Managing a resource conflict-prone environment

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<u>Abstract</u>

The objective of this paper is the production of insights on drivers and contexts of environmental resources conflict and tensions between different actors in northern Ghana. Drawing on discussions around disconnected experiences as analytical framing (Wilson 2007; Depuy et al., Foucault 1979, Habermas 1990), this paper engages with experiences of different actors with forestry technology and science to produce insights on how these experiences affect conflicts and tensions over agricultural and forest land. With a qualitative methodology and field research, the paper addresses the key question of how experiences with forestry technology underlie social mobilisation, conflicts, tensions, or cohesion over land between actors. Two analytical steps are followed in addressing this question. First, the paper presents ways that experiences with forestry technology affects social mobilisation of the different actors in the access to, use, and management of land. Second, a connection is created between social mobilisation and the occurrence of environmental resources conflicts and tensions between these actors. Social mobilisation in this paper refers to the efforts and processes by relevant actors, with appropriate tools, principles, and incentives, that purposefully influence these actors at various levels, to participate in collective actions for their collective mutual benefits (Westerhoff et al. 2018; Rogers et al. 2018). The Bulugu forest reserve in the Gushiegu Municipality in northern Ghana is the site for empirical research. Actors in this forest who are relevant for this paper include crop farmers, itinerant livestock herders, and the forestry commission. The paper tentatively finds that forestry science and its technology suppress local ontologies of land and are contested by these local ontologies of land. The contestation then constrains purposeful constructive interaction between the Forestry commission, local crop farmers, and livestock herders. As a result, mobilisation of innovations, epistemologies, and ideas of the different actors towards meeting their environmental resources needs does not exist. With limited innovations for land conservation, land scarcity facilitates increasing tensions and conflicts between these actors. These findings point to the relevance of environmental resources conflict management methodologies that create space for ontological interaction and co-production of knowledge, technologies, and practices between different actors.

Keywords: social mobilisation, ontological interactions, forestry, conflicts, Ghana