of Sierra Leone (2010) describe the Addax project as a project that brings “development”. Further, notions from various interviews indicate that also in the village this project had was presented as something that brings development.

explanations. But also the customary-related duty of sharing explains the notion that people expected the company to share its prosperity with the poor community of Mabilafu. Besides that, probably also the experience with other non-African “development” agencies who provided goods fostered the idea that Addax Bioenergy will hand over goods to the villagers. In accordance with this last notion the claims that Addax Bioenergy should “develop” the community must also be seen in the light of local struggles for prestige and social positions. Somebody could enhance his prestige if he or she was able to acquire “development” provided by external organizations. Thus, it has to be assumed that some actors tried to acquire and redistribute “development” by Addax Bioenergy, such as the construction of a bridge or access to wage labor for example, in order to gain prestige and therewith a higher social position.

However, as described in the following section, these high expectations led to constant critics by villagers that Addax Bioenergy would not fulfill its promises and would not treat Mabilafu as expected. Nevertheless, nobody in the village said that he or she would prefer that Addax Bioenergy leaves the area.

## 6.2 Perceptions of Impacts by the Addax Bioenergy Project: An Overview

In this section, I provide a brief overview of project impacts experienced in Mabilafu. To understand how such impacts emerged and affected people in their local contexts, the description of the company (see 4.2), its implementation (see 6.1), as well as the local context (see chap. 5) have to be considered as well. After providing a brief overview of impacts by the Addax Bioenergy Project, some of the aspects raised in this section are analyzed more in detail in the following section.

As described just before, the way the project had been introduced to the people in Mabilafu created high expectations regarding positive changes that were assumed to be brought by the company. These yet unaccomplished expectations were a cause of constant criticism by villagers.

Compensation payments (land-lease, acknowledgement and other compensation payments) were described by Addax Bioenergy as a positive impact that shall contribute to enhance the general income in this region (see 4.2.). The head of an important landowning family explained that the land-lease and acknowledgement payments committed to Mabilafu sum up to roughly 2700 EUR per year.<sup>83</sup> He also told me that this money was shared among the four land-owning families of Mabilafu according to the customary land rights (see 5.5). When I talked with beneficiaries of these compensations I was regularly told that the payments are

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<sup>83</sup> Ca. 1500 EUR for the land-lease and ca. 1200 EUR as acknowledgement payments. Addax did not confirm these figures but they correspondent to the general description of the land-lease and acknowledgment payments presented in their reports (see 4.2). According to figures provided by Addax, Mabilafu covers an area of 488 hectares within the project operational area (see 5.1). With roughly 5.9 EUR per hectare the total amount calculated on the basis of figures given by Addax should be ca. 2879 EUR per year. Besides these yearly payments people also received one off compensations payments for the loss of economic crops (see 4.2). If the acknowledgement and land-lease payment for the land of the whole community would be shared among the roughly 1000 inhabitants, every villager would receive 2.8 EUR per year, enough money to buy about 4.5 kg rice per person per year.

too low to benefit the people. In this context people envied other villages that had received more money from Addax Bioenergy because more economic crops were destroyed and onetime compensated there. Accordingly, they experienced more “development” from compensations than Mabilafu. In such villages, I saw more small shops, cement plastered buildings and generators to produce electricity than in Mabilafu. Nevertheless, also in Mabilafu some houses were newly constructed or improved (e.g. zinc-roofs) with money paid as compensation.

A so called stranger who moved to Mabilafu to work for Addax Bioenergy told me once in the evening in his bar that *“Addax has brought life to Mabilafu. Before, there was nothing here”*. He explained that other villages in Sierra Leone would be “less developed” than Mabilafu. There, people would not have flashlights or mobile phones to make light in the night. But, even though he believed that Addax Bioenergy had brought some “development” to Mabilafu, he added immediately that Addax Bioenergy could still do more for the community. Also other villagers that had been born in Mabilafu stated that with the construction of roads, which facilitate the travel to Makeni greatly, or the changes in the structure of houses in Mabilafu, Addax Bioenergy was bringing some positive changes. However, villagers highlighted the gap between expected and received compensation payments and ensuing “development” more often than achieved improvements facilitated by the company.

Furthermore, the creation of wage employment by the company could be seen as a positive impact brought by this project. These employment possibilities attracted people from the whole country and also most people in Mabilafu were eager to be employed by the company or one of its contractors. Nevertheless, the actual provision of wage employment for people for Mabilafu was well below expectations. Most villagers complained that Addax Bioenergy and its contractors neglect the people from Mabilafu and employ people from Makeni and other parts of Sierra Leone instead. Especially the employment of expatriates from India and Senegal in lieu of local workers was criticized harshly. The town head for example complained once that *“Addax brought skilled workers from a fare instead of skilling the local workers”*. Further he told me that these expatriates were not working well but were treated much better than the local workers. Moreover, he criticized that local people were only employed on short time contracts and thus were fired regularly. Notwithstanding, to have a wage employment was the highest target of most villagers and people endeavored greatly to be employed. Which strategies various actors applied and how they legitimized their claims to be employed will be discussed in section 6.5.

Besides this formal employment through the company and its contractors the project also created possibilities for informal economic activities such as preparing lunch for workers, selling products to workers and their families, if they lived in Mabilafu, or, in turn, supplying these traders with goods purchased in Makeni. However, these new income possibilities were not directly linked to Addax Bioenergy operations and thus most villagers did not perceived them as something that had been brought by this project. Also this topic will be further discussed in section 6.6.

A further change that was assessed with ambiguity by people who were born in Mabilafu was the increase of strangers that lived in Mabilafu. On one side they appraised that the village grew in the last years and that new houses were constructed. But especially elders complained that some young strangers would not assimilate into the “traditional” structure of the village family affiliation (see 5.3).

Even though I was told regularly that people would prefer to engage in wage labor over working as subsistence farmers, some people had noticed that such employment also caused problems. A woman who had a degree in teaching but preferred to work as gurad for Addax Bioenergy explained that people were too lazy now to work on their farms. Since laborers earned money, they preferred to buy food from Makeni. Therefore, they did not produce food by themselves anymore and rely on food imports from Makeni. Though, traders sold the food at very high prices and thus food prices generally increased in Mabilafu since the arrival of the company. The increase of prices for food and the need to import it, especially rice and palm-oil, was mentioned by many villager as a problem that came since the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project. Despite the guard’s remark that people became too lazy to work on their farms, also Addax Bioenergy was blamed for the increase of food prices and lost access to land-related resources. Especially the lost access to palm-seeds from naturally grown palm-trees, which had been removed by Addax Bioenergy, was emphasized as a great treat by some villagers. Palm-seeds were used to produce palm oil as an important source for resilience of poorer households (see 5.5). This topic will be addressed more detailed in the following section.<sup>84</sup> The FDP was designed by Addax Bioenergy to boost local food production with the implementation of new technics of production to mitigate potential negative impacts on food security. But in Mabilafu the FDP failed completely. Thus, this mitigation measure did not contribute to enhance the already previously precarious food security situation in Mabilafu nor could it mitigate losses of access to land and associated resources. But more about this issue in the next section.

Besides potential negative impacts of the project on food security, some people assumed that the quality of drinking water, fetched from a nearby stream and the Rokel River has decreased since the arrival of the project. Analysis of water samples taken by SiLNoRF and Bread for all confirm that excess irrigation water from sugarcane fields was contaminated by herbicides and phosphates (cf. SiLNoRF 2013: 26-27). However, not all people who raised concerns about the water-quality blamed Addax Bioenergy therefore. The lack of toilet facilities and adequate graveyards were also perceived as cause for the contamination of drinking water. It was generally acknowledged by villagers that polluted drinking water caused disease such as the cholera outbreak in early 2013 (see 5.1). In order to help reducing such health risks, the

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<sup>84</sup> Problems related to food were nothing new in Mabilafu. Elders mentioned regularly food crisis and the lack of food in biographic interviews and when they recounted about earlier times. If people in Mabilafu had enough food cannot be answered in this report. But there are indications that at least some people in Mabilafu suffered from poor diet, mal- and undernutrition as there were food supplies distributed by the WFP that are appointed for vulnerable people (cf. WFP Sierra Leone <<http://www.wfp.org/countries/sierra-leone>>, accessed July 7, 2014 or Winkler et al. 2014, see also 5.7).

provision of toilet facilities by the company was one of the expected supports villagers had anticipated to receive when the project had been introduced.

A further problem mentioned by some villagers was the assumption of other people in the region that the villager from Mabilafu would have a lot of money as they host the factory and therewith receive high compensation payments. Thus, these people insisted on higher prices if villagers from Mabilafu wanted to buy something.

Also the spread of alcohol drinking, drug consumption and prostitution was seen with suspicion and related by some villagers to the increased presence of strangers and expatriates that lived in and around Mabilafu. It was claimed that most prostitutes were coming from Makeni to make business with expatriates from Senegal and India, but also offered their services to workers from Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, interviewed people whispered that also women from Mabilafu were engaging in prostitution, but would do it secretly because if caught, their husbands could return them to their parents. Also drinking has been seen as a problem by some people in Mabilafu. Drunk people repeatedly caused troubles and some alcoholics stressed their families who had to take care of them. However, selling of alcohol was also an important source of income of some villagers, especially for the Limba who wholly relied on palm-wine tapping (see 5.5).

A further negative experience mentioned were unrests brought by disputes between workers and the police. One, probably the most severe conflict, an open violent fighting between workers and the police caused a massive police operation. According to villagers' statements, the police suspected some of the trouble makers to have hid in the village and thus they came to Mabilafu where they scared villagers and even arrested some people from Mabilafu. These people then had to be freed by paying high bribes.<sup>85</sup> As solution the town head claimed to be allowed to access the factory area to ensure law and order based on his customary authority. Further, he proposed that the company should only employ people from Mabilafu as he could only guarantee that these people would not cause troubles.

Another criticism raised by villagers was that Addax Bioenergy denied treating people from Mabilafu for medical emergencies in their hospital. I was told that they even would deny to provide vehicles if somebody has to be brought to the hospital in Makeni. Some people stated that villagers had died because Addax Bioenergy denied support for medical emergencies. Confronted with this severe allegation, the Social Manager of Addax Bioenergy stated that they had provided help in several incidents but their medical infrastructure had only been designed to care for minor injuries of their workers and would be overstrained if they would have to cater also for the local inhabitants (see also 4.2). With the creation of an exclusive health facility and other exclusive infrastructure such as electricity or the supply of drinking water for the expatriate workers only, the company provided services desired by villagers exclusive for themselves. Expecting to be also provided all these desired things exclusively

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<sup>85</sup> The Sierra Leonean Police had a bad reputation in the village. I was told that they are highly corrupt, violent and mainly consisting of former RUF rebels. Interactions with the police are avoided whenever possible (see also chap. 5 p. 12).

provided for the expatriate workers, villagers criticized that Addax Bioenergy did not keep its promises and would not treat them well.

### **Summary**

A range of impacts affected people in Mabilafu, some were perceived largely positive, others rather negative. The high expectations towards the project's performance that were not met so far led generally to negative descriptions of the project. Compensation payments (land-lease, acknowledgement payments and compensations for lost assets) were generally perceived as being too low to benefit the people. Moreover, the creation of new wage employment did not meet the villagers' expectations – too few people from Mabilafu were employed and working conditions were not as beneficial as people had hoped for. Nevertheless, access to wage employment was the most sought after change brought to Mabilafu. Besides this formal employment I observed that an informal economy evolved. Villagers perceived that food had to be bought from Makeni increasingly instead of being produced in Mabilafu. Too, people told me that prices for food have increased since the project arrived in Mabilafu and the FDP that was implemented by Addax Bioenergy to increase local food production did not work well in Mabilafu. Some assumed that the drinking water has been polluted by Addax Bioenergy's activities. A further negative impact mentioned, was the assumption of people from other villages that people from Mabilafu would have a lot of money and charged them more if they wanted to buy something. Moreover, people feared unrests brought by disputes between workers and the police and observed that alcohol drinking spread since the project arrived. Further, the influx of strangers who came to Mabilafu to seek employment was seen with ambiguity. However, people also noted that the Addax Bioenergy Project had brought some development to the village.

Despite these largely negative descriptions of Addax Bioenergy by most villagers I spoke to, nobody wanted Addax Bioenergy to leave. People only claimed that Addax Bioenergy should do better. Some hoped that the company will do more for them once the production of agro-ethanol started and the company will also earn money with their project. Due to several delays this happened in 2014 – after I had been in Mabilafu.

Following, I examine two aspects of the project more in detail. First, I describe impacts caused by the acquisition of some of the land that had been used previously through the complex interwoven and overlapping organization of property and user rights. Secondly, I analyze how the creation of wage employment and other forms of monetary income have had impacts on different local people and how these new created opportunities were dealt with differently.

### **6.3 Impacts on Access to Land and Associated Resources, and Direct Compensation**

Addax Bioenergy occupied roughly 20% of the land that belongs to Mabilafu (see 5.1). Land acquisitions in other villages in the project area were much higher. However, as indicated in the second chapter, impacts on affected people's access to land and associated resources depend not only on the size of land appropriated. To understand how the losses of land affected different people heterogeneously, it is important to know how the use of acquired

land and associated resources had been organized previously. As local descriptions of the ecosystem in 5.2 have shown, a diverse flora and fauna allowed a variety of use-patterns in Mabilafu. These uses were organized in a complex interwoven system that regulated access to various resources. Even though this system was not equitable, it enabled everybody in the village (landowners as well as landusers) to access needed resources. The combination of a diverse shifting cultivation, the harvest of palm seeds and hunting and gathering activities enhanced the people's resilience as they could rely on different sources. However, the subsistence-oriented food-system had already been beleaguered as various accounted food crisis indicate (see 5.5).

To account how the previous organization of land- and resource-use had been altered by the project implementation I describe different impacts villagers experienced. The acquisition of land caused some direct losses that are described first. But the company also aimed at mitigating potential negative impacts. Therefore, the performance of the FDP that had been designed by the company as a direct measure to enhance the overall food production and the individual food security of every project-affected person (see 4.2) is discussed in the next section. Thereafter I analyze if the creation of wage employment and other forms of monetary income could mitigate losses that were experienced by the appropriation of land and associated resources.

### **Access to Palm Fruits**

Villagers interviewed perceived the acquisition of land not as problematic regarding the prevalent shifting cultivation on the uplands as they assumed that still enough land was available for this activity. But during an interview with the head of the Kargbo and Thula Family, he insisted to talk about a matter of which I was not thinking to ask at this moment. Fortunately, I was prepared with my methodological approach to allow explanations of interviewed persons that went beyond my current catalogue of questions (see 3.4). The interlocutor insisted to account about the loss of access to palm seeds of locally grown palm trees, which he perceived as a significant problem. According to his explanations Addax Bioenergy has removed some of these trees and as long as people would not find other possibilities to sustain their lives in times of crisis, they would *"die of hunger or start stealing if they have nothing left to eat."* Once hinted on this issue I learned that this was a concern to many people in Mabilafu.

In regard of information presented in section 5.2 and 5.6, the extent of this problem becomes evident. The naturally grown palm trees were an important resource within the local food system offering a source to enhance the people's resilience. Even though these palm trees belonged to the landowner according to the customary law, people who did not "own" them but were in need of resources to sustain their life could ask or in their terms "beg" to be given access to harvest the fruits of these trees. Thus, the palm trees were also important for the resilience of people who did not "own" them. As described in section 5.6, the "owners" of these resources could not deny access to them without risking to lose their reputation within the community. Therewith, these palm trees resemble rather a CPR than a private property

resource, even though they are described in English translations in terms that describe private property (see 5.6).

According to their policy, Addax Bioenergy compensated the “owner” of destroyed palm trees with a one off compensation of nearly 6 EUR per mature tree (see 4.2). As these naturally grown palm trees “belonged” – according to the customary law – to the landowner, they were the beneficiary of the one off payments if trees were removed. Though, this compensation was only paid if the tree already reached a certain height at the time it was recorded by the company.

However, as described above, these trees were not only the “property” of a landowner but also a legitimate and commonly used resource for people who did not “own” them. Thus, the people who did not “own” them but were legitimate users also experienced a loss if these trees were destroyed. But, because they were not the “owner” of these trees, according to customary law, they were not directly compensated for their losses by the company. Furthermore, the one off compensation payment for the loss of a steady source for resilience is inadequate if people are not able to use this compensation to create a new steady source for resilience. Some people were able to transfer these one off payments to a new source of income (a small shop for example) but I also heard of people who spent most money received on consumer goods or on drinking.

With the clearing of locally grown palm trees, access to an important source that enhanced the resilience was destroyed within an already enfeebled subsistence-system. The direct compensations of Addax Bioenergy for destroyed palm trees were not adapted to this local context: First, only present usable trees were compensated if removed, young trees that could have been used in the future were not compensated. Second, a relative steady source that enhanced resilience was compensated with a one off payment and thirdly, with the payment of the compensation to the “owner” not all previous beneficiaries of these trees received a direct compensation.

### **Access to Farmland**

Likewise, direct payments for the land (i.e. land-lease and acknowledgement payments) did not correspond with the previous access to land for small-scale shifting cultivation. Thus, they did not correspond with the previous distribution benefits derived from using these resources. As described in 5.5, everybody who wished could access land to farm and the landowners coordinated its use. However, Addax Bioenergy only compensated the landowner directly with the payments of land-lease and acknowledgment payments. In contrast to the compensation for the destroyed palm trees, these payments are an ongoing and not only a onetime compensation (see 4.2). Furthermore, unlike access to naturally grown palm trees, villagers did not perceive access to land to be endangered by the company’s activities. Nevertheless, only the “owner” and not all the villagers that previously benefited from using land were directly compensated and in addition, these compensations were perceived as being too low to benefit the people (see 6.2).

However, also the situation of the landowners changed. Before wage employment was provided by the Addax Bioenergy Project, access to farmland was the most sought after source for economic activities. As will be shown in section 6.5, access to wage employment overtook this position and thus it became more difficult for landowners to gain prestige from allocating access to land. How landowners tried unsuccessfully to retrain a prestige gaining position with their efforts to control the allocation of jobs will be described in the same section. Even though compensation payments were perceived as very low, landowners benefited from land-lease and acknowledgement payments (e.g. spending this money to improve their houses).

It can be concluded that the land-lease and acknowledgement payments disbursed to the landowners benefited, similarly to the compensation payments for locally grown palm trees, only the “owner” and not everybody who could previously benefit from using the land. Further, these compensation payments were perceived as being too low.

Despite large efforts undertaken by the company to assess local impacts, their neoliberal shaped notion of “ownership” as something exclusive, prevented that they noted the local implication of “ownership” as assignment to organize access to land and associated resources rather than an exclusive right over them (see 5.6). Therefore, the company overlooked the rights landusers were granted by the local institutional setting. Thus, in sum it can be concluded that the direct compensation payments for lost access to land and related resources caused by the company’s operations were inadequate as they were not paid for every loss, they did not benefit everybody who had experienced a loss (i.e. the landusers) and they were perceived as being too low (resp. only paid onetime) to benefit the people.

However, besides the direct payment of compensations, Addax Bioenergy had also designed other measures to mitigate potential emerging losses. Besides the expectation that the creation of wage employment substitutes some losses, the FDP has been implemented to enhance local food production and food security. Following, the performance of the FDP is discussed briefly before the creation of wage employment and its impacts are analyzed in the subsequent section.

#### **6.4 The Farmers Development Program: A Failed Modernization Theory Based Development Program**

Addax Bioenergy assumed that landusers – in their terms “*landless people*” – probably experience decreased access to land due to the land acquisition “*as the land they were leasing [using] is now leased by the owner to Addax, and no ‘spare’ land is available as the remaining land is used for their crops*” (Coastal & Environmental Services 2009a: 102). However, the company assumed that mitigation measures, such as the implemented FDP and FFLS, would mitigate their lost access (cf. Coastal & Environmental Services 2009a, AfDB (n.d.)). As described in section 4.2, these programs were designed by Addax Bioenergy to mitigate potential negative impacts of their project on local food security. They aimed at boosting the local food production through the input of “modern” agricultural technologies and knowledge.

When local people talked about the FDP, they described it as a program in which “*they* [Addax Bioenergy] *make farms for us*” or “*they give us rice*”. Similar to other anticipated benefits, villagers expected the company to bring this program with little or no contribution of the beneficiaries. However, the FDP was designed to provide services to facilitate the implementation of new technologies of farming only and not to farm thorough for the people. According to the design of the FDP, weeding for example was the villagers’ responsibility. But misunderstanding concerning this responsibility and as the Social Manager explained, their attitude that “*Addax Bioenergy will do all for us*” impeded their effort for this task. Furthermore, he blamed the bad organization of the village to make it difficult for the company to interact with the community to coordinate their support. However, this misunderstandings of mutual obligations were not the only one causes for the insufficient performance of the FDP.

The FDP was designated to be implemented on bolilands, the most suitable land for rice cultivation in this area. Though, Mabilafu did not had such land. Their only claims in a boliland were relinquished with the retreat from the land dispute with a neighboring village in order not to hamper the implementation of the Addax Bioenergy Project (see 6.1). Thus, Mabilafu had to request access to bolilands of other communities. During my research, Mabilafu was in the third and last year of the FDP. Subsequently it was projected that the program should be transferred to the FDS, whereby the farmers can buy the services previously provided free (see 4.2). However, the FDP in Mabilafu has not been successful in these three years. In the first year, land was prepared for the FDP for Mabilafu at Komrabai Mackay, a village about 4 km south of Mabilafu, but the harvest was not successful. Some people told me that they even had to buy additional rice to return sufficient rice for the mandatory seed rice stock. In the second and third year, Mabilafu requested access to a boliland on the other side of the Rokel River. As no bridge crosses the river in suitable distance (see 5.2), Addax Bioenergy had to engage another contractor to prepare the FDP land for Mabilafu. In the third year, this contractor wrangled with villagers about payments for the preparation of the boliland and thus the land was prepared too late. Therefore, people expected again a very small yield from the FDP.

Despite great efforts by the company to implement the FDP to ensure that every project affected person receives rice for a secured food provision, even the Social Manager of Addax Bioenergy admitted that the program did not perform everywhere as anticipated. In Mabilafu the dispute with the contractor and the lack of cooperation and unclear responsibilities hampered the success of the FDP. But the Social Manager emphasized that the FDP performed successful in other villages. However, as indicated by the SiLNoRF 2014 annual monitoring report, Mabilafu was not the only village in which the FDP did not provide the anticipated harvests.

Moreover, as described in section 4.2 the FDP was designed as individual undertake to grow rice on allocated plots. However, in Mabilafu the collection of the seed rice and the distribution of the harvest had been organized along the customary structure of the four

families (see 5.5). Every family had to provide the same amount of seed rice and received a quarter of the harvest. After the rice was finally seeded on the boliland in the year of my research, the remaining rice from the last harvest of the FDP was shared among the four families. Every family got eleven bags of rice to be distributed within the family. When it came to the distribution of the rice within the Kurma family a heated debate kicked off. The town head ordered the Kurma family to pay back money he had advanced to buy a cow that was slaughtered for the celebration of the praying night during the fasting month before he would allow the rice to be shared. He has taken this money from the local tax he had collected on behalf of the government. Since he had to forward this money to the government, he feared to get in serious troubles if the families would not pay back the amount he advanced for the cow. Withholding the rice, he ordered to be given the money from the Kurma family, before he would allow to share the rice from the former FDP harvest. This incident indicates that the organization of the FDP and the distribution of its harvest did not happen detached from the local social organization and politics as it could be assumed from reading descriptions of the FDP.

In sum, the FDP, a modernization theory based top-down implemented development program that seems to waive various critics on such development approaches raised in the last forty years (see 2.3), failed when it came to be implemented in the local context in Mabilafu. The inadequate consideration of the local context led to misunderstandings concerning mutual responsibilities between the people and the providing company and pre-existing power-relations within the communities affected and delayed the distribution of the produced rice. But also late ploughing and harrowing caused diminished harvests. It can be concluded that the FDP in Mabilafu did not mitigate impacts caused by land-acquisitions as assumed by the villagers or the company.

Whether the created wage employment benefited the villagers in a manner to mitigate negative impacts caused by lost access to land and associated resources will be discussed in the following section.

## **6.5 Working for Addax Bioenergy and its Contractors: Access to Wage Employment and Working-conditions**

The creation of wage employment was emphasized in the reports about the Addax Bioenergy Project as something that benefits the local people. Access to this newly created possibility to be employed as a wage laborer was highly sought after in Mabilafu and a hotly debated issue. Nearly everybody was eager to be employed as a laborer, hoping to overcome the hardship of poverty and subsistence farming therewith. However, the amount of created jobs was well below the estimation of the villagers who expected that nearly everybody would be employed. The creation of employment also attracted people from other parts of the country and even from oversea so that access to employment became an issue of fierce struggles. About 17.5% of the villagers were employed by Addax Bioenergy or one of its contractors at the time of my

research.<sup>86</sup> In the following section, I describe how people with different possibilities attempt to be employed and how villagers who were finally employed perceived working conditions. In the last section of this chapter, I picture how the creation of wage employment facilitated the evolution of a considerable informal economy. Therewith I analyze the impacts and their perception by villagers from a labor perspective as it is described in section 2.4. The below mentioned aspects concerning wage employment were those of greatest importance to most people in Mabilafu.

### **Employment through Appointment by the Elders**

People in Mabilafu claimed to be employed preferential because they were promised so, because it was their land on which the factory – the core of the project – was built and because people from Mabilafu would be the better workers than laborers from Makeni or from abroad (see 6.1). According to the town head's and head teacher's explanations, workers from Makeni caused troubles several times, once these troubles even ended in a riot between workers and the Sierra Leone Police (see 6.2). The town head explained that he could guarantee that the workers appointed from Mabilafu would behave well but that he had no influence on workers from elsewhere. Further, he stated that people from Makeni would be all thieves who steal property from Addax Bioenergy as he was told by staff members of Addax Bioenergy in the regular meetings. Besides that, the laborers from Makeni had to be transported a long distance every day and if buses break or the weather blocks them, they would not be able to come to work while the workers from Mabilafu just lived very close to the factory. Others stated that the expatriates from India would be very unskilled and could not cope with the harsh conditions of Africa since one after the other would be killed by Malaria. It can be concluded that people in Mabilafu used every possible explanation to legitimate their claim that they should be employed preferential to laborers from elsewhere.

Officially Addax Bioenergy and its contractors fostered that local people are employed preferentially in order to enhance positive local impacts of the project (see 4.2). However, this policy has been circumvent regularly. The town head told me that people from Makeni or other distant villages who attempt to be employed would pretend to be from one of the local villages in order to be employed. Some even paid their annual head-tax in Mabilafu to use the receipt as falsely proof to be from the village. Also the possibility to pay bribes to be given a job was mentioned by several interviewed persons. A stranger who also tried to be employed told me for example:

*“Some of them [personnel manager] come and say, ‘if you need job, give me small small’. They are taking bribe in some way. And for people like me, that are not from this village – only the people that are born from this village find jobs, we heard because of the land – it is not easy. Except you have money to bribe them.”*

This statement shows not only that people were aware of bribing as a possibility to be employed but also that strangers perceived the situation of accessing wage employment

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<sup>86</sup> The number of employed people fluctuated greatly. The number presented here represents the rate of employed people at the time of accomplishment of the household-survey.

different from people who were born in Mabilafu. Strangers perceived it as being nearly impossible to be employed because the companies would only take people that were born in Mabilafu. On the other hand, elders from the village criticized that the companies employed people that were not born in Mabilafu in spite of their promise to favor locals.

To avoid the above mentioned malpractices the elders in Mabilafu claimed to be given the right to appoint the people that should be employed. Addax Bioenergy has agreed on this request and promised that the elders would be allowed to write lists – the so called “job-list” with names of people that should be employed if help-workers were needed. But during the time of my research a contractor employed a great number of help-workers from Makeni without considering this agreement. One villager saw this and called the head teacher. The head teacher in turn called one of the Social Workers of Addax Bioenergy to, as he said, *“keep him informed that the JVC Company has taken thirteen people from Makeni unknowing of the community of Mabilafu”*. Further he told me that *“this employment is not good. The way they do it, they don’t do it according to the right procedure.”* Thus, the head teacher told me that he intends to go to make a complaint after discussing this issue with the other elders.

Later the same day a delegation of elders went to discuss the matter with the representatives of the company. The company agreed to employ immediately five workers from Mabilafu and five from Rotunka, a neighboring village that also gave some of its land for the construction of the factory. Further, the elders were promised to be allowed to write a list of 35 people to be employed by the company in the near future. On the other hand, the company kept the thirteen workers from Makeni that were employed in the morning. Despite the policy of the elders to appoint only people that were born in Mabilafu to be given jobs, the villager who informed the head teacher about the wrongdoing of the company was also given one of the five immediate employments, even though he was a stranger.

Some days later I accompanied another delegation of elders that went to the company to hand over the list with the 35 names of people to be employed in the near future. One of the elders explained that every family could appoint the same amount of persons to be written on the list – because these families “owned” the land – as he said. Selected persons should be born in Mabilafu but otherwise the families had been free to organize this appointment. Normally every family could appoint the same amount of people, just sometimes the Kanu family would be given more places because they are the leader of the four families (see 5.4). However, when asked, he admitted that sometimes also people who were not born in Mabilafu were appointed, like the stranger who informed the community about the wrongdoing of the company or sometimes also people recommended by the head teacher who was not a landowner were accepted.

When we arrived at the company’s office a shy guard denied access to the compound. He only allowed the section chief to enter the office to hand over the list. However, the section chief did not speak English and thus could not communicate with the staff of the company. After about a half an hour he came back as he was finally allowed to be accompanied by an interpreter. Nearly another hour later – during which the elders waited displeased in front of

the closed gate on the sludgy dirt road while it rained heavily – the section chief and the interpreter came back. They could finally hand out the list. Ensuing, the delegation of the elders met the villagers whose name were written on the list. They waited in calling distance to be ready if they would already be employed this day. In a subsequent dispute the exasperated elders vent their anger to have been kept waiting for such a long time in the rain outside the compound just to hand over the list. During the remaining month of my research people were waiting patiently but in vain – nobody from this list was employed by the contractor during this time.

With this attempt to appoint people to be employed probably not only villagers that were born in Mabilafu were chosen, as envisaged initially. But the elders, resp. the heads of the families who could appoint these people would have gained power and prestige within the community therewith. However, this possibility to enlarge power and prestige was limited as this attempt to control access to the highly sought after employment failed temporarily and other strategies that did not include the control of the elders were applied (see below). The failure of this strategy is also indicated by the statements made in the household-survey. Only 17.3% of the people who have been employed once stated to have been employed because their name had been written on such a list (cf. Figure 8).

### Further Strategies to be Employed

Beside this official job-list written by the elders, occasionally the head teacher could also appoint people to be employed. He told me that he had a friend from Zimbabwe who worked for Addax Bioenergy. Because the head teacher had hosted him when he came to Sierra Leone, this Zimbabwean worker who apparently could impinge on intakes enabled him sometimes to appoint people to be employed. Some of the strangers that lived next to the head teacher's house and were under his responsibility told me that they had been employed this way. The head teacher explained that it was comfortable to have this possibility because therewith he could allocate jobs for "his" people that would not be given a place on the job-list since they were strangers.

People who were not employed by on of this channels attempt other ways to find employment. One man told me that he had succeeded to be employed when he went directly to the factory site where he had met a manager and asked him to be given a job. Others told me that relatives or friends who already worked for Addax Bioenergy or one of the contractors had helped them to be employed. This way of getting a job was most common as it can be seen on the illustration on the right-hand side. As further possibility, people waited at the gate of the factory compound where personnel manager employed people spontaneously sometimes. As described above, bribery was a further known strategy mentioned in

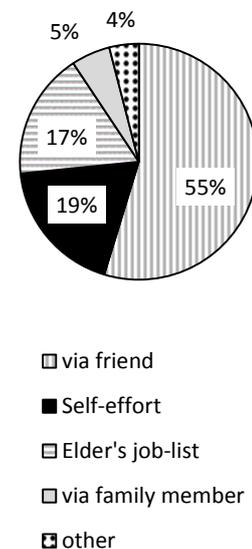


Figure 8: Diagram of Successful Strategies to find a Job

interviews. During my research various people also asked me to help them to write a letter of application to be forwarded by friends to personnel managers.

The analysis of the household-survey confirms what I learned from interviews and participant observation. As shown with the diagram, most workers got their job through friends who were already employed and the attempt to be employed by the job-list of the elders was comparatively not a very successful strategy.

### **How a Stranger, Got His Jobs**

One of my interlocutors, a so called stranger, worked temporary for one of the contractors of Addax Bioenergy. He had moved to Mabilafu to find an employment 1 ½ years before I conducted my research. He has a qualification as technician from the St. Joseph Vocational Center in Lunsar<sup>87</sup>. After he had worked for various contractors and endured unemployment for some time, he had heard of the Addax Bioenergy Project. His father who knew the former head teacher of Mabilafu had organized that my interlocutor could go to Mabilafu. There the former head teacher took care of him and provided a shelter and food when he arrived in Mabilafu. In turn he helped him to build his new house. Therewith, he became privileged by the former head teacher who allowed him to run a bar behind his house and to stay free with his wife and child in one of the rooms of the newly built house. My interlocutor told me that he is "*part of the family now*".<sup>88</sup>

When my interlocutor came to Mabilafu he had started to work as help-worker for one of the contractors of Addax Bioenergy. Because he had been very skilled his supervisor graded him up as masonry. After some months of working he even had been graded up as a supervisor himself. But after working for one year and five months his employer dismissed most of its workforce and also my interlocutor's contract was not renewed.

While he was jobless, he told me that it was good to relax after the exhausting nonstop working in the last months but he also hoped to be employed again soon because "*without no job you have got a lot of problems*" as he said. But further, he explained that it was not easy to be employed again even though he was a skilled worker. Nevertheless, about two weeks later my interlocutor got a job as supervisor again. He had been called by his former boss since "*he was kept in good memory*" as he said. However, he told me that his new job would be worse than the previous ones as he was paid only 3.4 EUR per day and could be dismissed at any time. Afterwards, when he was working, he was constantly hoping to be given new tasks in order not to be dismissed again.

### **Working Conditions**

As already indicated by this last description, most villagers perceived the working conditions as very poor. Following, most statements about the problematic working condition stem from

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<sup>87</sup> This vocational center is part of an Italian catholic development organization and mission (cf.: <[www.giuseppini.org/](http://www.giuseppini.org/)>, accessed June 19, 2014)

<sup>88</sup> See also the role of family affiliation described in section 5.5.

the stranger who's situation I have described above, but others told me similarly about problems they faced when they worked for Addax Bioenergy or one of its contractors.

In Interviews laborers constantly complained that the salaries paid by the companies would be too low. One interlocutor told me that he was paid 60 EUR per month to cut sugar cane but such a low salary would not encourage him much to work. Another worker told me that he only had gotten 45 EUR after working very hard for the whole month. He further explained that this salary would not be enough to feed his whole family. He had many children to care for since his two younger brother had died and he had to feed their children as well. A woman who worked as security explained that the 42 EUR she is paid per month would be way too low but people would still like this position because it allows them to heighten their income by stealing equipment from the company.

The obligation to share the money earned from wage employment with relatives depending on the worker's income further fostered the notion that the salaries were too low. The stranger, who's situation I have described above for example explained:

*"The money was very very much small because think of family affairs. I have a lot of family. Most of them depend on me. [...] My father was a head teacher but is now out of job. He is now going for his NASSIT<sup>89</sup> but up to this moment [he] is not yet approved. He depends on me." And further: „Now the money is so small they gave me. But the family I gave them the little I have. When the job is finished, there is no benefit for you."*

Thus, most families relied on additional income – generated in the informal economy or food produced by maintained subsistence farming.

Another complaint I heard regularly was that the companies would employ people only for a short time and there would be nearly no permanent employment. Interlocutors complained that they were dismissed from their jobs regularly and thus became jobless, or in their term, had to "sit" again. As the town head explained, this also thwart that workers get on the job training.

Further, I was told that the workers would be treated very bad by the companies and that the expatriates would be treated much better than the local workers even though they would not be trained better than locals. The stranger who I interviewed several times explained for example:

*"Those people that are coming from fare – the expatriates – they are treated so good. As now, we the locals, we are just very pathetic. While others are coming here. We are more sensitive than them. We have more technical knowledge than them but we are just below. They do not treat us well."*

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<sup>89</sup> The National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) is a statutory public trust to replace income loss caused by old age, invalidity or death (For further information see: Bank of Sierra Leone: <[www.bsl.gov.sl/nassit.html](http://www.bsl.gov.sl/nassit.html)>, accessed June 20, 2014).

Also the missing medical support and the lack of social security provision was criticized. I heard that workers who became ill or had an accident were not given adequate medical support and were not paid if they missed working days to recover. According to informants, workers who had serious injuries had to trust money in order to afford receiving medical treatment and workers who were sick faced deductions from their salaries – *“If you get sick. Nothing. You are not marked if you are sick the day you don’t go for the job. No money. When you don’t work forty hours a week, nothing. No money. These are the problems.”*

During the time of my research, the above-mentioned contractor that did not stick to the agreement to employ people from Mabilafu had, previous to this incident, dismissed most of its workforce even though its mission had not been completed. Since this contractor employed a great number of the workers from the village, precariousness and despair spread among the villagers after this happened relatively unpredicted. Some days later the company started to employ people again. As described above, not all of these intakes were according to the arrangements with the villagers but what further bothered the villagers was that the conditions of the new job were worse than the previous working conditions. According to the stranger, of whom I have described the situation above, his salary was reduced from 4.4 EUR per day to 3.4 EUR per day and the salary of help-workers even diminished from 2.9 EUR per day to 1.6 EUR per day. The stranger who was one of the five villagers that got a job immediately after they complaint about the false intake (see above) explained in detail how they were presented the new working conditions of which he stated: *“The conditions are not favorable, but since we have a need of job, we just have to agree with all this conditions.”* According to him, these new conditions contained a daily salary of 2.5 EUR if one worked from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Only additional hours and weekend work are rewarded with extra salary, needed to earn a living.

Workers also told me that they fear to complain about the difficult working conditions or to demand improvements because they were afraid to lose their job. During the time of my research office employees from Makeni organized a strike to enforce better working conditions for them but the unskilled laborers that worked for the contractors did not dare to raise their voice against their working conditions anymore, even though they had done it before.

### **Summary**

Access to wage employment was highly contested. Depending on the people’s possibilities the situation was perceived differently. The elders tried vehemently to expand their authority and to appointed – according to local customary institutions – who will be given a job. They legitimized their claim by a large variety of arguments that ranged from promises made by the company to incidents they interpreted in a way that underpinned their claim. Doubtless they also tried to strengthen their position within the community by allocating jobs. However, their struggle to control access to wage employment was only marginally successful and they accused the companies to employ illegitimately people that were not born in Mabilafu. On the other side, strangers that were not born in Mabilafu told me that it would be nearly impossible

to be employed because the companies would take only people that were born in Mabilafu. By applying less formal ways to be employed also strangers could work for Addax Bioenergy or one of its contractors. Even though struggles to be employ and to control access to wage employment were fierce, they did not led to tensions within the various social groups in Mabilafu.

However, even though if people succeeded to be employed the working conditions they met did not meet their expectations. Everybody I spoke to, perceived the working conditions as poor. The salary was described as too low and the insecure contracts that allowed to be dismissed at any time stressed the workers. Once the laborers received a small salary they were expected to share this money with their family and friends who were in need of support. Thus, as a worker explained, *“in the end there is no benefit for you.”* But, as another said, *“since we have need of job, we just have to agree with all these conditions.”* To cope with the insecure working conditions the laborers had to develop strategies to provide for times when they do not earn wages anymore.

People developed different strategies to cope with the lack of formal employment possibilities and precarious working conditions. Some started another business in the informal sector to generate a monetary income. Others kept being engaged, at least partially, in subsistence-oriented farming. As the latter is already described in section 5.6, the following section deals with the informal economy.

## 6.6 Other forms of Monetary Income: The Informal Economy

Despite the possibility for some to work for Addax Bioenergy or one of its contractors, the Addax Bioenergy Project also fostered other forms of monetary income, i.e. engagements in the informal economy.<sup>90</sup> During my research I examined the most prevalent informal economic activities. First, I describe the market that emerged in the vicinity of the factory. Then I picture a bar in the village that served as social security mechanism to cope with the precarious working condition. Thirdly, I explain how people tried to engage in trading after they were dismissed by one of the companies. Finally, I list further informal economic activities applied by villagers.

### The Market

In the vicinity of the factory-gate a scruffy market could be found consisting of roughly 30 simple huts made of sticks, palm-leaves, plastic and packaging materials (see map 3). These huts were mainly used by women to sell lunch and commodities to workers and a group of Limba-men used to sell palm-wine there. Some women from the head teacher's neighboring house worked at this market. They sold food in one of the huts. Therefore, every evening the women prepared food to be sold to the workers the subsequent day. At lunch time workers from the construction sites came to rest in these huts and to eat lunch. The women offered different menus. One women used to prepare rice with Krin Krin, a sauce made of chopped

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<sup>90</sup> for a definition of informal economic activities see section 2.5

potato leaves and palm-oil. This menu was sold at a price of about 0.3 EUR per plate. Others sold Fufu, mashed cassava with a spicy sauce, Beni, rice with sesame, or Kayan, sweet dry ground-nuts puree. These menus were sold for about 0.1 to 0.2 EUR per plate. The variety of the menu changed daily and different vendor prepared different food. Some workers paid the menu on a daily basis, others were supplied on account and were supposed to pay back the debts when they were paid their salary.

To construct a hut at the market, the approval of the landowner was needed. Despite a small amount deposited to make a request, similarly to demand access to land for subsistence farming, a rent or annual payment was not required. But it was expected that the vendors provide some money if the community is in need of money for specific affairs. A chairlady of the market was appointed by the village to settle minor conflicts between vendors or between vendors and workers. This woman, who also had a hut to sell beverages and petty commodities at the market, coordinated the allocation of land for new huts on behalf of the landowner. If somebody wanted to build a new hut, he or she had also to give some money to the chairlady of the market as well.

The women from the head teacher's neighboring house used to buy the food they prepared to sell at the market mainly from the head teacher's wife. Despite some food grown in the region, most food was brought from Makeni. The head teacher's wife used to buy food in large quantities in Makeni from where it was brought to Mabilafu by motorbikes. Subsequently, the women who sold lunch at the market usually just bought the food to be prepared for the next day. One of my interpreters explained:

*„Usually they buy it [the rice] from her [the head teacher's wife]. They do not buy a bag of it, they always do it by cup. Some cooks buy bags but they [the neighbors] don't have the commercial means for this. That is why she [the head teacher's wife] is buying the bags so frequently.”*

Even though the women were running the hut at the market collectively, every woman prepared her own menu which she sold independently in the jointly used hut. Thus, every woman bought her own food from the head teacher's wife and also accounts were made individually.

Often the revenues from selling lunch barely covered the costs to buy the food prepared. Regularly I was told that “*there is no gain*” when women accounted about their business. In the days after salaries were paid, workers usually spent more money on food and thus the women's business augmented. Then, women gained nearly as much as laborers who worked for one of the companies but in other days they also suffered huge losses, earning less than they had spent to buy the food. During the fasting month when most workers did not eat or drink at daytime, the situation of the women became particularly difficult. However, the hoped-for possibility to earn cash and the lack of other possibilities to do so kept these women continuing this difficult business.



People waiting discouraged under a tree at calling distance to the factory in their search for employment  
Picture taken by the author



People following a woman that is responsible for intakes of one of the sub-contractors. They beg her desperately to be employed.  
Picture taken by the author



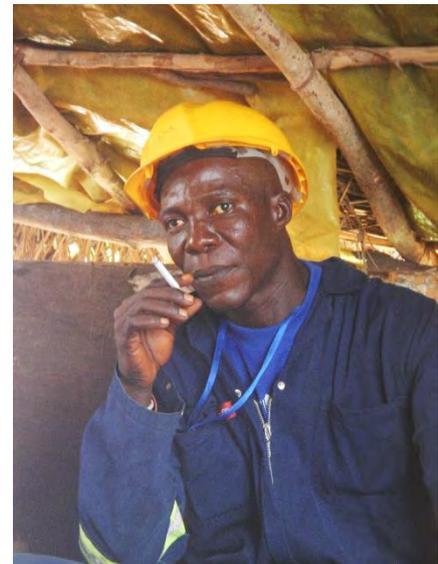
A man who came to Mabilafu in search for a job and who became employed as painter.  
Picture taken by the author



People working for Addax Bioenergy  
<<http://www.addaxbioenergy.com>>, accessed 20 June



Accommodation of expatriate workers, employed by one of the sub-contractors  
Picture taken by the author



A man working for Addax  
Picture taken by the author



The Market where people used to sell food and goods to the workers

Picture taken by the author



Inside a hut at the market. Workers are waiting to be served lunch.

Picture taken by the author



A trader presenting her items in Mabilafu

Picture taken by the author



A bike driver loading his motorbike

Picture taken by the author



A bike driver on his motorbike

Picture taken by the author



A trader with his bicycle

Picture taken by the author

This informal economic activity that consisted of the direct selling of lunch to workers, the supply chains that provided food to be prepared and a set of informal rules that governed the whole activities allowed partaking women to benefit indirectly, even though only marginally, from enhanced general income in this region. Meanwhile they also subsidized the formal economy by providing cheap services for laborers.

### **The Bar**

The stranger of whom I have described the working condition in the last section was running a bar in the village. This bar was an open sided building made of sticks covered by plastic planes and palm leaves. In the bar, a car battery supplied a small light bulb and a radio. In a box, beverages and some other petty commodities were presented and palm-wine was stored in canisters under a table. The majority of beverages sold were the popular plastic bags containing variously flavored schnapps sold at less than 0.1 EUR each. Palm-wine was sold for less than 0.2 EUR per cup. The schnapps were brought from Makeni, the palm-wine was provided by the Limba who earned their living from palm-wine tapping. In the evening young men came to the bar to consume – if they could afford it – alcoholics and marijuana. Sometimes the lively atmosphere was interfered by disputes between drunken guests and the barkeeper had to mediate between brawlers.

The barkeeper once told me that he made this bar because otherwise it would be boring in the town. Among the young men who came to the bar, he enjoyed a good reputation. But he also explained that it would be a very exhausting job running the bar at night besides his job at the factory site. Further, he explained that he constantly had to add parts of his salary to increase his business, i.e. to buy alcoholic drinks and petty commodities. So, I wondered why he was doing this anyway.

But when the barkeeper temporarily lost his job as worker at the factory site (see 6.5) and therewith his major source of income, I learned, that he sustained himself and his family by generating revenues from selling his stock or, as he explained: *“For now, I am not working. I don’t have small small [money]. So I go to the bank – the business [the bar] is the bank – the bank I am now living from.”* Therewith, the bar became not only a possibility to counter the boredom of the village and to gain prestige but also an important mechanism of social security to relay on if the major source of income intermitted.

### **Trade**

Similarly to the barkeeper, other villagers who had lost their job and therewith their major source of income started to engage in petty trade. Investing savings from working or their last salary, they bought petty commodities in Makeni which they brought to Mabilafu in order to sell them to other villagers. Such petty commodities were soap, biscuits, batteries, sweets, clothes, shoes, cigarettes, fuel etc.

A bike driver told me that he worked for one of the contractors for three months before he was dismissed. During this three months he had been able to save enough money to buy a motorbike. Thus, when he lost his job he started to work as bike driver, transporting people

and goods from Mabilafu and other villages in the vicinity to Makeni and back. Asked whether bike driving is a good job, he answered: *“Yeah, me got my surviving.”* Later, he added that if he would be employed again, he would *“keep back bike and go to work”* and then, if he would be dismissed again, he simply would *“take bike and bike [drive] again.”* Therewith he developed a strategy that enabled him deal relatively well with the precarious working conditions offered by the Addax Bioenergy Project. As he used money he earned as wage laborer to initiate this strategy, it can be said that he had been provided a new possibility to earn a living by the Addax Bioenergy Project.

However, not all traders were able to start a continuous business. One trader, a woman who also had worked for Addax Bioenergy previously, explained that she also tried to start working as petty trader when she lost her job. But she had to take a lot of money from her business to pay school fees and to pay for the housing. Thus, she did not had enough money anymore to go back to Makeni to buy new things to renew the stock of her business. Quiet destitute she sat on the remaining commodities bought from her last salary without any prospect to continue this kind of business or to escape this situation.

### **Other Strategies to Create a Monetary Income**

Other forms to create a monetary income besides wage employment were renting of houses or rooms to people who came to live in Mabilafu in search of employment. Various people told me that they were paying high rents to be allowed to live in one of the houses in Mabilafu. The idea of asking money to host somebody was relatively new in Mabilafu as I learned from informants. With the construction of new roads market centers were easier accessible and I could observe that people also prepared wood to be brought to Makeni. As mentioned in section 6.2 people also told me that some villagers earned money as prostitutes.

### **Summary**

It can be summarized that people engaged in the informal economy due to a lack of formal wage employment possibilities or to cope with the unsecure working conditions of formal employment. Some villagers were able to develop strategies to earn a living with their engagement in the informal economy. Others were able to combine their formal employment with informal economic activities to cope relatively well with the precarious working conditions. Therewith, they could develop new strategies of earning a living. However, others struggled to make ends meet with their engagement in the informal economy or when they lost their jobs.

With the creation of formal employment and the provision of new infrastructure (e.g. new roads) the company also fostered the development of the informal economy. Laborers were able to buy goods sold in the informal economy, money earned as wage laborer was used to establish a business within the informal economy, etc. On the other hand, the informal economy subsidized the formal economy. With its function to provide social security to laborers not provided by the formal employment (i.e. taking care of workers that were temporary or permanently excluded from formal employment) the informal economy helped

to maintain a pool of potential laborers, a reserve army of labor. Further, by providing cheap goods and services to people who currently worked in the formal economy, it even subsidized the maintenance of current worker that could live relatively cheap and thus did not had to earn much money to survive (see 2.4). Even though, some informal economic activities were financed by money earned in the formal production, most efforts to provide strategies to cope with the precarious working conditions were achieved outside the formal capitalist production (i.e. in the informal economy or subsistence production).

## 6.7 Perceptions of Possibilities to Deal with the New Situations

Even though most villagers complained bitterly about the Addax Bioenergy Project when I talked with them, they were very timid when they directly interacted with staff of Addax Bioenergy or its contractors. The town head explained that they would have no power opposite the company. I observed that the notion of “being powerless against the company” was common in the village. However, I witnessed situations in which people in Mabilafu actively formulated and enforced claims against the company and I was told that the secret society even took violent actions against a staff member of Addax Bioenergy once. Besides such spectacular open confrontations, villagers applied a range of indirect strategies to deal with this new situation.

Following, I describe an illustrative example that pictures the feeling of powerlessness of villagers against the company. Then I recount an instance in which people reacted violently on behavior of a staff member of Addax Bioenergy before I describe non-violent strategies villagers applied to interact with the company and its contractors. Finally, I analyze some indirect strategies people applied to deal with the new situation.

### Feeling of Powerlessness

An incident right in the beginning of my research stay illustrates how villagers acted when they interacted with people of the company and it characterizes their feeling of powerlessness. In the morning of my second day in Mabilafu a white shiny pickup of Addax Bioenergy approached the school where I lived. After a moment, the heads of the land-owning families arrived and entered the school office together with the Addax Bioenergy staff. The school office was a small and gloomy room that rather resembled a crowded junk room. One of the staff placed himself behind the head teacher’s desk. While I was offered one of the few seats, most of the people from Mabilafu, eight in total, sat on bags or leant against the wall. Then the staff behind the desk started to talk to the villagers and he handed out money to the town head and the two heads of the Kanu family. With a thumbprint they had to confirm to have received the money. The other Addax Bioenergy staff came to sit close to me and explained that this money was paid as acknowledgement for attending a meeting some days ago. After that, further compensation payments were handed out. The staff who sat close to me explained that these payments compensate the landowners for destroyed economic trees, who had to be removed for the construction of a power line. With narrow eyes the staff behind the desk studied leisurely some papers and handed out money and checks to the landowners

who were waiting silently, I would nearly say submissive. One after the other had to sign a document either with a thumbprint or by signing. The staff who handed out the money showed the landowners where they had to sign or just took their thumb harshly, to press it in the right place. Additionally, a picture was taken, to proof that the landowners received the money – if they would forget it – as the staff close to me explained. During the whole time the landowners and the town head seemed quiet timid. Just when they were asked something by the staff they answered quietly. When the compensation payments were handed out, the staff bundled his papers and they went back to the car. Leaving behind a cloud of dust and some still fuming cigarette ends, they had disappeared as quickly as they appeared.

After the Social Management Team had gone we went to the teacher's house and immediately the landowners started to complain that Addax Bioenergy is exploiting them, that they only get very low compensation payments for economic trees. One landowners stated that "*Addax is misusing the people like tools*" and that other villages get more money than Mabilafu, even though the factory is currently being built on the land of Mabilafu.

Some days later I told the town head that I had been surprised during the meeting with Addax Bioenergy because he had told me so many complaints about the Addax Bioenergy Project but now when people from the company came to visit Mabilafu he did not raise his voice or even complain a little bit. After a moment of reflection he stated something that was translated by the head teacher with the following words: "*If someone is stronger than you, you leave it to the Almighty. The Almighty will know who is right*".

Also when the elders delivered the job-list (see 6.5) they behaved very timid and submissive. By the end of my research period I witnessed another meeting with Addax Bioenergy. Stakeholders from several villages had been invited for a Cluster Village Liaison Committee Meeting in a nearby village. In this meeting Addax Bioenergy distributed some information and reported about the advancement of the project implementation and problems. Again in this meeting no critical voice was raised, although there were also people from Mabilafu who previously complained bitterly about the Addax Bioenergy Project. To the contrary: By the end of the meeting a group of stakeholders started to chant the slogan "*long live Addax*" to which many joined in.

This descriptions reveal that in direct interactions with Addax Bioenergy the villagers had difficulties to express their dissatisfaction with the project they propounded lengthy when I was taking with them. The implementation of the project brought new discourses and therewith new ways of framing, describing and evaluation phenomena (see 2.2 and 5.2). These new manner of interacting with other persons, talking about land rights or making complaints made it difficult for villagers – even the most powerful villagers – to deal with the company that came to their village.

Also the next incident reveals these difficulties of project affected people to find adequate means to interact with the company. Lacking adequate means to act in the new situation,

people drew on “traditional” customary practices, even though they appear out of place in this new situation.

### **The Application of “Traditional” Structures**

According to stories, recounted by different informants, previously to my research workers of a contractor had organized a strike to express their dissatisfaction with the low salaries. Therefore, the gate to the factory area was blocked with a Poro-stick to indicate that nobody was allowed to enter the gate. The Poro-stick was a sign of the same named secret society and it was used frequently to indicate taboos within the village. Such a stick could only be removed by specific persons (see 5.4). Knowing these rules the workers did not dare to enter to the factory compound. But a South African supervisor who worked for Addax Bioenergy, came and pushed down the Poro-stick so that the workers could enter the factory. Therewith he offended the strict laws of the Poro and thus he was kidnapped later by the secret society. To be released five bags of rice and an unknown amount of money had to be paid. No formal legal actions were taken against that by the South African supervisor nor the company but in turn the people had to promise to never again put a Poro-stick on land that belongs to the company.

This incident indicates that the drawing on “traditional” structures had been partially successful, at least once. The taboo of the secret society had banned the workers entering to the factory compound and the offender had been punished. But the people had to promise to waive using this strategy in the future. Thus, the secret society lost its power to be applied against the company again. Besides this spectacular but unique violent action against a staff of the company, I observed that villagers applied a set of non-violent strategies to enforce getting what they wanted when they directly interacted with the company – even though they perceived themselves to be powerless.

### **Enforced Claim for the Construction of a Bridge by Addax Bioenergy**

Between the village and the factory a stream flows that enters the Rokel River. During the rainy season this stream rises and crossing becomes difficult. The villager had constructed a bridge over this stream because the children from Rotunka, a neighboring village, had to cross this stream to go to school. During the last rainy season this bridge had collapsed. Villagers blamed the increased use by workers for that adversary. Thus, they claimed that Addax Bioenergy should build a new bridge for them. After the head teacher had written many letters of complaint, Addax Bioenergy agreed to help them to construct a new bridge. For the construction of the bridge a delegation of workers from Addax Bioenergy and people from the village worked together. Addax Bioenergy provided some cement, old poles, planks and bolts. Further construction material was taken from surrounding bushes. However, some days later, the town head told me that he was very unsatisfied with the bridge constructed by Addax Bioenergy. He said it would be located at a wrong place and only cheap second-hand material was used instead of new one. Thus, the head teacher wrote again a letter to the Social Manager of Addax Bioenergy to complain that the bridge had not been built to their satisfaction.

On the one hand, this incident shows that villagers were able to enforce their claim – at least partially. But on the other hand, it shows that a great effort was put on enforcing it, instead of constructing the bridge on their own account. Especially during the focus group discussion I learned that it was common to try to acquire help in order to receive something instead of trying to provide it self-reliant. This notion can be explained by the high presence of development organizations in Mabilafu that repeatedly provide material support (see 5.7).

Another illustrative case was the job-list whereby elders tried to enforce to be appointed to allocate the highly sought after jobs (see 6.5). In both cases the villagers had contact persons to which they could send letters or which they could call. Similarly to the incident with the bridge, the company made some concessions for the job-list, but finally the claims were not met to the satisfaction of the demander.

Besides such forms of open resistance people from the village also applied indirect forms to interact with the company and strategies to deal with this new situation. Such actions are described following.

### **Strategies to Interact Indirectly with the Company and the New Situation**

Even though people claimed to be powerless and the widespread notion that others have to help to achieve various things, I observed that people applied different strategies to deal with the company and the changes brought by the Addax Bioenergy Project. Besides open resistance people also applied a wide range strategies to interact with the company and to deal with its impacts. Besides the job-list of the elders, villagers tried other ways to find employment (see 6.5). Others engaged in the informal economy and sold food to workers, engaged in trading or rented rooms to strangers. All these activities can be seen as strategies people applied to deal with this new situation created by the company.

Further, a great problem for the company was stealing. In the above mentioned Cluster Village Liaison Committee Meeting a representative of Addax Bioenergy told that so far property of Addax Bioenergy worth 300'000 EUR had been stolen. Alone in August 2013 material worth 40'000 EUR had been missed and he added that “*whosoever steals from Addax offends the president*” who is in favor of this project. Even though the town head explained that people from Mabilafu would not steal, I discovered that villagers sold and possessed things that must have had been stolen from Addax Bioenergy (e.g. cement that was sold cheaper in Mabilafu than in Makeni). Too, I heard that people who work as security would accept their low salaries with the prospect to increase these salaries by stealing things from the company (see 6.5). Stealing can be seen as strategy to indirectly deal with the company by applying it as *weapon of the weaks* as described by Scott (see 2.7). The particular stealing of company's property can be done with a relatively low risk of being caught and punished but in total it causes a great damage to Addax Bioenergy.

Another strategy of villagers to try to enforce their claims was to play the game of the various NGOs. When representatives of NGOs visited the village – some only for few hours – people

made fierce complains against the company with the hope that the NGO launch a campaign against the company and therewith forces the company to do more for the villagers.

### **Summary**

This chapter has shown that villagers are not totally powerless. Strategies of direct confrontation – also violent confrontation – were applied. Besides open confrontation people also applied various strategies to deal with the company and its impacts indirectly. However, many strategies applied to deal with the company and its impacts were not or just partially successful. Thus, the notion to be powerless against the company and to be helpless in this new situation is not without reason.

## 7. Conclusion

In 2010 Addax Bioenergy has leased 57'000 hectares land in Sierra Leone for a designated period of 50 years to produce sugar cane based agro-fuel to be sold mainly on the European market. Such acquisitions of large areas of land – so called large-scale land acquisitions (LSLA) – are a relatively new phenomenon that became a topic of academic and public interest by the end of the first decade of this millennium. The food, finance and fuel crisis, starting in 2005, led to rising prices for agricultural commodities, making investments in the agricultural sector more profitable. Furthermore, countries where such land-deals take place increasingly endeavor to attract large-scale land investments as part of their neoliberal development policies, promoted by the World Bank and others. Along with attractive prices for land and labor in these countries, an auspicious environment for agricultural FDI – such as the Addax Bioenergy Project in Sierra Leone – has been created (see 2.1).

LSLA have great impacts where they are implemented and new agricultural projects are launched. Land and associated resources, often previously used by local inhabitants, are acquired for new modes of production, generally including extensive one-crop, market-oriented agriculture and wage based working relations. However, local impacts depend not only on the performance of the investing company but also on the local context, that influences how impacts affect local people.

To understand how LSLA-projects are implemented and how they affect local people, knowledge on concrete projects and their local impacts from an affected people's perspective is indispensable. Despite an increasing output of academic literature about LSLA, such data remain rare so far (see chapter 2). Therefore, as described in the third chapter, we – a group of master students at the University of Berne – aimed at addressing this research-gap by producing ethnographies of such land-deals based on in-depth qualitative research. We analyzed three selected LSLA-projects in different counties. From a vertical perspective, we aimed at reconstructing the implementation of particular land-deals of which we evaluated impacts on different local project affected people on the horizontal level of our approach. For the analysis of the Addax Bioenergy Project in Sierra Leone, one student focused on the vertical perspective and two students evaluated – each independently in one selected village – how impacts affected people there and how they perceive changes brought by the LSLA and reacted thereon. As piece of the horizontal level approach, my master thesis focuses on impacts and reactions in an affected village named Mabilafu.

To discuss the empirical findings of my master thesis, I briefly summarize some aspects of the theoretical debate on LSLA in the next section. Then, I analyze local impacts of the LSLA-project in Mabilafu, the perception of these impacts and strategies to deal therewith – all from a local people's perspective. Emerging from this discussion, I critically analyze the performance of the Addax Bioenergy Project. Last but not least, I point out which aspects of LSLA are to be considered to analyze local impacts adequately and I venture to add some arguments to the debate on whether and why LSLA are an opportunity or rather a threat for development.

## 7.1 Theoretical Debate on Large-Scale Land Acquisition

Depending on the authors' perspectives, different aspects of LSLA are highlighted but it is generally agreed that LSLA greatly affect the local context where land is acquired. However, different views exist, whether local impacts benefit or harm affected people. Authors with a neoliberal development perspective designate foreign direct agricultural investments as long awaited opportunity to modernize the underdeveloped agricultural sector in target countries: It is assumed that such a modernization – if managed well – finally leads to broader economic development in these countries and thereby poverty and food insecurity will be alleviated. However, the underlying assumptions of this theory are challenged in the academic debate on development for decades: More generally, dependency theorists criticize that the cause for underdevelopment is not to be found in lagging development but rather in the dependency of these underdeveloped countries, which is enlarged and worsened by LSLA. Furthermore, from a Marxist and Neo-Marxist perspective, it is argued that the transformation of non-capitalist modes of production into capitalist ones – as promoted by the neoliberal development perspective – leads to primitive accumulation and exploitation of the local population. Thus, from these perspectives, LSLA are perceived as being as exploitative and exclusive as were colonial practices. Moreover, from a human-rights based development perspective it is criticized that LSLA suppress small-scale farmers. Representatives of this perspective highlight that the promotion of small-scale farming would have better and more equitable poverty- and food-insecurity reducing impacts than the large-scale land-use type promoted by neoliberal development theorists. Especially the plantation of crops to produce agro-fuel instead of food is criticized harshly by some adherents of the human-rights based development perspective (see 2.3).

However, as further revealed in the second chapter, analysis with the above mentioned perspectives often pay insufficient attention to the local context where LSLA are implemented. Additionally to the way of how such LSLA-projects are implemented, the local context, on which they impinge on, heavily influences how impacts affect different people. Regarding the local context, rules and regulations, so called institutions, that govern access to land and associated resources are crucial. These institutions define how access to means of production and wealth is distributed. By their nature LSLA affect access to land and associated resources and alter local institutional settings. Thus, scrutinizing these institutional settings is crucial to analyze local impacts but not sufficient, as will be shown later.

As described in section 2.5, institutions that govern access to land and associated resources can be organized as private property, common property or state property. Formal institutions are developed and backed by the state and informal or so-called customary institutions are developed by local communities over time and embedded in their culture. In sub-Saharan Africa land and property rights that regulate access to land and associated resources are often informal and stem from different sources, embedded in different legal systems. According to Peters (2009) and Toulmin (2008) this leads to legal pluralism and overlapping claims. Even though this situation causes contradictions and insecurities, the formalization of land and

property rights also bears the risk of suppressing secondary-rights holders, fragmenting interlinked flexible settings that allowed reacting on ecological and social changes, etc. However, Ostrom (1990) has shown that locally organized common use can be effective and sustainable as well – if certain criteria of robust common pool resource (CPR) institutions apply.<sup>91</sup> According to her, CPR-institutions are in some contexts better adapted than formalized private property institutions or state regulations. However, group membership – that has to be clearly defined for robust CPR institutions – are, beyond her analysis, socially constructed and highly politicized and boundaries of resources are seldom as clear as assumed by Ostrom. Additionally, as described by Ensminger's model for institutional change, institutions that govern access to land and associated resources are a dynamic and contested social construct, influenced by bargaining power, legitimatization and organization. In turn, this interplay is affected by external factors that influence relative prices. Thus, institutional settings are not necessarily rules and regulations that benefit people equally, nor those that are best adapted to the local context (1992). Nevertheless, most of these institutions are better adapted to the local social and ecological environment than other institutions, such as national or international laws for example. LSLA have a great potential to transform previous institutional settings by altering relative prices and internal aspects of these settings, leading to changes in property right regimes for example. Thereby, as described by Locher and Müller-Böcker (n.d.), unequal power relations are usually in favor of the investing company, which has the most bargaining power to alter institutions, legitimatization and organization. Finally yet importantly, the local setting puts local people in different positions vested with different possibilities to deal with changes brought by LSLA, but this local setting and people's position therein is also altered by LSLA (see 2.2, 2.5 and 2.6).

However, changes brought by LSLA are not limited to access to land and associated resources. The payment of rents for land or the creation of wage employment needs to be considered as well to understand how LSLA affect different local people. As shown by Baird (2011), for the latter, the Marxist approach is beneficial. Accordingly, the appropriation of land and associated resources leads to the separation of previous users from their means of production. Thereby, these previous users become proletarians but due to insufficient employment possibilities, a reserve army of laborers emerges. This in turn, enables exploitation of labors by the new capitalist production. Thereby, maintained subsistence production and informal economic activities subsidize the capitalist production by producing and maintaining a pool of available labor forces and absorbing dismissed laborers (see 2.4).

Finally, as shown in section 2.7, it is important to note that people are not powerless subjects to changes brought by LSLA but perform resistance. Such resistance can range from open violent confrontations to hidden forms of everyday resistance – if open confrontation is not possible (cf. Scott 1985).

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<sup>91</sup> As described in section 2.5, this was denied by Hardin (1968) and is still neglected by proponents of neoliberal development theories, calling for formalizations and privatizations of land-rights in these countries (cf. De Soto 2000).

In sum, it can be stated that impacts of LSLA and the local context influence each other. Impacts are affected by the local context and people are put in different positions to deal therewith. However, this local context is affected and changed by LSLA as well.

This brief summary of the theoretical debate on LSLA has shown that analyzing local impacts of a concrete LSLA project requires not only consolidated knowledge about impacts of LSLA, but an in-depth understanding of to the local context on which impacts impinge on is indispensable as well.

In order to understand how the Addax Bioenergy Project affects different people in Mabilafu, I studied impacts of the project from a local people's perspective. Thus, I put the affected people at the center of my analysis to scrutinize which impacts the project had and how these impacts were affected by the local context. Therefore, as highlighted above, I also had to consider institutions that govern access to land and associated resources and how these institutions were affected by the LSLA project. Furthermore, I paid much heed to the organization of access to the newly created wage employment and working conditions – created by the construction of the nearby company's agro-fuel processing factory – as this was of great importance in the village under investigation at the time of my research. Additionally I inquired whether, who and how people perform resistance to changes caused by the project.

## **7.2 The Addax Bioenergy Project and its Local Context**

Before I discuss my findings, I quickly resume some basic information about the project and the local context in which this LSLA is located.

### **The Addax Bioenergy Project**

The Addax Bioenergy Project in Sierra Leone is praised by various international organizations as best practice example for sustainable agro-fuel investment models in Africa. Addax Bioenergy is a Swiss based company, funded by the Addax & Oryx Group (AOG) and diverse development finance institutions. In 2010, the company has leased 57'000 hectares land in Northern Sierra Leone for a designated period of 50 years. Roughly one fifth thereof is used for irrigated sugarcane plantations, the construction of infrastructure and the maintenance of ecological corridors. The remaining land could still be used by local inhabitants. The land-lease agreement has been made with central government authorities and the paramount chiefs. Accordingly, Addax Bioenergy pays an annual rent for the leased land. This money is shared between traditional landowners (50%), paramount chiefs (20%), district officers (20%) and the central government (10%).

Addax Bioenergy praises itself for their efforts to have considered the local people as well when implementing their project. They emphasize to have planned the project implementation carefully to avoid physical displacement of local residents, to avoid or mitigate other potential negative impacts and to enhance positive ones. Further, they point out to have – beyond legal requirements in Sierra Leone – decided to obtain the consent of

landowners before using their land and granting them, additionally to the land-lease, an acknowledgement payment. Destroyed assets, such as crops or economic trees, were compensated with a one off payment. Potential negative local impacts were assumed to be also mitigated by positive impacts, such as an enhanced accessibility of the villages by the construction of new roads, the creation of wage employment and the launched FDP, a modernization theory based agricultural development program (see 4.2).

### **Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone – the host country of the Addax Bioenergy Project – endeavors to attract such projects as part of their neoliberal development goals pursued since the end of the devastating civil war. These efforts are supported by the World Bank and other neoliberal development agencies.

Moreover, the country pursues a fast tracking decentralization program. Central government functions are devolved to newly developed locally elected authorities. Despite these recently implemented decentralized governmental institutions, chieftaincy – the “traditional” local political organization – remains powerful in rural areas. This leads to an overlapping administrative setting with conflicting responsibilities emerging. For example, control over land that is guided by so-called customary law in rural areas remains in the hands of “traditional” leaders (paramount chiefs and land-owning families), but these organizations are increasingly controlled by decentralized central-government-obedient institutions.

Sierra Leone has two major political parties – each representing one of the two largest ethnic groups in the country. Their harsh antagonism can be explained by the virulent struggle for supremacy since the end of the colonial era (see 4.1).

### **Mabilafu**

Mabilafu – the village in which I conducted my research – is located within the Addax Bioenergy’s project area, close to the company’s agro-fuel processing factory. As described in the fifth chapter, at the time of my research, the village encompassed roughly 140 houses with a total population of approximately thousand people. Most villagers described themselves as Temne, one of the two largest ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. According to the household-survey conducted during my research, nearly 45% of the people who lived in Mabilafu had moved there during their lifetime. Out of them, 40% – mostly women – came to marry and 39% – mostly men – came to find a job in the last years. About 43% of the villagers were peasants, 23% worked as traders and another 17% were currently employment by Addax or one of its contractors. A considerable shift of immigration patterns and economic activities can be observed since the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project.

Contrary to Addax’s descriptions of the landscape as degraded and underused, the local perspective on it has shown that the different patches of the landscape and ecosystems are used within a complex interlinked locally administered, mainly subsistence oriented food system (see 5.2). Prior to the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project, people depend mostly on subsistence-oriented shifting cultivation. Besides seasonal shifting cultivation, access to other

land-related resources, such as palm trees for example, was of great importance within this complex interlinked subsistence oriented food system. These land-related resources enabled the people to enhance their resilience. However, this local food system had been debilitated for a long time, as accounts of former food-crisis indicate.

Access to land and associated resources is – as in most rural areas in Sierra Leone – administered by customary institutions. Four landowning families own the land and associated resources in Mabilafu. This tenure is legitimized by reference to patrilineal inheritance from first-settlers. As described in section 2.6, according to Toulmin (2008) this is a common source for rights to land in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the landowning families have no exclusive rights over their land. Landusers – people who do not own land because they came to Mabilafu later – can request access to land and other land-related resources. Such a request can nearly not be denied as landowners and generally, people who have something others need, are obliged to share. Thus, this obligation legitimates landusers' claims to access land and associated resources. Meanwhile landowners can enhance their reputation as responsible rich people who take care of others who become associated with them thereby. Even though the landowners have clearly a higher social position and more bargaining power within this local setting, landusers are not powerless and have a legitimate right to use land and associated resources. To administer access to these resources, the landowners as custodian of the land and other land-related resources can draw largely on an underlying religious structure and, rules and regulations of the secret society, implemented with specific symbols (e.g. access to specific resources can be prohibited by the use of symbols from the secret society). Overall, there is no or only very limited control by the state nor does this institutional setting bear similarities with private property institutions as rights over land and associated resources are not exclusive in practice.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, the locally administered customary institution that is embedded in the larger institutional context prevents an open access situation. Therewith, the organization of access to land and land-related resources resembles CPR institutions as described by Ostrom (1990), even though not all of the eight design principles for robust CPR institutions apply. Thus, this local institutional setting enables – as it is common in sub-Saharan Africa – not only owners, but also so called secondary right holders, to access land and associated resources. This leads to a more equitable distribution of benefits from using land and other land-related resources within the community. However, as can be assumed considering Ensminger's (1992) analysis of institutions and institutional transformation and as will be shown later, this institutional setting was and is not immune to change.

Decisions that affected the whole community are taken by a council of elders whereby membership depends on descent and on personal competences (i.e. most elders were heads of the landowning families but also people who moved to Mabilafu during their lifetime could become elders). Furthermore, as mentioned above, monotheist religions, animism and the

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<sup>92</sup> Even though the terms used to describe this institutional setting in English refer to private property settings, the obligation to share property voids the exclusivity of owning something.

secret societies play an important role as underlying structure, symbols and legitimatization of the political organization and the administration of access to land and associated resources.

Even though prior to the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project Mabilafu was quite remote, it was not completely isolated. People moved to other parts of the country and back, the recent civil war affected the village as well and – especially since the end of the civil war – governmental and international organizations imposed their aid and development projects in the village. All this has caused constant changes in the institutional setting. However, according to elders in the village, the implementation of the Addax Bioenergy Project brought the profoundest changes so far.

### 7.3 Local Perspectives on the Addax Bioenergy Project and it's Local Impacts

Addax Bioenergy acquired roughly 20% of Mabilafu's land within the project area, mainly for the construction of the agro-fuel processing factory and associated infrastructure. The construction of the factory provided some formal employment and besides this, the informal economy evolved greatly.

When the Addax Project was introduced to the people in Mabilafu, they were "*very happy*" because they expected this project to provide long awaited "development". Villagers anticipated that the company would build new houses, roads, water-wells, latrines, etc. for them. But above all, they expected this project to generate good permanent wage employment to relieve them from the hardship of subsistence farming and poverty.<sup>93</sup> Anticipating all these good things to happen, unable to effectively participate in the new discourse on land, implemented by the company with the use of GIS based maps and written contracts and convinced by the President's endorsement of the project, the villagers in charge agreed to the proposed land acquisition and even waived their claims in a long lasting land dispute with a neighboring village in order not to endanger the project's progress (see 6.1).

However, when the project came to be implemented things turned out to differ from villagers' expectations. The awaited construction of houses, schools, water-wells etc. did not occur and formal wage employment was below expectation. The company claimed to have never promised the provision of such constructions nor employment as anticipated by the villagers. Nevertheless, villagers claimed to have been promised all these things – especially access to wage employment – during initial meetings. Further, they legitimized these claims with reference to their great support of the project (e.g. waiving claims in a land dispute) and noted that the company would be able and thus obliged to provide the things claimed – similarly to the customary obligation to share. Furthermore, in the village the notion that "development" could only be achieved by help from outside was widespread since people were used to organizations that came to Mabilafu to provide such help (e.g. food distribution, construction of the school etc.). Moreover, villagers who were able to attract such "development" gained

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<sup>93</sup> This anticipated development resembles the description of development in neoliberal development theories, focusing on economic changes mainly (see 2.3).

prestige and therewith higher social positions. This motivated them additionally to seek support from Addax (see 5.7 and 6.1).

Roughly summarized, initially people were enthusiastic about the proposed project and agreed to the acquisition of one fifth of the village land, assuming that the LSLA project would lead to “development”. However, the company did not provide this type of “development”, stressing that they never promised what the villagers anticipated to occur.

### **Access to Land and Other Land-related Resources**

At the time of my research, about three years after the implementation of the project, people in Mabilafu perceived the land acquisition not as being problematic regarding the subsistence oriented shifting cultivation itself. They felt that still enough land was available for this activity and only time will tell whether this perception holds good. However, some villagers observed effects of the land acquisition on access to other land-related resources (e.g. palm trees). These resources are an important source to enhance the resilience of the local food system, and impacts thereupon were perceived as though, especially because the expected development (i.e. the provision of wage employment) not occurred as anticipated. Furthermore, compensations were paid to the owner (usually landowners) of such resources solely and not to everybody who could use them previously. In addition, compensations for destroyed trees were only paid if trees had already reached a certain height at the time of recording. But overall, a steady resource that importantly enhanced the people’s resilience permanently within the local food system was compensated with a one-off payment only. Similarly, the periodic land lease and acknowledgment was paid to the landowners solely, as if they would have been the exclusive beneficiaries of the land previously. The landusers who also benefited from the use of the land and other land-related resources prior to their acquisition, and therewith experienced losses as well, did not receive direct compensations from the company for their losses.

Regarding the institutional setting governing access to land and associated resources in Mabilafu, the above described compensation scheme triggered significant transformations. Even though the structure of the institution has not been changed (landowners were still entitled to govern access to land and were asked to approve the proposed land acquisition of the company),<sup>94</sup> the effects thereof changed profoundly. Previously, land and land-related resources were used commonly. Thus, the institutional setting resembled a CPR-institution (see 5.6). With the appropriation of land and destruction of associated resources by the company and compensations therefore paid solely to the owners, they become the exclusive local beneficiaries. Thus, where land is acquired and resources are destroyed, the institutional

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<sup>94</sup> The landowners were asked to approve the proposed land acquisition but their approval cannot be considered as free nor prior informed since they were unable to estimate the range of this agreement and their approval based on wrong expectations: Unable to effectively participate in the new discourses on land, based on GIS maps and written contracts, convinced by predicted development and the endorsement of the project by higher authorities, they saw neither a reason nor a possibility to reject or adjust the proposition of the company. Later on, they faced great difficulties to claim changes regarding the performance of the company or the agreement itself.

setting becomes a private-property institution with exclusive benefits for local owners. Thereby, hitherto legitimate users – so called secondary right holders – can no longer access appropriated land nor use associated resources but do neither receive direct compensations for these losses. Thus, besides the often-mentioned problem of the small amount paid as compensation, lease and acknowledgment, this compensation scheme neglects user-rights of secondary right holders. Thereby, the bargaining power of landusers diminishes. While they had a legitimate right to use land and other land-related resources, this right can no longer be claimed if land or in this case mainly land-related resources are no longer available. This indicates that the institutional setting respectively its effects are changed by external aspects that interplay with internal parts as described by Ensminger (1992). Further, as Peters (2009) and Toulmin (2008) describe generally in the context of customary land rights in sub-Saharan Africa, if contested and overlapping land-rights are formalized and privatized, this transformation bears a great risk of bypassing secondary right holders who lose former possibilities to use certain resources that had been an important part of their food-system. However, it needs to be added here that the compensations paid to the owner, especially the lease and acknowledgment payments, were so small that also the landowners had no real benefit therefrom. Thus, the topic of wage employment, scrutinized in the next section, becomes even more important.

Before addressing the issue of wage employment, access to land and associated resources needs to be discussed from a Marxist perspective as well. Therefrom, the impacts on access to land and associated resources, caused by the Addax Bioenergy Project, can be described as primitive accumulation, similar to other LSLA (cf. Baird 2011, Peters 2013). As described above, the company has acquired land and associated resources for their capitalist production hitherto used for subsistence-oriented activities. Even though not all land of Mabilafu has been acquired and incorporated into the capitalist production and some villagers remained engaged in subsistence farming, access to important means of production (especially land-related resources such as palm trees) has been reduced. Thereby, the diversified, complexly interlinked, already vulnerable subsistence oriented food system has been further undermined. Nevertheless, initially, people welcomed the project with its land acquisition, awaiting proposed wage employment to release them from the hardship of subsistence farming and poverty. Thus, people were actually in favor of a transformation to proletarians, accepting primitive accumulation (see 6.1).<sup>95</sup>

However, additionally to the Marxist analysis, described in section 2.4, two further points need to be considered for the analysis of the land acquisition from this perspective: First, as noted above, not all people are affected equally by the acquisition of land and land-related resources for the capitalist production (i.e. by primitive accumulation). The landowners were consulted and received small compensations for lost access to land and associated resources

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<sup>95</sup> Unlike other LSLA (e.g. the case described by Baird), the state did not expropriate the villagers from their means of production. The investing company made contracts with the landowners and had its own means to prevent access to parts of the acquired land. Nevertheless, the state, respectively the president played an important role to legitimize the land acquisition and its enforcement.

while the landusers were neither consulted nor compensated. Moreover, the compensation scheme and local structures put local people in different positions to deal with the new situation (e.g. to impinge on the allocation of wage employment). Consequently, if something like a proletarian class emerges from this primitive accumulation, it should not be conceived as homogenous (more about that in the next section). Second, Marxist theories focus mainly on tenure, but, as shown above, people who not own, but are entitled to use means of production (in this case land and associated resources) also experience losses if these means are appropriated by new the form of capitalist production. Moreover, as pointed out with the term “control grabbing” by Borras et al. (2012), the appropriation of these means of production does not necessarily include the transfer of property- but rather user rights.<sup>96</sup> Thus, not only owners of means of production, appropriated by primitive accumulation, are dispossessed but also entitled users who do not own them. Furthermore, appropriating land and associated resources does rather entail the appropriation of control over these resources than the possession thereof. Accordingly, analysis of primitive accumulation should consider control over access to means of production rather than property situation.

### **Potential of the FDP to Enhance Food Security**

Besides access to land and associated resources and direct compensations, the Addax Bioenergy Project encompassed, as described above, further aspects that are important in order to analyze local impacts of the LSLA project. One of them is the FDP. The goal of this program was to boost local food production and to modernize the backward subsistence based agriculture in Mabilafu (see 6.4). However, this modernization theory based development program was not able to cope with the local conditions in the village in which I conducted my research. Mutual obligations between the provider and the beneficiaries of this program could not have been made clear by the company. People in Mabilafu believed that Addax produces food for them rather than just providing some help to do so – as envisaged by the company. Further, the FDP could not be implemented on village land because Mabilafu had no bolilands, the only suitable land therefor. Thus, the community had to “beg” access to suitable land of other communities in their vicinity. This caused further problems and a dispute between the villagers and a contractor, hired to plough and harrow the fields, delayed the seeding. All this was assumed to cause low yields in the year in which I conducted my research. However, already previous yields of the FDP did not meet the expectations of the villagers. Furthermore, the rice produced by the FDP was not distributed within the village as anticipated by the company since this has been affected by the local context. In sum the FDP in Mabilafu failed and could not contribute to an enhanced and resilient local food production that would provide a reliable source of food for the project affected people.

### **Access to Wage Employment, Working Conditions and Informal Economic Activities**

The implementation of the Addax Bioenergy Project importantly affected access to land and associated resources, the basis of the hitherto small-scale subsistence oriented food system.

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<sup>96</sup> To illustrate: Addax for example did not buy the land but just leased it for 50 years. Thus it remains the property of the landowners, even though it is controlled by the company.

As described in the last section, direct compensation, lease and acknowledgement payments and the implemented FDP could not adequately compensate the negative impacts on access to land and other land-related resources caused by the project-implementation.

However, in Mabilafu the most important and most keenly awaited impact of the Addax Bioenergy Project was the creation of wage employment. As described above, people had welcomed the project and agreed to the acquisition of land, assuming that new wage employment would help them to overcome the hardship of subsistence farming and poverty. Many villager told me that the project gained their goodwill especially because they expected to be provided wage employment. The town head even argued that a better provision of jobs for the villagers would compensate for all the other unfulfilled expectations and losses caused by the company's operations. Thus, arguing with Marxist terms, people were actually in favor of a transformation to proletarians, accepting primitive accumulation therefore.

But, as described in section 6.5, the project did not create enough nor good jobs to compensate for the losses villagers experienced with the land acquisition in Mabilafu. Moreover, people from other parts of the country were attracted by the created wage employment, attempting to get a job as well. The large amount of people seeking employment led to a fierce struggle over allocating and getting the sparsely available jobs. Depending on perceived possibilities, people tried different strategies within this struggle.

Elders claimed on behalf of the landowners that only people that were born in the village should be employed by Addax Bioenergy and its contractors as Mabilafu provided the land to host the factory. Together with further legitimatizations,<sup>97</sup> elders claimed to be given the right to appoint the people that should be employed as help-workers. Addax agreed on this claim in order to foster that the newly created jobs benefit the local people – one of their targets to foster positive local impacts. Therewith, regarding Barth's (1969) concept of ethnic groups the emphasis of place of birth became a socially relevant factor to differentiate social groups and to exclude people from accessing desired resources (i.e. access to wage employment, see 2.5 and 6.5). Moreover, the landowning elders hoped to maintain their social position in the village with the allocation jobs. Previously to the arrival of Addax, landowners gained prestige by allocating land and other land-related resources for subsistence farming. However, since the creation of jobs, access to wage employment became, for the above-mentioned reasons, more sought after than access to land for subsistence-oriented farming. Thus, landowners tried to transform their basis for prestige from allocating land to allocating jobs. Although, in practice their strategy to allocate jobs was only marginally successful. In fact, only few people had been employed through appointment by landowning elders because their right to exclusively appoint people being employed was often ignored (see 6.5). Thus, most people, especially people who were not born in Mabilafu, applied other strategies to seek employment. The head teacher for example could appoint people to be engaged from time to time since a friend of him with good relations to personnel managers could impinge on intakes. Others had friends who were already working for one of the companies and thus could

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<sup>97</sup> For a detailed account see 6.5.

help their friends to be employed as well. Some waited at the factory gate where people were employed spontaneously sometimes and – according to rumors – personnel managers also took bribes to assign jobs.

Additionally to the unexpected difficulties to be employed, also working conditions did not meet the expectation of the villagers to be released from their hardship of poverty and subsistence farming therewith. Workers complained that salaries were too small and the obligation to share earned money with relatives that depended on the workers' income further diminished the money they had at their disposal. Moreover, it was criticized that people would be treated bad by the companies and – probably the fiercest critics – that they would only be employed for short periods. Generally employed on a daily basis, people were often dismissed when mandates finished or they lost their job if they became sick or had an accident. During my research, laborers were dismissed regularly and one contractor even laid off nearly its whole workforce to re-employ them with lower salaries a few days later (see 6.5). These unsecure working conditions made it difficult for workers to sustain themselves and their families from wage employment solely as they could not count on earning a steady salary once they were employed.

To cope with these precarious working conditions, people had to develop alternative strategies. Some continued with small-scale subsistence oriented food production besides their formal employment. Others engaged in small informal economic activities to rely on if they lose their job. Thus, besides the formal employment, small-scale subsistence oriented food production remained important and an informal economy emerged. Women used to prepare lunch, sold to the laborers in small huts close to the factory compound. Others earned money from selling petty commodities and alcoholics, transporting people and goods on the newly constructed roads or renting rooms to so called strangers. Most of these informal economic activities only became possible with the arrival of the Addax Bioenergy Project.<sup>98</sup> Therewith, the company enabled some people to develop new ways of earning a living and diversifying their livelihoods. Thus, if people were able to develop additional strategies to cope with the precarious working conditions, they could benefit from the new wage employment offered by the Addax Bioenergy Project. However, only few were able to do so and some were not able to engage in small-scale subsistence farming or the informal economy when they became unemployed.

From a Marxist perspective, it can be concluded that initially people welcomed the proposed transformation from subsistence oriented activities to wage employment and thereby accepted the acquisition of land and land-related resources (i.e. primitive accumulation). This, together with the influx of people, lead to the formation of a proletarian class, albeit not a homogeneous class as described by Marx. The local institutional setting has put them in different positions to deal with this new situation (e.g. to impinge on the allocation of wage employment). Thus, it should be noted that Marxist analysis of capitalism should not only

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<sup>98</sup> e.g.: The construction of roads allowed easier transports and salaries and compensation-payments were often used as start-up capital for informal economic activities (see 6.6).

focus on the role of capitalists (i.e. the company), but also on the local institutional setting that governs the performance of the proletarians. However, the few employment possibilities offered by the new implemented capitalist production and the sparse employment possibilities in Sierra Leone<sup>99</sup> in general turned most of the people into unemployed proletarians and a reserve army of laborers emerged, as described by Marx. This situation is similar to the case described by Baird (2011) and as generally assumed for LSLA: Neither the new implemented capitalist production nor the sparse employment possibilities in countries where land-deals occur provide enough jobs to incorporate the people who previously lived on and from the land and associated resources acquired by LSLA (see 2.4). However, not all laborers and reserve laborers in Mabilafu had been previously working on the land acquired by the company since employment opportunities also attracted people from places outside the project area. Thus, the analysis should also include the general context beyond the project area (the national and international context). Thereby, the history of Sierra Leone and its position within the global economy and politics is important (for a broad overview see 4.1). However, the interplay of these aspects and their effect on the current situation in Mabilafu, Sierra Leone or other so-called underdeveloped countries in general is controversial discussed in different development perspectives (see 2.3).

The competition for employment within the evolving reserve army of laborers forced active workers to accept rigorous exploitation by the capitalists. Thus, as described in section 6.5, laborers in Mabilafu had to accept precarious working conditions, neither offering good salaries nor social security. Maintained subsistence and new informal economic activities helped the laborers to cope with this precarious situation. Meanwhile, as described in section 2.4, according to Meillassoux (1973) and Elwert et al. (1989) these sectors subsidized the capitalist production: The subsistence sector had provided the labor force appropriated by the capitalist production. Moreover, these sectors provided social security not offered by the formal employment and thereby helped to maintain a pool of available laborers – the reserve army of laborers. In addition, they even helped to feed the active labor force, allowing the capitalists to pay salaries below the costs of sustaining an active labor force (e.g. selling of cheap food for laborers with nearly no economic benefit for the women selling it). Consequently, efforts accomplished in the subsistence and informal sector in Mabilafu were appropriated by the capitalist production of the Addax Bioenergy Project that was subsidized thereby.

Nevertheless, this relation should not be analyzed as one-way interaction solely. Some people were able to start a small informal business with money earned as wage laborer, benefiting from enhanced income in this region and roads constructed by the company (e.g. bike drivers or the barkeeper who sold commodities and services to active laborers). Therewith, they could diversify their livelihood-strategy, coping relatively well with the precarious formal working condition and diminished access to land and other land-related resources. These strategies

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<sup>99</sup> According to official figures, in 2004 only 4.5% were employed as wage laborers (see 4.1). This low number is underpinned by the arrival of many people in Mabilafu searching employment.

can be seen as development made possible by FDI in the agricultural sector. Thereby, they comply with the broader development envisaged by the company or by adherents of neoliberal development strategies in general (see 2.3 and 4.2). However, these strategies demanded great efforts of the beneficiaries (e.g. to work as wage laborer during the day and as barkeeper at night) and not everybody in the village had access to means to develop such strategies. Unemployed and unable to engage in the informal sector or to return to subsistence farming, some were rather marginalized than empowered by this new development.

Despite some people whose situation improved, with the provision of wage employment for less than a fifth of the people living in Mabilafu, low salaries and unsecure working conditions, the created wage employment could – as the other mitigation measures described above – not compensate the losses caused by the land acquisition (e.g. mitigate reduced resilience within an already enfeebled food system caused by the destruction of palm trees), let alone provide changes as envisaged by the villagers when they had agreed to this project.

### **Possibilities to Deal With the New Situation**

Even though people were not pleased with the current situation, little open resistance was performed. The villagers felt to be powerless against the company. In most direct interactions with staff, they were shy and barely able to participate in the new discourse implemented by the company. Moreover, they still hoped that the anticipated “development” occurs once the production of agro-fuel starts. Nevertheless, during my research I discovered and learned about strategies people applied to perform resistance against the company and its practices. Strangers who were not born in Mabilafu circumvented the agreement between the company and the village elite, to employ only people who were born there. The stealing of company’s property and gossiping about company’s staff can be interpreted as applying weapons of the weak as described by Scott (1985, see 2.7). In some situations villagers were even able to openly claim for something (e.g. the construction of the bridge) and performed open resistance (e.g. the Poro-incident with the South African worker). Not all of these strategies proved to be successful and the notion to be powerless against the company was not without reason.

### **Summary of Local Impacts of the Addax Bioenergy Project in Mabilafu**

It can be summarized that analyzing impacts of the Addax Bioenergy Project in Mabilafu from a local people’s perspective – considering not only the effects of the project but also paying much heed to the local context – has shown that the project triggered some severe negative impacts in the village. Even though the reduced access to land for the shifting cultivation itself has not been seen as problematic, impacts on access to other land-related resources were perceived as though. Measures, meant to mitigate such negative impacts or even fostering positive changes were generally not adapted well to this local context: Compensation, lease and acknowledgement payments benefited not everybody who had experienced losses and even those who received money could not benefit much thereof. The FDP, meant to improve local food production, was not successful in Mabilafu and thus could not mitigate negative

impacts of the land acquisition on the local subsistence oriented, already previously enfeebled food production let alone improve it. Last but not least, also the eagerly awaited provision of wage employment did not mitigate negative impacts adequately. Only few were employed and the few who were, faced precarious working conditions with low salaries and short time contracts. To deal with this situation, people had to develop alternative strategies, such as maintaining subsistence oriented small-scale farming activities or engaging in the emerging informal economy. Even though some managed to diversify and increase their livelihood, others struggled and faced great difficulties to make ends meet.

#### **7.4 The Performance of Addax Bioenergy**

The analysis of the impacts of the Addax Project in Mabilafu from a local people's perspective allows further to make some statements on the company's performance, re-evaluating its label as best practice example which has been awarded by the FAO and RSB.

Addax Bioenergy has undertaken great efforts to plan and implement the project with regard to the affected people. Physical displacement have been largely avoided,<sup>100</sup> lease, acknowledgement and compensation payments went beyond national legal requirements and mitigation measures had been implemented to mitigate negative impacts and to foster positive ones. The project had some positive changes for some affected people in Mabilafu and some villagers acknowledged that there had been some "development" since the company arrived. However, this "development" did not meet the high expectations of villagers towards the company by far nor could it compensate for all the losses caused by the land acquisition. Already in reports of 2009 it is mentioned that the project may cause expectations among local residents that will not be met (see 4.2). Thus, the company had been aware of this problem but not able or willing to address it. Purposely or not, the emerging high expectations facilitated to obtain local people's initial approval.

The description of the landscape in which the project should be implemented as underused and ecologically futile had legitimized the acquisition of land for the project's purpose. Moreover, the company's description of the landscape – based on aerial surveys and GIS data collected by Addax – created a new discourse to frame land issues. This new discourse prevented local people's participation and neglected their previous use of the land and associated resources. In other terms, the company described the land as "underused" rather than as "important for the local small-scale subsistence oriented food system," without letting participate the previous users in this framing. Additionally, a weak understanding of the local organization of land- and resource-use prevent the company to grasp all important aspects thereof and thus not all of their effects thereon were anticipated adequately. This has led to an inadequate lease, acknowledgement and compensations scheme that did not compensate everybody for experienced losses.

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<sup>100</sup> In Mabilafu nobody had been physically displaced.

The assumption to boost local food production by the FDP with the transfer of technologies and technical knowledge did not prove to be correct in Mabilafu. The FDP failed because too little attention had been paid to the local context in which this program should have been implemented. Similarly, the widespread notion of Addax staff members that privatization of land rights would provide a pre-condition for economic development in this region has to be questioned as the de facto privatization of land rights in the project area excluded so called secondary rights holders (i.e. landusers).

Moreover, the expectation that the provision of wage employment benefits the local people and thus compensates for negative impacts has proven to be wrong: Not everybody who experienced negative impacts has been employed and the benefits of those who were, appear less profitable if the precarious working conditions are considered as well. In fact, wage employment only benefited people who were able to develop additional strategies to cope with these precarious conditions. Thus, the conditions of wage employment represent nearly a pure form of capitalist exploitation as described by Marx (1962 [1867]). Meanwhile, the company is expecting to make great profits by selling the produced good. Thus, it can be assumed that the company will make a huge benefit by appropriating the surplus production of its labor force. Thereby, rather the investing capitalists benefited from wage employment than the laborers.

It can be concluded that the findings from my in-depth research have pointed at some important aspects neglected by the investing company. This indicates that its neoliberal perspective did not enable Addax Bioenergy to anticipate and measure adequately the different impacts their project had for local project affected people. Incorporating these aspects in the analysis sheds light on mainly negative impacts not considered adequately by the investing company. Moreover, it reveals that the company greatly overestimated the benefits of its mitigation measures and positive impacts. Therefore, it has to be questioned whether the rather neoliberal oriented evaluation scheme of the company is adequate to consider its local impacts and whether the Addax Bioenergy Project actually should serve as a best practice example for sustainable land-investments.

## **7.5 A New Perspective on Large-Scale Land Acquisitions**

The outline of the academic debate on LSLA in the theoretical chapter and insights from this case study have shown that scrutinizing local impacts of LSLA requires an approach that goes beyond the analysis of the pure physical size or economic value of land acquired. The former local benefit of land and associated resources acquired by LSLA needs to be considered as well. In Mabilafu, an adequate consideration thereof required a careful analysis of previous local institutions that governed access to land and associated resources and its role in the larger context of the local food-system.

Only an analysis that scrutinizes local impacts of LSLA from local people's perspectives allows to identify and investigate the important aspects to be considered for such an analysis. This indicates that considering local impacts of LSLA adequately requires knowledge on LSLA and

local contexts that most of the current data available on LSLA is not providing. The gross of data analyzed in the current academic debate on LSLA focuses on the areal extent of acquired land – mainly for global comparisons. However, exploring this aspect of LSLA solely neglects important aspects. If local impacts are not considered adequately, unfounded dramatizations of the phenomenon occur or, on the other hand, it is praised wrongly. Whether LSLA are an opportunity for broader economic development in countries, where they occur, or suppress equitable development opportunities, cannot be answered in general by the data available. However, regarding this case study of an allegedly “*best practice example*” for LSLA, doubts about the potential to foster “development” thereby may arise when local impacts are considered adequately.

According to a report by the Social Manager and Executive officer of Addax “*observers who take time to research and properly assess the objectives, scale and potential outcomes of the Addax Bioenergy investment model will note key areas where the project has brought considerable benefits to the project area and the communities that reside within it*” (2014: 37). I argue that researchers who are able to go beyond a pure neoliberal analysis and consider local perspectives on the Addax Project as well, discover crucial negative impacts of this project besides some positive ones as well.

## 8. Epilogue

My research is based on data gathered before and during my research stay in Sierra Leone from the of June 12, 2013 to the of September 1, 2013. After I left the country, in May 2014, the company began to produce agro-ethanol and electricity in the factory next to Mabilafu (Addax Bioenergy 2014). Whether this is a good information for the people living in Mabilafu or not cannot be answered within this report. Some people expected the company to do more for them as soon as the production of agro-ethanol initiates, assuming that once the company makes money with the project, they will provide more support to the communities. However, I am very doubtful thereabout since the company officially did not promised anything like that. I rather assume that things will become more difficult for most villagers as the FDP that provided some food for the people in the village is transferred to the FDS in which the beneficiaries have to cover the costs for the services by themselves. At least for some, this will be very difficult. Furthermore, with the complementation of the factory, many jobs for unskilled laborers will be terminated. Therefore, it remains to be hoped that the villagers will be able to develop strategies to deal with these changing opportunities and probably even to build enough pressure to generate more support from the company as it is their goal.

### **Postscript (October 2014)**

The district where I conducted my research is heavily affected by the 2014 Ebola epidemic in Western Africa. The spread of the disease and launched countermeasures have led to dramatic changes. Thus, it has to be noted that my master thesis describes the situation before the outbreak of Ebola. In my thoughts with the people in Mabilafu, Sierra Leone and the other affected countries, I fervently hope that the countering of the disease will be successful soon.

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