Political conflicts and resource capture: Charcoal in the Ghanaian savannah and transition zones

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Abstract

This paper examines charcoal policy in Ghana and conflicts within charcoal producing communities. Policies use narratives about charcoal production to blame charcoal burners and to justify the need to regulate it. All these policy narratives are underscored by political conflicts over the exercise of power, legitimacy and control over resources. This paper argues that there are four distinct types of conflicts within charcoal producing districts: 1) conflict between chiefs and local government over regulation and control; 2) conflicts between chiefs over exercise of power over subjects and over legitimacy; 3) conflicts between chiefs and their subjects over the allodial and use rights in land and extraction of rents; and 4) conflicts between categories of charcoal producers with different rights and access to land resources.

Keywords: political conflict, resource capture, transition zone, charcoal, policy

1. Introduction

Charcoal is presented in policy as a harmful product-that destroys the environment and thus its production must be regulated and controlled. To achieve this goal - regulating and controlling the charcoal resource, policies use narratives about charcoal to blame charcoal producers in ways that the basic assumptions seem to be taken for granted (Leach and Mearns 1996). This paper is based on field research carried out in the West and North Gonja Districts of Ghana. It demonstrates that political motives underpin policy using as illustrations the political conflicts that engulf charcoal production in the Ghanaian transition and savannah zones.

The main argument of the paper is that there are four distinct types of conflicts within the charcoal production districts: 1) conflict between traditional authority (the paramount chiefs) and the local government over regulation and control of the charcoal trade; 2) conflict between chiefs over exercise of power over subjects and over legitimacy; 3) conflict between chiefs and their subjects over allodial and user rights in land and extraction of rent; and 4) conflict between categories of producers with different rights and access to resources.

The paper contends that policy is used in an attempt to extend state control and regulation over charcoal production and over the charcoal resource. This is in line with the notion that political context and interests, especially the range of competing actors' interests involved shape policy discourses and outcomes on the ground (Keeley and Scoones 2003). The politics of policy is often marked by a complex and messy processes involving a range of competing actors. Thus, contrary to the conventional and dominant perspective, policy making does not happen in clear-cut distinct-stages. Rather, policy processes are complex and involve interactions between multiple actors with different interests and power.

Understanding the policy processes thus requires, among other things, knowledge or awareness of the narratives that tell the policy stories and the enabling or constraining power dynamics inherent in the policy process (IDS 2006, Bangura 1996). This implies that policy processes also embody power struggle, struggles for political legitimacy and social mobilization by multiple institutions and actors at various stages and levels.

At the local level, this often reflects a struggle involving multiple social actors, especially, a struggle between politico-legal institutions over natural resources and the legitimacy and power of these institutions. These struggles often result in some politico- legal institutions reviving or solidifying and expanding their power, while others are weakened or eroded altogether (Lund 2008, Sikor and Lund 2009). It is also argued that in societies characterized by legal pluralism, institutions compete for recognition as the legitimate institutions to sanction and validate peoples claims to land resources. In the process, the institutions build and consolidate their legitimacy and power among their competitors (Lund 2008, Sikor and Lund 2009). Thus, Sikor and Lund (2009:1) assert that 'the process of recognition

of claims as property simultaneously works to imbue the institution that provides such recognition with the recognition of its authority to do so'.

With regards to legitimacy, it has been argued that the land resource in Africa is a contested arena involving two contradicting claims with different sources of legitimacy. While the state and its institutions power over land resources is rooted in the formal processes of statutory law or constitution - political legitimacy, the traditional authority's claim of legitimacy and power over land resources is drawn from historically constructed social structures and relations embedded in tradition-traditional legitimacy (Okoth–Ogendo 1989).Hence, the political legitimacy of state institutions is backed by the formal processes of law or constitution while the legitimacy of the traditional authorities (chiefs) is backed by sociocultural beliefs, norms and values, perceptions, lineage ties, customs and traditions.

Another perspective about the legitimacy of chiefs in Africa can be deduced from the argument of Amanor (1999). He argues that the empowering of chiefs and the incorporation of this invented traditional sector into the state as an arm of rural administration by the colonial and post-colonial state, created an alliance between traditional authorities (chiefs) and the state in labour, land and natural resource administration (Amanor 1999: 43, see also Konings 1986). By implication, therefore, the bifurcated status or position of the traditional authorities (chiefs)– representing both the state and the people of the community at the same time, guarantees them (chiefs) both formal and informal legitimation (Gyekye 2013).

This framework presents a holistic view of the charcoal trade and unmasks the power relations and the various interests often concealed in environmental policies and policy processes in Africa. Contrary to the dominant policy assumptions, communities are highly differentiated and hierarchically stratified: politically and economically. This suggests that, institutions and powerful social actors can mobilize the narratives that inform policy, or manipulate and exploit policy to control, regulate and maintain access to resources, or to capture the benefits that accrue from natural resources. There is therefore the need for policies and their implementation to be recognized as negotiated outcomes involving multiple actors with different cultures, powers and interests.

The next sections describe the research area and method used to collect the data, and the study context. Further, it describes the types of conflicts in the Ghanaian transitional and savannah zones. The final section provides the summary and conclusion of the study.

2. Research area and method

This article is based on ethnographic surveys and two months of fieldwork to study the dynamics of charcoal production and resource capture in the new frontier of charcoal production. Fieldwork was conducted from 2017 to 2018, mainly in the transition and savanna zones of Ghana, which is the main centre of charcoal production in Ghana (Nketiah and Asante 2018).

During the fieldwork, I interviewed eighty-four (84) individual participants comprising charcoal producers, chiefs and elders, gang chairmen or leaders, District Assembly Officers, Assembly Men, youth leaders and charcoal transporters. I also observed charcoal production and negotiation processes for concessions between charcoal producers and chiefs. The research areas are located in the West and North-Gonja Districts, in the Savannah Region of the Republic of Ghana (Figure 1). Three of the case communities Soalepe, Soreto No.1 and Soreto No.2 are located in the West-Gonja District and only one community, Kupoto, which is one of the largest charcoal production centres, is located in North-Gonja District, nine miles from the district capital Daboya. Soalepe is located near the district capital of West-Gonja, Damango. Sorto No.1 and Sorto 2 are close to each other but a bit far from the capital. The communities are in the Gonja traditional area, headed by the paramount chief. The area is on the northern boundary of the transitional zone and lies within the Guinea wooded Savannah vegetation. The climate is tropical continental. The mean annual rainfall is between 1000mm and 1500mm.

The population of the West-Gonja is 51,716 (Density=10.96/Kmsq) and the population of North-Gonja District is 55,110 (Density=11.37/Kmsq) (GSS 2010). The Gonja are the majority and the indigenous people in the two Districts. Damango serves as the seat of the traditional authority headed by the over-lord, and is also the regional capital of the Savannah Region. The area is predominantly inhabited by the *Gonja* but there are also other ethnicities- *Hanga, Dagomba*, *Mamprusi, Tampalma, Frafra, Dagaaba* and *Fulani.*

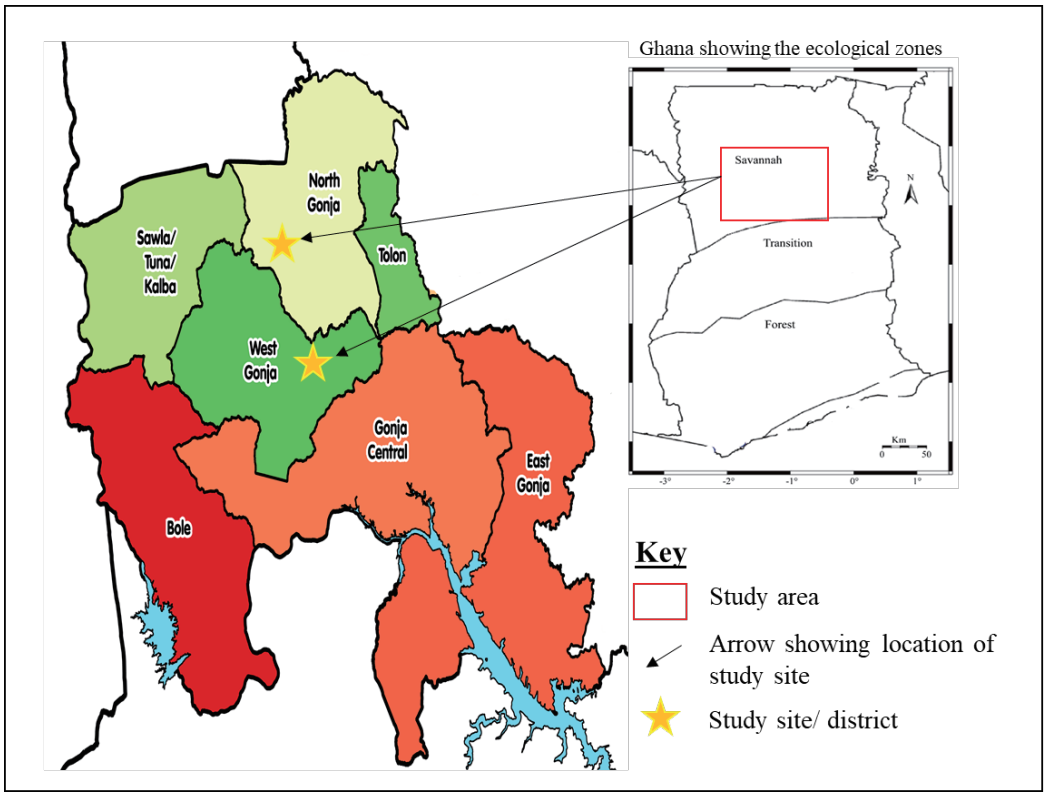

Figure 1. Research area

3. The context

Charcoal is mainly produced in the savannah and transitional zones of Ghana, where the hard wood and fire-resistant tree species that make the best quality charcoal are found (Amanor 2007). The trees of this vegetation zone are robust, resilient and regenerate rapidly from coppice and root suckers, and thus adapt well to the environment. The main charcoal producers are migrants from the Sissala area of the Upper West Region of Ghana who have the expertise in charcoal burning. They control a large portion of the charcoal market and transport trade. The Sissala charcoal producers are socially stratified. Whiles the rich Sissala charcoal merchants acquire permits, have their own transport and hire labour, poor Sissala charcoal producers only hire their services out to the merchants (ibid).

In the study area, three distinct types of charcoal production occur. The first type consists of small-scale production by local farmers who are citizens and therefore have secure access to farmland and have rights to exploit the tree resources freely. The second production system is characterized by the rich individual Sissala charcoal merchants who have strong links to political authorities (both the traditional and government bureaucrats). These merchants have capital and can mobilize labour and acquire concessions from chiefs to produce charcoal. The third system of production consists of mainly the Sissala professional charcoal producers and some other ethnic groups who organized themselves into charcoal production groups called gangs. The gang members pool their resources together under the group's leader known as 'chairman'. The chairman of a gang is responsible for scouting for wood, negotiating with the chiefs for concessions and making arrangements for the transportation and marketing of the charcoal in the cities. The chairmen are also very rich and powerful persons who have access to capital, labour, transport and are well connected to government officials, and the traditional authorities (the chiefs).

In the political hierarchy or chain of command of the Gonja, the *Yagbumwura* is the overlord of the Gonja Kingdom. Below him are the divisional chiefs who in theory owe their offices to appointment by-the paramount chief, but in practice, they are rulers of independent-states whose subjects owe allegiance immediately to them alone and only indirectly, through them to the paramount chief- the overlord (Jones 1962).

Migrant Sissala charcoal producers, wishing to gain access to tree resources in the Damango area in the Savanna zone, visit the chief of the area where they wish to burn the charcoal to obtain permission. They make a token presentation of cola and drinks or a small amount of money. These are given to the chief to enable them obtain a permit which grants them rights to exploit trees for charcoal production within a particular area. This way of negotiation for concession rights has led to conflict between the paramount chief and the sub-chiefs. This is because, initially, the migrant Sissala charcoal burners visited the paramount chief first before going to negotiate with the sub-chiefs for their concessions. In this way, the token presentation that was supposed to be made to the sub-chiefs and landlords was rather

made to the paramount chief who also collects rent and tax charges from the charcoal burners after the charcoal is produced. This, however, has been resolved in favour of the sub-chiefs and the landlords.

The migrant Sissala charcoal burners, in the Damongo area, are not charged for access to concessions, unlike in the other areas of the transitional and savannah zones. After visiting the chief and making the token payment, the migrant charcoal burners are given parcels of land where there are no farms to exploit the trees. However, the charcoal burners pay GH₵ 1.00 per every 50kg bag of charcoal produced. Producers usually transport between 300 to 400 bags per load of a single and double axel kia trucks respectively. This translate to monitory income of GH₵ 300.00 ($63.00) and 400.00 ($83.00) to the chiefs and the District Assemblies. With the long haulage articulator trucks, the charcoal burners pay between GH₵ 1000.00 (about $208.00) and GH₵ 1500.00 (about $313.00) for every load between 1000 and 1500 50kg bags of charcoal respectively. Payments to the chiefs and the landlords are made after the charcoal has been produced. This has led to conflict between the rival chiefs in the area. In addition to paying these amounts to the sub-chiefs, similar payments are made to the paramount chiefs and to the District Assemblies through their Area Councils. In most of the communities, a separate payment is also made to the area councils. In all, before charcoal leaves the Damongo area to the urban markets, four different payments are made for four permits. Then another mandatory payment (which is considered controversial) is also paid to another chief in the central Gonja District where all the charcoal passes to the south. This has also led to the intensification of simmering tension between the paramount chief, and the divisional chief over power and the legitimacy of their power.

4. Charcoal conflicts in the savannah and transition zones of Ghana

4.1. The conflict between local government and traditional authority (chiefs), over the regulation and control of charcoal resources.

Tree resources under the customary land tenure are recognized as belonging to the chief. The District Assemblies are responsible for enacting sound environmental policies for sustainable management of the environment and natural resources. The local government authority is headed by the District Chief Executive (DCE), and it collaborates or works with the Chiefs (traditional authorities) in many areas of development, including the management and regulation of natural resource use. Hence, they work together to threaten charcoal burners and actually introduce by-laws to ban charcoal burning on many occasions, using narratives of environmental decline. They consider charcoal production to be destroying the environment and resulting in desertification. These bans, any time they have been imposed they have been quickly lifted or not effective at all because tolls on charcoal production is one of the major revenue sources for the district assemblies in the transition and the savanna zones. The chiefs also depend on the rent on charcoal concessions for many purposes.

The increasing commodification of natural resources and the pressure on District Assemblies to create revenue sources to generate revenue internally to supplement the governments' common fund

which is not enough and also not regular, led to intense competition and conflict between local government authorities and chiefs over the control and regulation of natural resources and the extraction of revenue or rent from the charcoal trade. A chief in one of the case communities stated that 'the land and the trees belong to me and my people the District Assembly has no power over our land and trees'. This reflects the tensions, contestations and the struggle between the traditional authorities and the District Assemblies over natural resources and over the legitimacy and power of institutions at the local level. These major actors- the chiefs and the District Assemblies, any time they need money often mobilize narratives about charcoal to blame charcoal burners especially, the migrants. They then threaten a ban on charcoal burning, the main source of livelihood for the migrant charcoal burners and increasingly, the youth of the communities. Whenever the chiefs ban charcoal production, they say or claim that it is a government policy whiles the District Assemblies justify their ban by saying that the chiefs support them. Any time the chiefs place a ban on charcoal burning, two things happen; (i) the amount of money charcoal burners pay to the chiefs before they can transport charcoal to the markets will be increased and (ii) the migrant charcoal producers will mobilize a huge sum of money and pay to the chiefs. Similarly, if the ban was placed by the District Assemblies, the amount of money charcoal producers pay to secure council permit will automatically increase and the migrant charcoal burners will contribute huge sums of money and pay to the District Assembly officials. This has been the situation in the area, where the District Assemblies led by the District Chief Executives and the traditional authorities (chiefs) both collaborate and compete over the control of the charcoal resource. The district assemblies and the chiefs both deploy their own task forces to enforce compliance anytime they ban charcoal production. The task forces of the traditional authorities are also used to collect tax from the migrant charcoal producers. The Chiefs always used rhetoric of the invasion and destruction of their lands by the Sissala migrants charcoal burners to justify attempts to gain greater control over the charcoal resource and over the migrants and levy more taxes on them. As a result of this, Assembly officials, not the Assemblies, and the chiefs benefit from the charcoal resources more than the poor charcoal burners most of whom are indigenes of the area. The majority of the people remain poor and marginalised.

4.2. Conflict between chiefs over exercise of power over subjects and over legitimacy.

'*The chiefs are fighting because every chief in this place wants to make money from charcoal*' said by a youth leader in West Gonja District. This statement exemplifies the importance chiefs in the area attach to the charcoal trade as a vital source of revenue, and the conflicts that emanate from charcoal production. This conflict emerged from within the local traditional political hierarchical structure in which different actors claim different privileges in relation to claims on land and natural resources based on the allodial rights and user rights. The production of charcoal and the competing claims of rent on resources from charcoal have intensified simmering tensions and conflicts between chiefs of different traditional authority hierarchies (between paramount chiefs and divisional chiefs) and between chiefs of the same

hierarchy of traditional authority (between a paramount chief and another paramount chief or between a divisional chief and another divisional chief). My informants say that charcoal production and its trade has reignited and intensify contestations, tensions and conflicts between the overlord of the Gonja traditional area and a divisional chief over power and legitimacy. There is also a chieftaincy dispute between two rival sub chiefs in Damango town who both claim the right to collect rent on charcoal in the Damango lands.

As has been narrated above, charcoal burners have to make three mandatory payments (ie., to the chiefs, the District Assemblies and the Area Councils) for permits before they can transport their charcoal to the cities. This is expected to be the final payment. No other chief should also take any tax from them. However, the Buipe chief whose town the trucks pass to the urban markets in the Southern part of Ghana charges them mandatory fees before the trucks are allowed passage. This is considered an affront and disrespect to the powers and legitimacy of the overlord of the Gonja traditional area. The Buipe chief claims that, he has the right to collect taxes and rent from every charcoal truck from both the West Gonja and the North Gonja Districts passing through his town. The collection of taxes or rent by both the paramount chief and the divisional chief is a show of power by the two, at the same time legitimizing their power (Lund 2008).

Damango, the traditional and administrative capital of the Gonja land is the seat of the overlord. However, the Damango town has its own chief. Over a decade now, there has been a protracted chieftaincy conflict between two brothers who both claim to be the rightful successors to the skin (chieftaincy) office. This generated tension in the community between the rival chiefs and between their supporters. With the influx of the migrant Sissala charcoal burners into the area, and the increasing commodification of the natural resources, the two rival chiefs to the Damongo skin make competing claims as the allodial title holders to the Damongo land. The simmering tension between the two rival chiefs and their supporters was intensified and exploded into open confrontations over who has the right to collect rent from charcoal burners in the community. In resolving this conflict by the overlord, it was agreed that both rival chiefs should issue permits to charcoal burners (thus, charcoal burners could pay to any of the rival chiefs for their permits). Charcoal burners therefore decide which of the rival chiefs to pay their money to. The collection of rent from the charcoal burners and the granting of permits by rival chiefs has therefore led to competing parties claiming legitimacy of their powers. As Lund (2008, Sikor and Lund 2009) show, those who have control over land and natural resources use their powers to grant access or receive rent and at the same time legitimize their power and consolidate their position as allodial title holders. The rent from charcoal is a vital source of income to the chiefs in the area, hence, the competition for control over the charcoal resource.

4.3. The conflict between chiefs and their subjects over allodial title and over rights to land and extraction of rents.

Initially, the District Assembly in collaboration with the ministry of Agriculture and the chiefs manipulated environmental decline narratives that are rooted in a discourse of blame to force the sub-chiefs to ban charcoal production in their communities. However, the sub-chiefs quickly realized that most of the youth in their communities had learnt how to burn charcoal from the migrant Sissala charcoal burners and were also seriously producing charcoal. The youth realized that it was more rewarding to do charcoal business than farming. So, most of the people in the communities went into charcoal production on their farms. The ban on charcoal therefore affected both the local people (indigenes) and the migrant Sissala charcoal burners. This did not go down well with the indigenes and led to a conflict between the youth and their chiefs because charcoal production has become a major source of livelihood for the people, especially the youth. According to the youth, agriculture was no longer profitable or rewarding. This view is clearly captured by a farmer who is also a charcoal producer in Kuputo, a village in the North Gonja District 'for eight years now I have not been able to harvest enough crops to feed my family how much more to sell and pay for my children school fees, charcoal is my only helper now'. Views like this are common among the indigenes and show the importance of charcoal as a source of livelihood to the people. The youth claim that they have rights to the trees and must be allowed to continue to exploit them for charcoal.

However, because the youth, or the indigenes have user rights to the land and the tree resources and therefore could not be charged any rent, the chiefs are usually less enthusiastic to lift the ban on charcoal in the communities, while at the same time the paramount chief' acquiesces to the continuous operations of the migrant Sissala charcoal merchants in their concessions, because the paramount chief benefits from the extraction of rent from the migrant charcoal burners which the chief cannot do to the youth who are indigenes and thus have user rights to the forest. The chiefs and elders say the youth are lazy and do not want to farm. They claim that the youth are only interested in quick money. As a result, there are tensions and conflicts between the youth and the chiefs and the elders in the communities over the use of the charcoal resource and other natural resources (see Amanor 1999, 2001, 2009, and Yaro 2010).

4.4. Conflict between categories of producers with different access to resources and different claims on charcoal through market and birth rights.

'*This is our land; it belongs to us and we must benefit from it not strangers*' a statement by an indigene of Soalepe in the West Gonja District of Ghana. This statement highlights the tensions, contestations and struggles between indigenes and migrant charcoal producers over natural resources. The charcoal market in the savannah and transitional zones of Ghana is composed of migrant Sissala charcoal burners (made up of wood cutters, those who combine both wood cutting and charcoal burning and the

merchants who hired labourers to burn the charcoal) and the youth of the communities. Most of the migrant charcoal burners are organized into gangs headed by rich merchants who have links with the political authorities as chairmen. The migrant Sissala merchants have access to capital (in terms of finance from plough back profits, and equipment/tools), labour, authority (chiefs and the District Assembly officials) and also control the charcoal market. They also have the knowledge and experience in the charcoal business. The indigenes (the youth) of the area, unlike the migrant merchants, only have user rights to the forests. While the migrants mostly operate in gangs and thereby pooling their resources together, the indigenes operate individually. In view of this, the migrant merchants are able to gain access to large concessions, produce a lot of charcoal frequently and transport the charcoal to the various markets (which they also have control over). The migrants therefore dominate the charcoal trade in the area and also make more money than the indigenes.

The indigenes therefore do not understand why they, having the user right to the resources, benefit marginally, while the migrants gain more benefits from the charcoal trade. They therefore blame the migrants for destroying the environment and must therefore be chased out of the area. The youth also claim that, the authorities (ie the chiefs and the DCEs) often connived and collude to apply the bye-laws differently in favour of the migrants and accuse the DCEs and the traditional authorities of discrimination. According to the youth, anytime a ban was placed on charcoal production, they the indigenes were not allowed to engage in charcoal burning but the merchants were always allowed to go on with their charcoal production with the excuse that, the merchants needed to recoup the investments they had already made on their concessions. They also accused the migrant charcoal burners of always breaking every ban and bye-law on the Gonja land and that with their financial muscle, the Sissala merchants were able to buy off the chiefs and the DCEs. As a result of these claims, the youth were also engaged in mobilizing the same narratives about charcoal that the Chiefs and the DCEs often manipulate, used and exploited to further their economic and political interests; and to justify their call for the migrants to be ban from their communities. The youth even went to the extent of courting and enlisting the support of environmental NGOs to put pressure on the overlord and the DCEs to ban migrant charcoal burners from the area.

Ribot (1998) observed that, communities that control direct access to forests may reap a small portion of its benefits, if they do not also have access to capital and markets; and that political elite and powerful entrepreneur class with linkages to political authority, and access to labour, capital, and control over charcoal markets, and aided by policy, benefited disproportionately from the charcoal trade in Senegal. In a similar study, Ribot (1999), in his historical account of the resistance of the forest villages of Makacoulibantang of eastern Senegal to charcoal production, reveals, not only how flawed, selectively and skewed implemented policies created a struggle and competition between local populations and powerful actors for the control of access to the benefits derived from forests and the

charcoal trade, but also enables the political elite and the merchant class with links to government bureaucrats and agencies and traditional authorities to capture the benefits of the charcoal trade.

Larson and Ribot (2007) examine how forestry policy and implementation maintain double standards in an uneven playing field in a manner that permanently excludes the rural poor from the wealth of forest around them – producing poverty and marginalization in the process. They contend that, like Ribot (1998) and Faye and Ribot (2017) double standards in forest and market access through the implementation of policies and regulations have tied the charcoal trade in the hands of a small privileged group of elite and well-connected patrons.

It is therefore important to recognised that having direct control of access to forest and other natural resources (in terms of property rights) by people in the forest/resource communities without access to capital and markets is futile (Ribot 1998, 1999, Ribot and Peluso 2003), and that policies and their implementations can exacerbate inequality, unfair competition, resource capture, exclusion of the poor and conflicts. This also draws attention to the question many people have been asking- whether the chiefs are for the people or on the side of the government and merchant capital? This is because resource communities are politically and economically stratified and elites such as chiefs often make decisions that are not in the interest of the community as a whole. Recognising this will enable us to focus on how power and resources are distributed and contested in different contexts by social actors, and to get beneath the structures to unmask the underlying interests and incentives that are often embedded in policy and the corresponding institutions that enable or constrain equity in the distribution of resource benefits.

5. Summery and conclusions

Traditional political authority (chiefs), and the legislative political and administrative authority (Assemblies) collaborate, mediate and contest for power, authority and legitimation over the regulation and control of the charcoal resource. The chiefs are the custodians of the land. Article 245 of the 1992 constitution of Ghana mandates the Assemblies to formulate and execute plans, policies and programs for the effective mobilization of the resources necessary for the development of their areas. Clearly, there is the need for collaboration, not competition, and conflicts between the chiefs and the Assemblies. In any case, it would be too simplistic to reduce these contests over natural resources to a straightforward conflict between the Assemblies and the chiefs over the revenue from charcoal. For these contests are also, probably, about struggles for legitimacy, power and resources. Hence, when traditional authorities (chiefs) use task forces in periodic and surprise raids on illegal charcoal producers and wood cutters, it is a statement about the deployment of power and authority to charcoal producers as it is to the District Assemblies and the other state institutions who are mandated to do so. These conflicts, as the study has shown, are not only between different institutions, but also occur within the hierarchies of institutions – the conflicts between chiefs over legitimacy and the exercise of power over the charcoal resource. The

issue of permits, and collection of rent and taxes from resource users, by the chiefs simultaneously strengthens and legitimatizes their power and authority in relation to their competitors (Lund 2008, Sikor and Lund 2009).

Another important issue the study highlights is the conflict between the chiefs and the youth over right to land and tree resources. The state recognizes the allodial rights as being vested in the chief and user rights in the indigenes (subjects). This allows indigenes to use land and trees freely for farming, charcoal production and many other purposes but does not allow the indigenes to sell their land, since the land by customs belongs to the skin. Chiefs can therefore transact trees and natural resources with migrants, but not with the indigenes who have rights to use the trees freely.

Since the chiefs cannot gain or extract revenue from the youth who are indigenes, they are often interested in transacting trees and land with the migrant charcoal producers. This has led to the conflicts between the youth and the chiefs since the youth wants to protect their own use of the trees, and the chiefs are interested in transacting the trees with the migrants and to prevent the indigenes from exercising their use over the natural resources (see Amanor *et al.* 2005, and Amanor 2009 for a detail discussion).

In view of this, Ribot (1999), like Amanor (1999) and Cline-cole (2000), questions the legitimacy of traditional authority, whether chiefs actually represent their communities or their self-interests? and draw attention to the contradictions inherent in the chieftaincy institution as a colonial tool for indirect rule and resource appropriation. Further, Ribot (1999) implicates policies for their frequent failure to recognise that a 'community' is not made up of a homogenous population, but according to Ribot (1999) are '*stratified ensemble of persons with different needs and power'.* Hence, powerful actors, in collusion with policy agents, can manipulate policy processes and implementations to capture the benefits of forests and the charcoal trade.

Finally, the conflict between the indigenes and the migrant charcoal producers indicate that there is no balance use of the natural resource by the locals and other actors. The resources tend to be concentrated in the hands of both traditional and government institutions and elites, who use policy to their own advantage. The study reveals that the indigenes or the local people are not able to compete effectively with the migrants for the production of charcoal because they do not have access to capital, labour, transport and markets. The indigenes are further constrained by the differential application of by-laws and rules by both the chiefs and the District Assemblies; and the preference of the chiefs to transact land and resources with the migrants than to allowing access to the same resources by the indigenes, since the chiefs cannot gain revenue from them (indigenes). The only way the citizens can protect their own use of the resources is to fight for the expulsion of the migrant charcoal producers in the communities. This insight corroborates the view that forest communities that control direct access to forests may reap very small portion of the benefits from the resource if they do not also have access to markets and capital (Ribot 1998). This finding is also similar to Ribot (1999) account of the resistance

of the forest villages of Makacoulibantang of Senegal to charcoal production. Ribot, in his historical account of the resistance of the forest villages of Makacoulibantang of eastern Senegal to charcoal production, reveals, not only how flawed, selectively and skewed implemented policies created a struggle and competition between local populations and powerful actors for the control of access to the benefits derived from forests and the charcoal trade, but also enables the political elite and the merchant class with links to government agencies and traditional authorities to capture the benefits.

6. Conclusion

Policies and their implementations are not neutral. The political conflicts that engulfed the production of charcoal in the savannah and transitional zones of Ghana show how policies can be manipulated, exploited and used in an attempt to control, and to capture the benefits that are derived from natural resources. Chiefs have, on the one hand acted, contested, disputed and competed over allodial rights to land and natural resources, and the control over the benefits that are derived from them. The local governments have, on the other hand cooperated with the traditional authorities, in most times to regulate the use of natural resources but sometimes too competed with the same institution for the control and extraction of rent and revenue from the charcoal resource. Through these struggles, the chiefs strengthen and consolidate their legitimacy and power in relation to their competitors. The charcoal merchants who manipulated, and are being manipulated by the system also competed with the poor youth of the area for the benefits of the charcoal trade. Clearly, the winners are the powerful elite – chiefs, the District Assembly officials and the few powerful charcoal merchant-class who had access to capital, labour, markets and most importantly, access to the political authorities. The losers are the village populations, who are alienated and marginalized.

There is therefore the need for policies and their implementation to be recognized as negotiated outcomes involving multiple actors with different cultures, powers and interests. Instead of merely reaffirming assumptions within national policy processes, policies that are implemented at the local community level must reflect conditions on the ground and be responsive to the needs and interests of the people (Amanor *et al.* 2005).

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