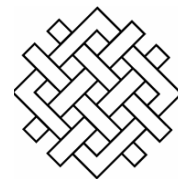


**ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA  
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**Constructing Subsidiarity, Consolidating Hegemony:  
Political Economy and Agro-Ecological Processes  
in Ghanaian Forestry**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite proliferating claims that Ghanaian forestry is collaborative and community-based, most powers over forestry remain concentrated in an unrepresentative and unaccountable centralized forestry administration. In ways that presage current negotiations over the principle of subsidiarity, various regimes in Ghana throughout the twentieth century have, when challenged, misconstrued agro-ecological processes in order to justify centralized and violent control that, although conducted in the name of the public good, allowed forest resources to be appropriated by select state agents, traditional authorities, and domestic and international firms. Recommendations are given to help pry the concept of subsidiarity away from abuse by hegemonic elites: participatory empirical studies of forest agroecologies and management, and inclusive processes of formulating and interpreting policies and laws.

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## INTRODUCTION

While participation and democratization gained increased acceptance in much of Africa and indeed the rest of the world during the 1990s, true decentralization in development, particularly in natural resources management, has often remained limited in design and implementation. Following Agarwal and Ribot (2000), I conceive of decentralization as the processes of transferring powers and resources to local authorities representative of and accountable to, and administrators responsive to, their constituents. Strong support for decentralization is, at first glance, embodied in the principle of “subsidiarity”—that is, that decision-making, implementation, monitoring, enforcement, and judicial recourse are best conducted at the lowest practicable level of government. Although it has antecedents in Catholic Church administration, the principle of subsidiarity has recently grown increasingly salient with the Declaration of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, as well as with issues of sovereignty and regional coordination in the European Union. In line with this general worldwide trend, the 1992 Ghanaian Constitution declares that “Ghana shall have a system of local government and administration which shall, as far as practicable, be decentralized.”

But subsidiarity may actually raise more questions than it solves. While control by accountable and representative lower-level officials is justified, in principle, by increased efficiency, capacity development, responsiveness, and incorporation of local preferences, knowledge, resources and creativity, higher-level coordination is also justified by scale effects, transaction costs of decision making, positive or negative externalities across time and space, and equity concerns. How do we know where the balance lies? So while subsidiarity may seem to portend the desirability of decentralization, the concept also raises crucial questions of who decides what is “practicable” (and hence what are the limits of decentralization), on which criteria, with which evidence, and through which processes? Deciding where to allocate powers and resources thus inherently involves “the politics of the possible,” and consequently the principle of subsidiarity can and has been used across the political spectrum equally to justify higher-level intervention or non-intervention—a tension present in the crowning pinnacle of subsidiarity to date, the Maastricht Treaty. As Jordan and Jeppesen (2000: 77) presciently argue “the principle of subsidiarity is not a clearly defined principle capable of arbitrating disputes over the allocation of competence. It is merely symptomatic of wider forces of an economic and political nature.” The following review of forestry policy and administration in Ghana illustrates some of the remarkably consistent ways in which various regimes have, when challenged, sought to legitimize their select appropriation of resources via centralized government by arguing that devolution to the local level was neither environmentally nor economically “practicable”—they have, in short, constructed subsidiarity to consolidate hegemony.<sup>1</sup>

Ghana is a productive place to examine decentralization and its causes, obstacles, and difficulties because the country has seen successive devolutions of power, the most recent of which has been embraced, at least rhetorically, for more than two decades. The country is increasingly marketed as a model democracy, a politically stable gateway for investment in West Africa. The material presented here provides further evidence of the subtle manner in which power can operate in formal democracies (Dean 1999; Paley 2001; Rose 1999). Examining experiences in Ghana also

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<sup>1</sup> I do not aim to review decentralization in general or in Ghana (see Ayee 1994; Ayee and Tay 1998; Crook and Manor 1998: 202-270; Thomi et al. 2000).

allows one to understand the character of political dynamics and discourses in diverse, changing, and complex “natural” environments. Northern Ghana is dominated by Sahelian savanna and woodlands, which give way through a transition zone to the undulating forest zone in the south. With less than a quarter of pre-colonial forest cover left in the southern zones (even by revised estimates such as Fairhead and Leach 1998; Hawthorne and Abu-Juam 1995), the case is also pertinent in understanding past causes of environmental degradation, and relatedly, future conservation and rehabilitation.

The research for this paper was conducted from October 2001 to May 2002. It involved a review of contemporary and archival primary and secondary literature, and semi-structured interviews—concentrated in Accra, the Eastern Region, and Kumasi—with roughly forty various government officials of different ranks, international donors, academics, and local and international non-governmental organization staff.

While I originally set out to examine the extent of local democratic accountability and representation in Ghanaian forestry—on the agenda in the mid 1990s—I quickly learned that decentralization of forestry was no longer under consideration. As I probed the literature and conducted interviews, I came to realize that contemporary arguments against decentralization paralleled ones much earlier in the twentieth century. I consequently turned to investigate the changing reasons behind this general continuity in discourses.

In the next section of the paper, I describe the formative period of forest policy and administration in Ghana, in which colonial administrators invoked the logic we now call subsidiarity in an inconsistent manner and without technical evidence as part of a political struggle over access to and control over lucrative resources. Subsequently, I address continuities and changes in the post-independence period. After independence, successive regimes again selectively invoked the rhetoric of subsidiarity to legitimize appropriation and centralized management, but they did so in different terms suited to the new domestic and international political economy. After a lull during the turbulent years of changing dictatorships, subsidiarity rhetoric was resuscitated by the Rawlings regime in the 1980s and 1990s as a means both to retain powers and to garner new resources in the midst of national and international pressures for reform in Ghana’s forestry sector. I conclude that the nature of processes of allocating powers and resources is crucial to both policy and project outcomes, and recommend that these processes can be improved through broad-based, participatory empirical and policy-interpretation studies, backed with democratic representation and policy advocacy networks.

## **AGRO-ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESSES AND THE ORIGINS OF CENTRAL CONTROL**

In Ghana’s forestry sector, the British colonial system of indirect rule through “indigenous” political structures was beset by strong tensions (cf. Mamdani 1996). Colonial administrators were driven by bureaucratic imperatives and, more importantly, attempts to secure timber and cocoa revenue. When faced with strong local opposition, they sought to legitimize their forceful appropriation of forest management by portraying unrepresentative centralized administration as the only way to objectively balance indirect benefits and costs of forestry management, and to

ensure the appropriate spatial and temporal pattern of timber utilization (despite a considerable lack of empirical evidence on forestry dynamics).

Historically and currently, forest policy and timber industry procedures recognize and require the authority of chiefs (whose representativeness and accountability is often disputed) to allocate land and timber resources, despite widespread and longstanding conventions that trees belong to “the community.” To maintain cost-efficient and stable bases of rule, Britain devolved an accountability-weakening fusion of judicial and executive powers and administrative duties to unrepresentative and upwardly accountable chiefs, termed “Native Authorities,” which, in an era of nascent codification of customary law and commercialization, and commoditization of timber resources, allowed chiefs, with the assistance of their bourgeois cohorts, to exercise de facto ownership over timber (Amanor 1996, 1999; Asante 1975; Berry 2001; Crook 1986; Gold Coast 1950; Kimble 1963; Latham 1959; Logan 1947; Lugard 1922; Woodman 1985, 1988, 1996).

Indirect rule, however, was not tantamount to free reign for chiefs. It involved questions about which functions, responsibilities, powers and resources could or could not be devolved. The colonial governments came to disavow outright expropriation of land in West Africa, but nevertheless justified expropriation of management control under the guise of acting as benevolent stewards managing resources in trust for current and future populations. Such appropriation of forest management arose after unsuccessful attempts to ideologically persuade chiefs into conformity, but came to take a logic of its own based on reasoning that resembles contemporary discussions of subsidiarity.

Beneath the self-serving colonial espousals of trusteeship, we can see that administrators were likely motivated to reserve forests by a combination of imperial environmentalism, bureaucratic institutionalization, and pursuit of logging and cocoa revenue. The preoccupation of the Gold Coast administration with deforestation was rooted in earlier concerns in the British Colonial Office, strengthened by lobbying from important botanists about the implications of forest loss for the economic viability of imperialism (Grove 1997; Fairhead and Leach 1998). The Gold Coast Forest Department found its roots with a 1908 reconnaissance mission by a British forester in Nigeria (Thompson 1909), who was earlier employed in the Indian Service (Kennedy 1942a: 32). The landmark 1927 Gold Coast Forestry Ordinance likewise was adapted from earlier versions implemented in Burma, India and Nigeria. Thus, Gold Coast foresters probably acted partly on sincere environmental concerns and as simple cogs in the British imperial forest bureaucracy.

In its early years, the “raison d’etre of the Department” (Logan 1946: 59) was to reserve forests. A concerted campaign was mounted to overcome vociferous nationalist resistance to colonial intervention in land matters. Chiefs, intelligentsia, and businessmen based in coastal cities, but with connections to popular bases of support in the countryside, had previously battled against British expropriation of land via the 1894 Crown Lands Bill and the 1901 Concessions Ordinance (Asiamah 2000; Kimble 1963). Fearing renewed expropriation, they rejected the first two versions of the Forest Ordinance that allowed the Governor to constitute as reserves “any wastelands, i.e. lands unoccupied and uncultivated” (1910 version) and “any land which appears to be unoccupied” (1911 version). After 1911 the Forest Department urged the Native Authorities to create reserves through their own authority, but reservation was slow—because of

the still strong organized popular (and sometimes violent) resistance generated by the earlier attempts to expropriate land for the Crown, and perhaps because chiefs wanted the option to sell or lease land to timber companies or cocoa farmers (Asiamah 2000; Collins 1961). The administration grew impatient and alarmed at the rate of deforestation, and in 1927 passed a new Forestry Ordinance.

The language of the 1927 Forestry Ordinance differed in important ways from the prior, more contentious versions that had permitted government management of what was ambiguously described as “waste” or “unoccupied” land. The 1927 incarnation, in contrast, explicitly recognized in its opening lines that reservation would not affect ownership (at least technically), and allowed the government, without consent from the Native Authorities, to reserve land wherever

it appears to the Governor in Council on the advice of the Conservator of Forests that the destruction of the forests thereon is diminishing or is likely to diminish the water supply, or is injuring or is likely to injure the agricultural conditions of neighbouring lands, or is imperilling [sic] the continuous supply of forest produce to the towns or villages on or contiguous to such lands.

(Sec 4(4))

If the Native Authorities would not form reserves, the government would use the “indirect benefits” logic of section 4(4) to constitute reserves themselves. Colonial administrators invoked the scale effects and public goods nature of forests in order to justify to their recalcitrant subjects the administration’s appropriation of land management (since it had previously faced fierce opposition to appropriation of ownership). There was subsequently a strong attempt, not always successful, to obtain and legitimize increased direct government management of forest reserves through an “intensive campaign of education and propaganda” (Oliphant 1932: 1) that appealed to the public interest in protecting cocoa production.

The logic through which administrators expropriated management rights presages current discussions of subsidiarity. Forests provided certain trans-boundary and trans-generational “public goods,” by which is meant goods that are (1) non-rival and (2) non-excludable—that is, goods for which one person’s consumption does not preclude another’s consumption, and from which other people cannot be excluded. Colonial administrators, guided by experience in other colonies and prevailing understandings of tropical regional ecology, believed that such public goods included protection of watersheds from drying, preservation of general humidity and low temperatures, protection from penetration of the savanna into the rainforest zone, soil health, and retention of fresh water. The campaign to obtain consent from chiefs and the general populace to colonial forestry directives increasingly emphasized the positive effects of these forest-related public goods on commercial agriculture, particularly cocoa. T. F. Chipp, for example, warned in his 1922 Forest Officer’s Handbook that savannization would result in “the practical disappearance of the cocoa, kola, and oil palm industries as commercial ventures” (47). In his survey of forestry in Ghana and Nigeria, Major Oliphant (1932: 6) argued that “Water supplies and agriculture depend upon the forest. It is the forests that are responsible for the export of cacao ...” (see also Ormsby-Gore 1926). Several agencies mistakenly speculated that



deforestation caused swollen shoot virus then afflicting cocoa and threatening the entire financial basis of colonial administration.<sup>2</sup>

These forest-related public goods—so essential to export crops—were thought, on the basis of largely speculative evidence, to be in dire threat by the intrusion of the savanna into the forest zone. Colonial administrators, working with incomplete and distorted histories, as well as with prevailing concepts of climax ecology, incorrectly asserted that pacific and medically savvy European interlopers had disturbed a primeval but barbaric equilibrium in which disease and tribal wars restrained population growth. The resulting exponential growth of families of forest-burning shifting cultivators farming new commercial crops would combine with dry Harmattan winds and regular bushfires to cause the savanna to steadily and irreversibly encroach into the forest zone (Chipp 1923; Fairhead and Leach 1996, 1998; Oliphant 1932: 3; Ormsby-Gore 1926; Wilks 1996).<sup>3</sup>

The savanna's purported threat to the forests and associated public goods was used by administrators to justify centralized forest management on the basis that imperial trusteeship would solve problems of collective action (public goods not being easily bought and sold and hence over-used and under maintained) between distant peoples and generations. If left to parochial local discretion, administrators argued, public goods would not be maintained to socially optimum levels, since the benefits from conservation might not accrue to the same communities (or generations) incurring the costs of forest protection.<sup>4</sup>

Property of this kind, from which derive the well-being and prosperity of the country, is peculiarly the heritage of posterity, not for the sole enjoyment of the existing generation. If the British Government be regarded as the trustees of these people, then the present beneficiaries have been allowed to squander valuable capital and impoverish the trust ... The climatic effect of deforestation is not necessarily obvious to the existing generation ; reserved forests may be remote from the area they are designed to protect ... Legislation for forest conservation must be based on the recognition that the forests set aside for ensuring climatic stability and the permanent satisfaction of the timber requirements of the country are national property, held in trust for posterity.

(Oliphant 1932: 2, 7, 8, emphasis added)

Chipp (1923: 73) likewise asserted that “no community is prepared to give up its rights over the forest on its land in order that the land of another community may be protected in a far and distant part of the country with which it has no immediate concern.”

The possibility of democratic and representative coordination and planning at supra-local levels was ruled out with the rationale of lack of local capacity, then couched in prevailing tropes of primitive Africans' ignorance, irrationality, fixation with immediate gratification, and inability for complex or abstract thought and planning. In 1933, for instance, the Chief Conservator wrote to the Colonial Secretary in London, arguing that “forestry has no place in politics, particularly

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<sup>2</sup> FD (1938); Governor, *Legislative Council Minutes*, March 15, 1938, p. 10. Indeed, the MLF technical director seemed to approvingly reiterate this view as late as 1996 (Smith 1996).

<sup>3</sup> While the prevalence of these ideas does not mean complete ideological or analytic uniformity (see, among others, Nicholson 1957), nevertheless, such policy “conventional wisdoms” were hegemonic because they were backed with force.

<sup>4</sup> In technical terms, there are positive externalities to forest conservation across space and time.

as practiced by largely illiterate and wholly uninformed people.”<sup>5</sup> Oliphant (1932) likewise argued against democratic administration because “The forests could not be kept intact over the long period required to educate a primitive people” (2). A 1935 Memorandum on the Forestry Problems of the Gold Coast noted, “As an ideal, indirect administration is in line with general policy in West Africa. But it overlooks that forestry is a technical and little understood subject ...”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, on the issue of forest reserves, Lord Lugard, the architect of Indirect Rule, himself recommended circumspection and came to support Nigeria’s policy of direct state control of its Southern forests (Grove 1997). Thus, while chiefs did exercise a degree of decentralized despotism (Mamdani 1996), the state restricted chiefly discretion through threats to exercise overriding centralized powers, threats that were justified on the basis of protecting trans-boundary and trans-generational environmental public goods.

The scientific evidence for these concerns was not strong (Fairhead and Leach 1998), despite public invocations by forestry staff and prevailing legislators of authoritative, rational science. Administrators sought to reserve an apparently arbitrary twenty five per cent of the forest zone, simply because the standardized figure was “commonly quoted as being required to ensure complete protection of water supplies” (Foggie 1962: 232; see also Unwin 1920, cited in Fairhead and Leach 2000). R.C. Marshall, Chief Conservator of Forests, confessed in a draft 1940 memorandum (after reserves had been demarcated and generally constituted) that “there are innumerable theories [of savannization] but very few facts on which credence [sic] can be placed.” The reserves were established, and policy formulated, by an administration for which “the practical problems of tropical forest management were and still are largely terra incognita” (Logan 1946: 59, emphasis in original; see also Collins 1961). The less than sound scientific basis of colonial forestry policy raises the question of whether the colonial administration was acting on precaution, or whether the scientific rhetoric of environmental catastrophe was merely a front for expanding control.<sup>7</sup>

Several memos reveal that administrators were driven not only by Nineteenth Century imperial environmentalism and British colonial bureaucracy, but that they also invoked rhetoric of indirect environmental benefits to justify a centralized management structure that could in turn be used to capture Ghanaian timber revenue. The Department’s founder, H.N. “Timber” Thompson (1909) claimed that the spread of food cultivation was threatening potential revenue from timber and the export crop industry, as well as eliminating Ghanaian forests as a reliable source of timber for England in the wake of declining timber supplies from America timber. Chipp (1923: 68-9) had emphasized not only the benefits of forests for water supplies and agriculture, but that Gold Coast forests were “a source of lumber and produce to the heart of the Empire” and would replace costly imported lumber for “mines, railways, and domestic use.” Chief Conservator Moor argued in 1935 that “A forest reserve is not a museum piece to be looked at, but not touched, it is something to be worked. When any commercial industry creates the demand, the reserve is there to satisfy it ...” He noted that in attempting to persuade chiefs to constitute forest reserves, the government had in 1919 initially emphasized in its propaganda the direct benefits of forests (such as timber revenue and fuel), but chiefs had demanded an

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<sup>5</sup> H.W. Moor to R.C. Chamberlain, September 28, 1933, Ghana National Archives CSO 10/2/56, emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Ghana National Archives CSO 10/2/69.

<sup>7</sup> The difficulties are also apparent in the Tropical Shelterwood Systems (Ghartey 1990; Mooney 1962, 1963; Taylor 1954).

“advance” on these benefits. Consequently, in order to avoid paying out such advances, “This aspect [i.e., direct benefits] had then to be obscured and policy veered to the other extreme; the indirect benefits [i.e. environmental] were stressed and the monetary aspects suppressed.” A different report likewise noted that after 1923 “there was some slight improvement [in reservation], when the keynote of propaganda which apparently until that time had been timber production, was changed to protection of the cacao crop” (Oliphant 1932: 1; cf. Saunders 1944). The environmental public goods aspect of forest reserves was stressed—despite the fact that more than eighty percent of the reserved land was considered “merchantable” (Moor 1935)—as a rationale for centralized control, most likely driven by efforts to control timber-related revenue.

To halt the supposed desiccation, foresters could have worked (within staff limitations) to establish tree barriers in the transition zones and northern regions, particularly since administrators wielded greater control over northern land. However, foresters concentrated on the resource-rich south—at least initially—and only a few visits north were ever made before the 1940s (Logan 1946). Perhaps because the north lacked significant sources of revenue, forests there were not believed to affect the climate (Foggie 1962).

In essence, colonial powers seeking to elicit consent by recalcitrant subjects to more direct, centralized control over lucrative timber and cocoa revenue constructed, circulated, and invoked scientific discourses that savannization—a trans-boundary and trans-generational agro-ecological process—was endangering the public goods provided by forests. “Colonialism on the cheap,” or what Berry (1989, 1993) calls “hegemony on a shoe string,” was pursued not only through attempts to use local socio-political structures in lieu of costly armies of expatriate administrators, but also, as Gramsci’s (1971) writings on hegemony suggest, by countering resistance with attempts to elicit ideological consent through cultural and pedagogic means.<sup>8</sup>

the keynote to the successful prosecution of intensive agriculture and of protection and improvement of forests is education. Enforcing authority on a not understanding people is difficult and costly, and is rarely productive of the results desired ... [T]hrough the methods of education ... lies the only way of bringing home to the people how they can save their country for themselves.

Chipp (1923: 75), emphasis added

These attempts were not always entirely successful (colonial subjects were not passive dupes), and resentment and violent clashes have plagued forestry personnel ever since. The rhetoric may have in fact been aimed at appeasing challenges from the more vocal nascent cocoa, timber, and bureaucratic elites.

The 1927 Ordinance, however, did not result in a proliferation of government-formed reserves, but rather put teeth in the government’s demands upon the Native Authorities. The chiefs responded, presumably to pre-empt more restrictive government control, by constituting the majority of the Forest Reserves through bylaws under powers given them by the Native Administration Ordinance, also passed in 1927. As Amanor (1999: 51) notes, “Chiefs had incentives to constitute forest reserves, since they could gain valuable revenues from royalties which would be lost if local citizens took up the land for farming purposes.” The number of

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<sup>8</sup> They were indeed attempts, for hegemony was not complete, due to limited state reach, internal fractures within the state, and reworking by local peoples.

reserves grew dramatically in the 1930s, and by 1944 chiefs had constituted 127 of the 200 Forest Reserves, the vast majority of which were classified as “productive,” rather than “protective” (FD 1944).

## **ORGANIZING NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Subsidiarity, by allowing for powerfully ambiguous notions of what is practical, possible or feasible, thus has to do with the limits of decentralization, and with who defines such limits and how. In the post-World War II period in Ghana, there was a double movement in forest policy: the environmental benefits of off-reserve areas were devalued, and liquidation of on- and off-reserve areas was legitimized through new discourses about national economic development. In 1935, reserves were classified as either productive or protective (as barriers to the dessicating Harmattan, as shelterbelts humidifying the region, or as protection of watersheds from erosion) (Foggie 1962: 232). In 1948, these functions were enshrined in forestry policy, and only the reserves were entrusted with “the preservation of water supplies, maintenance of climatic conditions favorable to the growth of the principal agricultural crops, minimization of erosion ...” By implication, the Forest Department incorrectly devalued off-reserve areas as expendable, and not crucial to the protection of essential public goods.

The government consequently aimed to preempt farmers by promoting logging of off-reserve trees. Legislation in 1946 expanded the Administration’s powers over concessions and the Forest Department subsequently instructed concessionaires to log as many trees as possible regardless of girth, purportedly before destructive shifting cultivators inevitably arrived. This directive, was then enshrined as official Forest Department Policy in 1948 (Gold Coast 1950), remaining in force for forty-six years. By 1956, such orders already covered more than 6,000 square miles of timber concessions outside the reserves—nearly all the remaining forested areas.

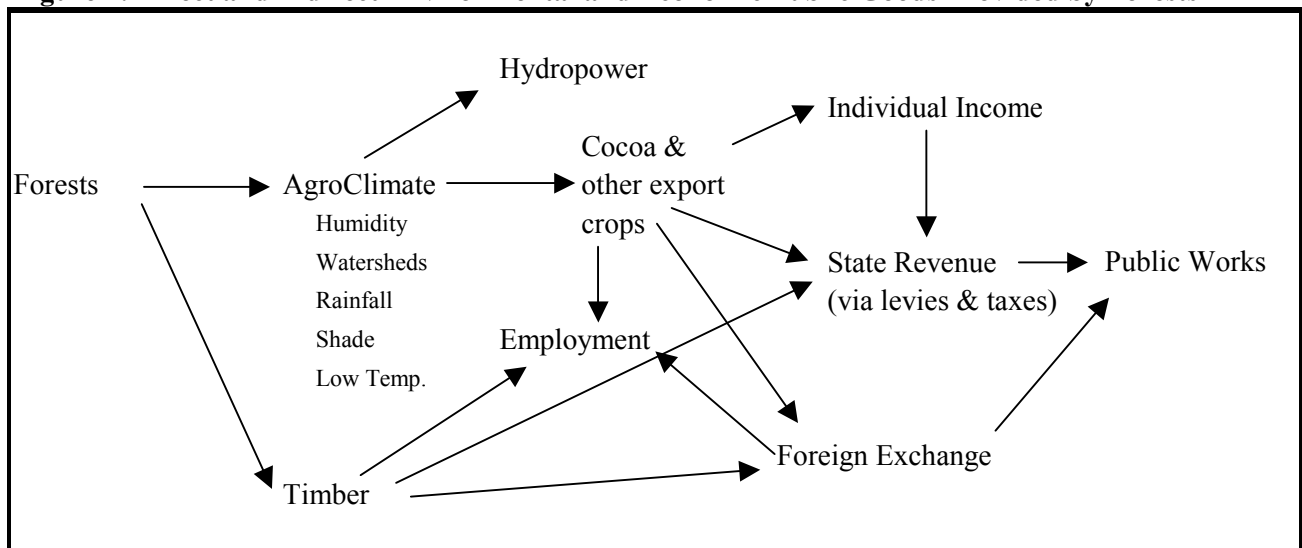
However, simply promoting active tree-harvesting by companies proved insufficient. With the dramatic rise of the timber industry in the post-World War II period, the administration increasingly restricted farmers’ rights to timber. The rhetoric of these times justified restricting farmer tree tenure on the basis of ensuring that national assets (particularly foreign exchange and state revenue) were not wasted, although much of the accumulated funds, from cocoa duties and most likely from timber duties, during the post-war period was repatriated via foreign banks to finance bonds in the UK for reconstruction (Cox-George, 1975). In 1949, the Trees and Timbers Ordinance made regulations on felling trees, marking trees, issuing licenses and permits in reserves, controlling transit and export of timber, and imposing fees.

Centralized regulation and restrictions increased as access to forest resources seemed to face increasing threats. Massive settlement expansion and migration continued in the 1950s with rising cocoa prices, and disease and declining yields in older cocoa areas. Such changes combined with overseas demand for timber exports and the construction of feeder roads by both timber companies and government food promotion programs (FD 1951-2: 1; FD 1954: 2). Foresters struggled to monitor and regulate the expansion (FD 1953; Collins 1960: 127). The problem, foresters believed, was that farmers, although denied the right to harvest and/or sell timber, still retained their rights to farm and settle as the pleased on non-reserve land allocated to them by stools. The subsequent 1959 Protected Timber Lands Act empowered the Minister to restrict farmers from settling, setting fires, farming, or doing any damage to “any tree or timber”

without a license until timber companies had made “maximum usage” of all marketable timber. This policy was again justified by appealing to the mass interest in the revenue generated by timber that would purportedly be “wasted” or “destroyed” by cocoa farmers. Just one year after passage of the Act, more than 1,245 square miles had been designated as protected lands (largely in the Western Region), many of which were subsequently constituted as reserves in 1963. Only due to a lack of staff did the Forestry Commission not reserve all remaining off-reserve forests (FD 1958: 30-31; Boateng 1961: 12).

The rise in the timber industry generated a subtle shift in the terms of the subsidiarity rhetoric used to justify control over lucrative resources. Centralized control over the reserves was justified for reasons other than providing climactic conditions favorable to export crops. Increasingly, the state argued that the timber industry’s exclusive access to off-reserve forests as commodities was necessary to create employment as well as generate the state revenue and foreign exchange necessary to provide social and economic public goods (Collins 1960). Native authorities (replaced in 1951 by Local Councils) were deemed to be unable to decide and regulate forestry matters to the national optimum. Thus, the public goods nature of forest encompassed indirect ecological benefits as well as even more circumlocutory national economic development, the latter being provided by the sale of timber as a valuable commodity (see Figure 1).<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 1: Direct and Indirect Environmental and Economic Public Goods Provided by Forests**



Since cocoa farmers rarely cut all trees on their land (Amanor 1996), off-reserve deforestation was understood in economic as much as ecological terms; that is, mere settlement was defined as forest destruction since the honeycombed farms made forests effectively “useless for organised [sic] timber exploitation” (FD 1953, 1954, 1955).<sup>10</sup> Forests were conceived in reductionist terms as simply groves of standing timber. Consequently, the bulk of forestry efforts and research went into increasing the amount of “economically desirable species,” often by thinning the forest

<sup>9</sup> See also Kennedy (1942b: 145) for the case of Nigeria.

<sup>10</sup> Cocoa trees are more productive under shade, although new hybrid varieties are sun-loving.

through cutting or arsenic poisoning of low-value or non-market trees—in 1964 alone, for instance, nearly 1,000 square miles of forest had been so treated (FD 1964).

Centralized forestry was indicative of the consolidation of power by Nkrumah's government. While protests against chiefs, trading oligopolies and the hypocrisy of colonial army recruits in the second world war resulted in the establishment of more democratic local government in 1951, the subsequent decade saw concerted attempts by the nascent Nkrumah regime to eradicate the powers of chiefs as a means by which the new government could extend its own control over the countryside. Nkrumah's Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) administration, under purported threats of seditious Ashanti successionism, initially suspended numerous local councils, achieving "de facto direct rule," and then fragmented, and thereby weakened local councils (which reached 282 in number by 1965) (Ayee 1994; Rathbone 2000: 43-47, 122, 123). The CPP repeatedly invoked the "public good" in systematically utilizing violence, intimidation, and state-controlled "civil society bodies" to consolidate power against chiefs and the rival National Liberation Movement, the United Party, and the Moslem Association (Rathbone 2000, 102-3, 106, 135; Beckman, 1975).

Through a series of laws from 1958 to 1962, Nkrumah's state usurped from chiefs the power to collect all revenues and manage all lands. The Nkrumah government, as one of the first African colonies to gain independence (1957), sought to quash internal Ashanti-based secessionist and federalist sentiments, to build a seat of power in a politically turbulent region and new Cold War world, and to tap agricultural and natural resources to emulate the Soviet experience of rapid industrialization and thereby break the chains of dependency carried by reliance on export of primary crops and natural resources. To do so, Nkrumah urged domestic processing of timber, regulated and nationalized the timber industry, and prioritized cutting forests in order to establish large food plantations and generate revenue (RoG 1963). Chiefs became mere clients when the government, overriding customary law, empowered itself to depose unfriendly chiefs, and to protect loyal ones from destoolment (Rathbone 2000:124, 142-3).

In 1958, the administration sought to grasp the resources at its disposal and ordered a Commission of Enquiry into all concessions (Boateng et al. 1961), which revealed some 11,000 square miles of concessions, many overlapping and many covering farmland with trees. The Boateng Commission, like its colonial forerunners, claimed that grantors (that is, chiefs) had "failed to protect themselves and their subjects against entrepreneurs" and thus needed the "protection and advice" of the (central) government. By vesting timber in the executive, the Commission argued, the government would be able to "represent and act for" grantors with its competent "professional legal, estate management, and valuation staff," and thereby "bring about an equitable distribution of all proceeds accruing from concessions." Nkrumah concurred and in 1962 ushered through the Administration of Lands Act, which allowed the president to usurp management control of any land he so choose. Later in the same year came the Concessions Act, which went further by declaring that all forest reserves, timber lands, and "timber or trees" were thereby vested in "the President in trust for the stools concerned," allowing the president "to execute any deed or do any act as a trustee ..."

The Nkrumah government quickly brought centralized and despotic forestry administration to its zenith. Executive fiat replaced judicial examination (Kilba 1989: 249). In devising and utilizing

the Concessions Act, the government, as Amanor (1999: 70) contends “institutionalised the myth that farmers traditionally had no rights to timber trees growing on their land.” Mayers and Kotey (1996: 17) summarize how, over the subsequent two decades,

concessions were granted by central government with little or no input by stools, village communities and local authorities. Individuals did not receive any portion of royalties and had no legal right to be informed of, or to refuse, felling or trees by timber concession holders. Further, they suffered damage to their trees, crops and farms when timber trees were felled, receiving little or no compensation.

## **SAILING THE CENTRALIZED SHIP OF STATE**

With central control over forest resources generally established by the 1960s, the subsequent seven political regimes were able to utilize the centralized forestry apparatus to exploit timber resources and forest land for private benefit, with ever declining need to justify their actions to a battered and fleeing civil society. Even after Nkrumah, the same historically consistent rationales were used to exclude forestry from the National Liberation Council’s proposed program of decentralization. While the program recommended—like subsidiarity proponents of today—that “management decisions ought to be taken as near as possible to the operation” (Mills-Odei et al. 1967: 18), forestry was left out (although District Authorities were empowered to reject timber concessions):

The management and exploitation of the nation’s forests must, if they are to remain an economic resource in perpetuity, be undertaken on a national basis ... If the national forests were to be placed under District or Regional management, there would be a continuing temptation to realize the cash value of resources more quickly than is compatible with the interest of future generations ... Moreover, the protective reserves have a significance beyond the Districts or Regions ... Past experience has shown that, where this conflict [between man and nature] is resolved at political levels, the short-term priority of the agriculturalist tends to prevail over the longer-term national interest ... Forestry (like wildlife) takes place in areas largely unoccupied and does not provide a direct service to people.

*Ibid.*, 18, emphasis in original

Subsequent regimes devolved certain non-forestry powers and administration only as minor tokens to appease critics, or as a means to establish broader security.

Each regime, however, has used the centralized apparatus to take the slice of the forestry “cake,” as is evident in heightened logging off- and on-reserve. The 1948 Forest Policy stated that reserves could provide “direct benefits in the form of sustained adequate supply of forest produce to meet actual and potential local requirements and the demands of the export trade.” By emphasizing liquidation off-reserve forests, the Forest Department accepted active deforestation by and for vast mechanized monocultures (FD, 1971, 1973: 4; Francois, 1989: 4; Konings, 1986). And while both establishing reserves and liquidating off-reserve forests had been justified as measures to save the publicly beneficial on-reserve forests, with post-World War II markets booming, subsequent governments heavily logged the forest reserves themselves until economic collapse in the late 1970s. As soon as the Ghanaian economy picked up in the late 1980s due to macro-stabilization and infusions of donor capital, legal and illegal logging on the reserves again increased.

Contrary to the claims of economic and environmental public welfare, only narrow interests benefited from the post-independence centralized structure of forestry policy, legislation and management. By the 1960s, nearly all exploitable forested land had been leased out by the government as concessions. These concessions, many of which had been allocated by the British to foreign firms, were increasingly appropriated for friendly Ghanaian clients (or at least Ghanaian representatives of international firms), first by Nkrumah, and then by Colonel Acheampong, resulting in greater numbers of concessions of smaller size (Aggrey 1976; Blay et al. 1967; IIED 1993: 63; Kilba 1989: 248). A Ghana Timber Marketing Board, as well as a Union, were established by Nkrumah mainly as means to exert control over the trade and to channel inputs and loans to politically favored clientele (Blay et al. 1967). Loggers were able to harvest trees for token payments to government and traditional authorities, with little or no compensation to farmers for damaging their farms. Timber companies pressured the government in 1970 to reduce the felling cycle to fifteen years so as to not let “over-mature” trees go to waste; only in 1990 was the cycle revised again to forty years (Annie-Bonsu 1970; FD 1971: 2; Prah 1994). Smaller operators obtained timber licenses from the Lands Commission for three square miles for three years (Chryssides 1975). Millers, largely expatriate, were able to benefit through bans on exports of certain species (fourteen species in 1979, fifteen by 1993, and all in 1994), also justified with environmental rhetoric. The export ban increased the domestic availability and affordability of logs, but also thereby drastically reduced public revenue (Asante et al. 1991; Birikorang 2001; Mayers and Kotey 1996). Traditional authorities benefited through revenue (although marginal and irregular) from off- and on-reserve production. The Lands Commission was able to benefit from irregularities in issuing timber licenses and in collection of timber royalties. The Forest Department benefited from its thirty per cent share of on-reserve royalties—purportedly to cover operating costs (IIED 1993: 53, 63-4). This situation continued unabated until the economic collapse of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

While the bulk of this essay focuses on means by which government and associated select interests maintained access to and control over resources, I am also very aware that neither acceptance nor resistance by local populations of their broader political and economic conditions can be automatically assumed. This essay, like social science in general, is plagued by the difficult question of why, how, and when rural people consent to, or rebel against, unfavorable policies or rule.<sup>11</sup> There is a dearth of research on contemporary rural politics in Ghana, but a few speculations can be put forward. The apparent collective passivity of the Ghanaian countryside with regard to effectively changing post-independence national forest policies and administration (as opposed to ad hoc or hidden forms of protest) appears to be partly a product of specific configurations of rural differentiation along class, gender, and age axes, political cooptation and repression, and national, regional, and international migrations.

Forest resource users are usually at least partly agriculturalists, and the forums to voice their concerns are often production-related organizations, although other bodies such as churches or mosques, youth, women, education or ethnic associations may also be salient (albeit understudied). However, the importance of farmers’ movements, and associated issues of production and class, in environmental decentralization is often overlooked, not least in Ghana, perhaps indicative of the bifurcation of research on agriculture and forestry (Agarwal and Sivaramkrishnan 2000; Amanor 1994, 1996). There is a legacy of rural mobilization in Ghana,

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<sup>11</sup> A few classics and reviews include Bates (1981); Lichbach (1994); Moore (1966); Scott (1985); Skocpol (1994).



as with anti-despot Asafo companies and the debilitating anti-monopsonist cocoa “hold up” (with good participation by women) of 1937 (Asiamh 2000; cf. Austen 1988; Kimble 1963). Nationalist struggles gave rise to a United Ghana Farmers Council and its claims to represent the “everyday farmer.” Such an organization, or more precisely, a federation of groups, could have played a crucial role in lobbying for forest policy change. However, given the importance of cocoa revenues to Nkrumah’s industrial welfare-state, the Council was co-opted by the increasingly autocratic Nkrumah Administration, becoming highly corrupt and centralized, and focused almost exclusively towards large, wealthy male cocoa farmers (Beckman 1975). People resisted the Councils capriciousness with formal petitions, complaints, threats, and the like, but without sufficient alternative organization to achieve institutional change until the 1966 military coup d’etat. By the 1970s, the general political climate again was unfavorable for rural organization. The dictatorial military regime of Colonel Acheampong controlled print, radio and television media, clamped down on protest and dissent in vocal cities and limited organization in the countryside to donor-financed mega-projects or micro-scale church welfare projects (Chazan 1983; Oquaye 1980; Pobee 1992). In this context, resistance against forestry policies could take the form of voting with one’s feet, as millions of Ghanaians left for the frontiers of the Western Region, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Europe and the United States. Farmers staying put simply voted with machetes and matches, eradicating timber trees and seedlings that, under existing policies, brought them more harm than benefit.

## **MAINTAINING CONTROL IN TURBULENT WATERS**

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the regime of J. J. Rawlings faced a combination of broader pressures and sector-specific incentives to reform forestry industry and management. However, the government evaded its own promises and mandates to decentralize forestry by resuscitating “subsidiarity rhetoric” in order to capture aid monies and a greater share of domestic resources for itself and the industry through greater centralized regulation and enforcement in the face of what had become a repressed and fragmented opposition.

The Rawlings regime, having seized power in 1982 for the second time, was able to survive a turbulent first five years marred by several attempted coups, drought, bushfires, and the forced repatriation of over a million Ghanaians living in Nigeria. By the late 1980s, the regime faced domestic pressures for democratization and administrative reform from university students, trade unions, lawyers, churches and the media (Nugent 1996). The state also had to deal with a shaky financial base (shortages of foreign exchange and state revenue, and mounting debt), leading to efforts to cut costs by shedding various sectors through privatization or devolution of management responsibilities to District Assemblies—reform of forestry out of the civil service was said to be “in line with current thinking in Government circles” about creating self-financing agencies based on fee-for-service revenues (Anonymous 1992: 21).

Internationally, the regime grappled with pressure to continue neoliberal economic restructuring, but to at the same time ensure social safety nets, “good governance,” and environmental sustainability (Cornia et al. 1987; Hyden and Bratton 1992; Mosley et al. 1991; World Bank 1995). The Forest Resource Management Project (FRMP)—the start of major donor involvement in the sector—was a product of growing environmental concerns, in particular the Global Tropical Forest Action Program jointly conducted by the British, Canadians, United Nations and the World Bank.

These domestic and international pressures combined with incentives to reform that were specific to the Ghanaian forestry sector. The regime sought to simultaneously capture more aid money and greater revenue from forests. The Forest Department had to adapt to the fact that aid to the forestry sector, like the forty million dollar FRMP, was increasingly conditional upon deeper institutional and management restructuring rather than shortsighted infusions of project funds for computers, vehicles and consultants (Charles and MacLachlan 1997; Kemp et al. 1993: 22). To meet new aid conditionalities, the Forest Department conducted management and regulation reviews, and established a Rural Forestry program and a Collaborative Forestry Management Unit.

A second sector-specific impetus for reform of forestry administration and regulation was the government's desire to capture a greater share of the resources produced by the then booming sector. Milling capacity doubled from 1984 to 1988 (to an amount greater than the Annual Allowable Cut) with an infusion of International Development Assistance capital through the Export Rehabilitation Project—fifty eight million dollars for “sawmill improvement” and seventy million for logging equipment, dispersed through poorly supervised loans and grants and coupled with legal and illegal tax rebates (SilviConsult 1989; FOEG 1997). This revitalization, combined with broader economic recovery, devaluation, and a renewed overseas demand, led to dramatically increased levels of logging—both legal and illegal (FOEG 1997; IIED 1993: 121). As Smith (1996) describes, “what had been a lingering problem of unregulated, inequitable timber harvesting on farms had become a crisis ... Much of the felling was illegal and speculative ... huge sums of revenue were being lost.” The corrupt and centralized regime of forest regulation was breaking down under the weight of massive industry expansion. The necessity of involving local people in forestry was also increasingly recognized (in part simply because of the excessive cost of widespread direct state monitoring and enforcement), marking an embrace of both stick- and carrot-based approaches, or rule by both domination and discipline (cf. Neumann 2001).

It is in this historically and geographically specific conjuncture of Ghanaian political economy and international economic development that the Rawlings Administration increasingly refined its populist post-coup declarations of decentralization. Pressures for reform resulted in the inclusion of forestry in the 1988 and 1993 Local Government Acts as a sector to be decentralized to the district level, and culminated in a new Forest and Wildlife Policy (MLF 1994) and the 1994 Interim Measures on logging—which included “unprecedented, but limited” (Awudi and Davies 2001a: 41) changes by way of pre- and post-felling inspections with “local representatives,” log inspection forms and certificates of conveyance.<sup>12</sup> The Ministry of Land and Forestry's 1994 Forest and Wildlife Policy likewise notes as a “guiding principle” the necessity of developing “a decentralized participatory democracy by involving local people in matters concerned with their welfare” (MLF 1994: Sec. 3.2.15).

Nonetheless, these promises of decentralization were not motivated by sincere intentions to devolve powers and resources to representative and downwardly accountable local authorities.

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<sup>12</sup> More superficial suggestions for decentralization, or at least deconcentration, were made in 1940 and in 1958. See Marshall (1940) and FD (1958); the latter calls for the “entire conversion of the Division to an entirely local service in the shortest possible time ...” (emphasis added).

Rather, they were means to navigate through the turbulent waters of political and economic reform, to appease specific domestic and international critics—a calculated attempt to garner legitimacy and gather funds for a regime wishing to remain in power for another decade or more (Nugent 1996; Thomi 2000). When it came to actually holding the government to its word (and laws), the administration, as detailed below, once again latched on to “subsidiarity rhetoric” to justify centralized and despotic control.

During the 1990s, the Ministry and Forest Department initially tolerated discussions of different structures for forestry (including decentralization), but was able to suppress any strong moves towards relinquishing powers and resources to local governments. To stem the leakage of valuable resources in the early 1990s, donors, the government, and Forestry staff urged moving the Forest Department out of the slowly reforming civil service and reconstituting it as a smaller, more corporate semi-autonomous body so that staff could be given proper incentives to clamp down on illegal activities and to collect the full value of royalties and taxes (Anonymous 1992; Anonymous 1993; Touche Ross & Co. 1994). Forestry initially wanted a 100 percent increase in the number of forest guards within and without the reserves to monitor logging and to assist with revenue collection (FD 1993; cf. FSD 1998). FD staff could not be singled out within the civil service for (higher) compensation based upon performance, and hence the civil service was perceived as “inherently inflexible and characterized by time-honoured rigidities” (Anonymous 1992: 21; MLF 1996: 17). Forestry was also plagued by inadequate and irregular annual budget appropriations, low salaries and wages, low morale, few trained staff, and an inability to recruit staff, or reward or punish workers. However, in 1988 the World Bank had made an “explicit decision to proceed with institutional reform within the civil service, rather than establish an autonomous organization ...”—a move that was later regarded as a mistake (Kemp et al. 1993: 8). While the staff of the civil service was reduced from 140,000 in 1987 to 93,000 in 1992 (IIED 1993: 36), reform of the civil service has nonetheless been excruciatingly slow, and a Local Government Service Act was still pending in 2002, nine years after passage of the Local Government Act.

To bring some clarity and suasion on appropriate organizational structures, donors in the second phase of the FRMP, hired consultants from Touch Ross & Co, a firm with an “established international reputation,” to give advice with the “necessary weight” (Gayfar 1995). The gray-suited consultants, however, largely ignored the local particularities of forestry. They consequently presented a narrow concept of decentralization that was an uneasy compromise between predetermined models from corporate organizational theory and the existing Ghanaian legal requirements (*ibid*). District Assemblies would meet their “forestry needs” by purchasing services through ad hoc Memoranda of Understanding and Service Level Agreements with the Forest Service or other “service providers,” such as NGOs, businesses, or various government agencies. District Assemblies—or more ambiguously, “local authorities”—could ensure accountability by choosing amongst service suppliers on the market (Touche Ross & Co. 1995b: 23). Such commoditized forestry goods and services excluded decision-making, implementation, or enforcement powers. Decentralization instead was equated with DA purchase of advice and materials, such as tree seedlings, farm advice, public information, advice on negotiations with concessions, assistance with district forestry plans, stove designs, and royalty disbursement (although even the latter four needs were axed in the final MLF-edited report) (Touche Ross & Co. 1995a). This restricted model of decentralization would take as long as fifteen years to

implement due to scarcity of funding, uncertainty over decentralization in general, and donors' preoccupation with their own short-term priorities (such as the World Bank's FRMP and Rural Forestry Project, British aid support to the Policy Branch of the FD, and German projects in the Volta Region) (Touche Ross & Co. 1995a: 53).

The Forest Department again invoked the familiar rhetoric of subsidiarity in its vehement opposition to Touche Ross & Co.'s even limited proposals for decentralization, calling them "completely and totally unworkable" (FD 1995: 2, emphasis in original). "The decentralisation described in the Local Government Act," the Department argued, "will seriously compromise the resource and will put resource managers in a position where they cannot effectively manage this national asset" (*ibid* 2). They resolved to draw up a memo (MLF 1995) laying out the roles and responsibilities of the District Assemblies "but which maintains the forester's authority over management" (FD 1995: 2, emphasis in original). The reasoning was much the same as earlier in the century:

This is a national asset and these forests provide intangible benefits to a wide section of the population (maintaining microclimate for agriculture and safeguarding the population's drinking water supply to name but two) ... we are committed to the spirit of decentralisation ... [but] it would be reckless to transfer the authority over forest management and protection to the District Assemblies or the DCE [District Chief Executives] (indeed they have a vested interest in exploitation as they derive a large portion of their income from royalties).

(*ibid* 5, emphasis in original).

As a result of such strong refusal by the MLF, the already quite limited language of Touche Ross & Co. transformed significantly to only briefly note "decentralized services" and "relationships," while the Ministry would retain "control over policy" (50), and staff need not be under the aegis of the District Assemblies (Touche Ross & Co. 1995a: 49). To further appease the MLF, they noted that such suggestions could later be revised (Touche Ross & Co. 1995b: 23). There was subsequently almost no mention of decentralization in the Forestry Development Master Plan 1996-2020 drawn up the following year (MLF 1996).

More recently, the northern Forest Department has also picked up on the rhetoric of subsidiarity to evade decentralization. As described above, the Administration first invoked subsidiarity by portraying southern forests as strategic national assets. The implication was that northern forests were not in the "strategic national interest," and the Ministry initially proposed to abolish Forest Department activities there by 2001 (MLF 1995: 5). However, as northern foresters saw this threat they lobbied to retain northern administration, which was then to be decentralized under a project funded in part by the World Bank (FSD 1998; cf. Ribot 2001; Kennedy 1942b: 144; World Bank 1998). By 2002, even decentralization in the north had been blocked, as northern foresters also invoked subsidiarity to retain control; this time by asserting the northern forests are critical to the (trans-district) watersheds of the White and Black Volta Rivers that provide crucial national assets in the form of drinking water and hydro-power (although few studies exist on these connections, and each sector is beset by numerous other problems of greater importance).

As officials constructed subsidiarity in order to avoid decentralization and thereby consolidate power, they repeated earlier inclinations to rely on ambiguous analysis and elisions cloaked in scientism. In a series of interviews with forestry officials and experts about the 1990s negotiations, I found systematic tendencies to elide between on- and off-reserve management, to

reduce decentralization to an all-or-nothing process (that is, suppressing questions about which functions and powers can or cannot be devolved, and thus ruling out any sort of local discretionary authority), to mis-portray previous problems with reforms as invalidating decentralization, to put forth claims without study or documentation, and to occlude deficiencies of the centralized administration. The issues cited as precluding decentralization have not, to my knowledge, been rigorously studied by the Ministry or the Forest Department, and are only otherwise addressed (if at all) in an unpublished eight-page report (MLF 1995).

First is the elision between on-and-off reserve areas. Since the forest reserves and stool lands frequently span multiple districts, many officials argued that devolution would create excessive problems of cross-district coordination, collaboration and/or conflict: “A resource of such strategic national importance cannot be coherently managed by numerous, independent local authorities whose jurisdiction does not extend beyond the borders of their district” (MLF 1995: 5). These complex issues of jurisdiction over the forest reserves were frequently invoked as precluding any decentralization in the off-reserve areas.

When queried further, many forestry officials argued that devolution in off-reserve areas would also face intractable difficulties from the current situation in which the Forest Department administratively uses fifty three “forest districts” whose boundaries do not exactly coincide with each and every political boundary of the 110 District Assemblies—a claim that seems somewhat flimsy since I was unable to locate more than one person in the entire Forest Department and Lands Administration Department that possesses, or is even aware of the existence of, a map of these “forestry districts.”

More importantly, most forestry officials, like their predecessors, ruled out inter-district coordination and collaboration in management of forest reserves, or a revision of the forestry districts, without much serious evidence or analysis as simply too complicated. Decentralizing such prized resources might also, they claim, be politically and socially explosive: “The forest reserves are by and large stool and skin lands. Considerable local friction would be aroused if management control were transferred to the District Authority” (MLF 1995: 6). Even “discretionary authority” over off-reserve forests was dismissed too politically sensitive and potentially divisive, given the only five-year-old democracy in a region plagued by dictatorships and civil wars (e.g. Ghanaian Chronicle 2000). Decentralization was thus misrepresented as an all-or-nothing option; either decentralize both on- and off-reserve areas, or neither; either devolve all powers and resources to District Assemblies, or none.

The negative experiences correlated with (but not necessarily caused by) previous devolutions of powers and resources to the District Assemblies were also repeatedly cited as evidence of the flaws of decentralization, despite the fact that these devolutions did not constitute decentralization and sector troubles were largely due to other causes. Local government was depicted without evidence, or in contradiction to existing evidence, as inherently parochial and short-sighted, and thus susceptible to set standards either too low or too high (as in the case of chainsaw permits and regulation of the timber industry) or to under-invest in environmental protection (as in the case of local use of timber revenue).

Many interviewees claimed that a Ministerial directive allowing the Districts in 1991 to sell chainsaw permits led to an unsustainable increase in legal and illegal logging (permit allocation was subsequently re-centralized in 1994)—purportedly an instance where local priorities and control produced negative environmental outcomes. However, devolving allocation of permits did not itself constitute decentralization, and increased chainsawing is not entirely attributable to the devolution of permitting. From the outset, even the legal responsibilities of allocation were unclear, as both Forestry and DAs were issuing permits (FOEG 1997: 16, 69, 71). The power to issue permits was unaccompanied by public education on the change and did not include transfers of requisite resources to the District Assemblies in the form of staff, finances, guidelines, or advice for issuing permits. Nonetheless, in 1992, districts still only issued permits for less than a fifth of the total chainsaws operating (FOEG 1997: 63). Regulation of chainsawing went above and beyond simple permitting, as chainsawyers could often collude with staff from centralized departments—including the police, customs, and forestry—as well as chiefs to illegally cut and market of lumber (FOEG 1997: 16). There was also great popular demand for chainsawing, since, under existing institutional arrangements farmers could receive one third of the lumber that chainsawyers cut on their land, as well as substantial local employment, whilst receiving nothing from capital-intensive concessionaires except perhaps damage to their farms from roads and skidding (Amanor 1996). Chainsaw lumber was also cheaper and more locally available than timber from the capital-intensive loggers and millers who, attracted by skyrocketing overseas prices, exported nearly all their wood (FOEG 1997). The Eastern Region, for instance, had the fewest millers and (consequently) the largest number of chainsawyers (FOEG 1997: 16). The devolution of permitting was also unaccompanied by further financial decentralization, and was probably intended to substitute for it: permitting would provide newly constituted district governments with revenue in order to legitimate them after controversial elections, since the government was at that time unwilling to give more than slim, erratic, and heavily regulated allocations from central coffers (Ayee and Tay 1998; FOEG 1997: 69; Nugent 1996). The timber market was booming with overseas demand and infusions of cheap donor-capital to increase logging and milling capacity (to greater than the legal yearly limit). Ghanaians expelled from Nigeria after oil-related economic downturns brought back cheap chainsaws purchased with previously over-valued Naira. Illegal chainsawing had become severe several years before the devolution, and re-centralization of permit allocation in 1994 failed to stop illegal sawing. The subsequent complete ban in 1997 of all chainsawing has simply prompted sawyers to arm themselves and to work at night, on holidays or sacred days, or in remote areas (recently to the north of the country). Thus, while the case of chainsaw permits does reveal problems of sectoral pandemonium and widespread institutional malfeasance, it is not strong evidence of intrinsic problems of decentralization per se.

Another piece of evidence marshaled to show intrinsic drawbacks of local governmental control over forestry is the lack of tangible projects (and particularly forestry sector projects) implemented by District Assemblies, particularly since Assemblies received forty-eight and one half percent of timber royalties (as stipulated in the 1992 Constitution). In the first half of the 1990s, royalties in Ghana were still some of the lowest in the world, and, as mentioned below, were frequently uncollected, let alone redistributed to Districts. Recent spot checks indicate that currently, “land revenues” make up a roughly ten to fifteen percent of the total local government revenue of some heavily forested districts, making it the largest source of district funds aside from central government allocations. However, this apportionment is a far cry from fiscal

decentralization. During the 1990s, actual transfer of all funds (including royalties) to District Assemblies was delayed, irregular, subject to approval by the Ministry of Finance, and often less than the amount needed and requested (Ayee and Tay 1999). The District Assemblies also play almost no role in collecting royalties. By the late 1990s, when more outstanding royalties were being recovered by Forestry, the Ministry decided to effectively lower the proportion allocated to the District Assemblies in order to retain more for the Forestry Commission, which had been re-constituted as a “self-financing” public corporation (see below). Moreover, the essence of local government is to have the discretion to allocate resources according to local priorities—it is the District’s prerogative if they decide to use funds to build a school rather than a plantation. The Forest Department has not shown a greater ability to carry out effective projects (forest-related or otherwise) at the District level with its share of revenue. In sum, contrary to unsubstantiated “conventional wisdoms” in the forest administration, neither authority over chainsaw permits nor finances had truly been decentralized, and neither experience is responsible for the ongoing negative social and environmental conditions in forestry.

Other commentators suggested that local authorities would implement restrictions (they did not specify which restrictions) that would be too stringent, and thus ruin the local timber industry and exacerbate unemployment (Adjei-Yeboah 1989: 305; Safo 2001b; Smith 1996)—a potential case of local control leading to negative impacts on community welfare. In the words of the Ministry of Lands and Forestry, controls over forest could not be decentralized because they are of “strategic national importance” since “the wood processing industry now employs over 100,000 people ...” (MLF 1995: 5). However, this figure only comes out to a little over one percent of the total workforce of nine million (FAOSTAT). The government has in fact deliberately expanded employment in the timber industry (particularly in milling and processing) through an export ban (as opposed to a levy) as a means to compensate for the failure to generate jobs in other sectors (Asante et al. 1991; Birikorang 2001). In sum, there is little evidence that decentralizing discretionary authority over certain forestry matters would necessarily be too stringent, too lax, or too complex.

In addition to the purported problems with decentralization in principle, many officials also asserted, usually with only casual anecdotes, that decentralization intrinsically carries insurmountable practical problems of implementation. This pragmatist skepticism tended to over-estimate the fixity of existing “external” constraints and often failed to weigh potential difficulties of implementation against the current deficiencies of the centralized administration. For example, many commentators mentioned the unrepresentative nature of the District Assemblies, in which a third of the members are appointed and which is overseen by an appointed District Chief Executive with considerable powers. However, as early as April 2002, plans were in place by the Kufuor Administration to remove the one-third quota and establish elections for Chief Executives (MLGRD 2002).

Another practical problem that many officials and experts cited was a lack of local capacity, although again without much serious documentation (Mayers and Kotey 1996: iii; Touche Ross & Co. 1995a: 17; FOEG 1997). Indeed Ribot (2001) notes the tendency for specious suggestions of “inadequate capacity” to be used as justifications to avoid devolving powers or reducing central oversight. True decentralization itself can help develop capacity. Conyers (1990) notes that often “it is only the pressure of decentralization which motivates the action necessary to

improve capacity—and motivates the existing staff and the local level to recognize their own potential and demonstrate their real abilities” (quoted in Ribot 2001; cf. Asare et al. 2002).

These portrayals of the problems in practice and principle of decentralization were also highly selective, because they were not weighed against the centralized administration’s own shortcomings. The administration has not met its justifications for retaining centralized control; rather, it has, for roughly half a century, systematically failed to live up to its own rationale for existing, including reconciling transgenerational and transboundary processes and assuring inter-jurisdictional equity. By the early 1990s, nearly all off-reserve forest had been depleted and a third of the reserves were “severely degraded” (Hawthorne and Abu-Juam 1995). In terms of inter-jurisdictional equity—where a simple redistributive tax would seem to work and has earlier antecedent in Ghana (Amanor 1996: 6-7; Oliphant 1932: 5; Richards 1999)—private hands have appropriated the wealth of the once heavily forested Western Region, which remains one of the poorest and severely lacks infrastructure, while non-forest areas have seen precious little revenue redistributed their way. In fact, the forestry administration has not had any revenue to redistribute since it has failed to cover its own operating costs for eighty-seven years (FD various years). The administration consistently set royalties below market values, and failed even to collect those limited royalties, to prosecute non-payers or to reduce illegal logging (Awudi and Davies 2001a). In 1993, the total forest revenue collected amounted to five US dollars per cubic meter of wood, while the actual value of the wood was ninety eight US dollars per cubic meter—with domestic processors able to capture roughly two thirds of the uncollected value by buying cheap logs and selling higher-value lumber (Mayers and Kotey 1996: 14). Mayers and Kotey (1996: 15) note that “The low proportion of stumpage value collected in forest fees has represented a ‘gift’ from society to industry,” which Richards (1995) estimates to be roughly 100 million dollars per year. By 1999 the government and landowners still only received thirteen percent of the market value of logs (net of logging costs) (Awudi and Davies 2001a: 38).

Moreover, state-owned forestry companies racked up large debts over and beyond their value in timber rights, and had to be publicly subsidized to stay solvent, although several were privatized, some below their market value—representing a net loss to society and a gain for select interests, rather than a redistribution of public revenues (Awudie and Davis 2001a: 33). By the early 1990s, the government had failed to collect more than seven million dollars owed by the timber industry (including state-owned enterprises) to government and stools. The only areas where the Department could be said to have marginally succeeded was in generating employment and foreign exchange, but these were both were doomed to fall due to unsustainable rates of exploitation (Birikorang 2001).

In invoking subsidiarity—based more on elisions and omissions than evidence—to suppress decentralization, the Rawlings Administration was able to block significant locally-empowering structural reforms in spite of domestic and international pressure. Instead, the Administration simultaneously captured donor funds and retained control of forestry to their own benefit and to the gain of other select interests. For many years the regime dodged its own promises to donors of improved procedures for allocating concessions, increased royalty rates, greater collection of stumpage fees, replacement of the log export ban with levies, and conservation and social issues (Kemp et al. 1993: 18; World Bank 1995). Sector officials capitalized on donor incrementalism by placating aid hands with talk of further reforms. The government took seven years of donor



financed institutional reform projects to pass a law reorganizing the Forest Department into the Forestry Commission (a public corporation).<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile actual changes in administrative practice have been slow, and as of 2001, donor support made up nearly a quarter of the Forestry Commission's revenues.

Because all consideration of decentralization was jettisoned, the subsequent institutional reshuffling did not increase the representativeness or downward accountability of the Forestry Commission, which instead remained under the sway of the executive, industry, and chiefs. The new Forestry Commission Act effectively limits representation on the commission to state, chief, industry interests, and all of whom are appointed by the president. The 1997 Timber Resources Management Act (TRMA) gives the (presidentially appointed) Minister of Lands and Forestry broad powers to make regulations and policy. While the Minister does indeed have to be approved by Parliament, and has to report to Parliament, once installed he or she in practice operates with substantial autonomy (which may point also to the present shortcomings of Parliament's capacity and organization). Furthermore, the TRMA helps formalize rural Ghanaians loss of control over forest resources by stipulating that as soon as trees become lucrative they are classed as "timber" and fall under the ambit of centralized state regulation, while rural peoples' investments of labor, capital and knowledge—and hence claims to ownership—in such trees are read out of the landscape via formulaic standards of industrial forestry (grid or line planting of fast growing exotic species).

Vested interests were also able to retain strong control over the new procedures for allocating concessions. Although the TRMA institutionalized the new procedures for logging outlined in the 1994 Interim Measures, local people still have no representation on the Contract Evaluation Committee, and thus have no mechanism to voice their concerns over the selection of loggers or the terms of the concessions (known as Timber Utilization Contracts (TUCs)). The limits of the new procedures for allocating TUCs came to the fore in the year 2000, when the Rawlings Administration, having lost the presidential election, hurriedly approved over forty contracts on criteria more indicative of nepotism than logging competence. For more than a decade, donors have pushed for "Market Based Instruments," particularly allocation through competitive bidding—although these have been resisted by Ghanaian officials claiming that auctioning would favor large foreign firms—but few serious attempts have been made to include local government or farmer or rural organization representatives on the selection committee or any of the other boards.

Without deep-seated restructuring, the reforms, which were touted as giving some measure of community level involvement, remain trivial. There are roughly five cited instruments of community-based natural resource management, but they are limited in principle, and, in practice, are not effectively implemented. Firstly, while concessionaires must now make Social Responsibility Agreements with the affected communities, the SRAs are limited by ministerial directive to five percent of timber revenues, and lack mechanisms for participatory selection and

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<sup>13</sup> Donors supported legislative and administrative efforts to transfer the Forest Department out of the civil service by reconstituting it as an semi-autonomous "Forest Service" (the aim of British-funded Forest Sector Development Project, Phase I). However, constitutional requirements—that only a "Forestry Commission" can "be responsible for the regulation and management of the utilization of the natural resources concerned and the coordination of the policies in relation to them" (269(1))—and other donor-financed institutional strengthening measures required the process start over (FSDP Phase II).

enforcement of delivery, with consistent bias towards chiefs and elites (Awudi and Davies 2001b). Second, felling inspections are likewise biased towards superficial community representation through chiefs and appointed District Chief Executives. Third, Timber Tending Tolls are of recent invention, and are yet to be operationalized.

While these instruments mark a change from past policies, farmers remain unaware of them, they are not implemented for practical and political reasons, and they remain relatively limited in the broader arena of forest regulation (Richards and Asare 1999). The new Kufuor Administration has put a hold on the formal concession process—and hence the limited instruments for participation—pending a review of allegations that contract selection was biased under the previous Rawlings administration. In the meantime, logging has continued with the use of Timber Utilization Permits and Salvage Permits, both of questionable legality and without strong social or environmental guidelines. District Customer Service Centers—indicative of British aid’s neo-corporate orientation—are likewise yet to be operationalized (Forest Commission 2001).

As a fifth mechanism for participation, the Forestry Commission, with substantial donor support, continues to set up Community Forestry Committees (CFCs), whose precise structure, functions and resources are not entirely clear yet, despite bold statements in project documents and to communities (Asare 2000a; FSD and ITTO 2000). CFCs at the village level are supposed to have inclusive representation, yet questions of transparency and accountability arise since CFCs are set up on an *ad hoc* basis, and run in parallel with local government structures (Asare et al. 2002). They are to hold public meetings, promote “stakeholder awareness and participation” in preparation of District Forest Management Plans, ensure consultation and understanding for the Social Responsibility Agreements, and monitor implementation (Asare 2000a: 4-5). While such “information” functions are potentially useful, they must not obscure the fact that CFCs essentially aim to promote “participation” in projects, policies, and laws that are pre-determined by unrepresentative and unaccountable central powers. Beyond information sharing, the strongest leverage CFCs are able to muster is holding “workshops and meetings at which the community representatives, that is, the CFCs, will be invited to present their views”—views which the Commission and Ministry can choose to consider or ignore at their discretion (Asare 2000b). The real impetus to form CFCs has been to meet aid conditionalities that require community monitored “buffer zones” around Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas (Asare 1998). After ten years of “collaborative forestry,” it may be asked whether CFCs are indeed precursors to greater devolution, or whether they act to distract and appease demands for true decentralization.

These instruments of participation, limited in both principle and in practice, thus pale in comparison to the powers retained by unaccountable and unrepresentative central administration. In addition to the case of concession allocation mentioned above, the executive has also retained a ban on log exports despite considerable social costs (Birikorang 2001). Furthermore, ordinary rural Ghanaians have very little say in how the resource are valued through stumpage fees, which are set by the Minister, historically at very low levels which are allowed to fall behind inflation (Awudi and Davies 2001a). Stumpage fees derive from a relatively uniform formula based on international market prices that have historically been extremely volatile. There is thus no local discretion to adjust stumpage fees according to precise ecological and environmental priorities

and conditions (Barbier et al. 1994; Ghartey 1990; Hawthorne 1993: xi; Logan 1947; Prah 1994: 46; Safo 2001a; TEDB 1997).

The Forestry Commission has also been able, through a Minister's directive, to appropriate substantial funds by playing on semantic elisions to subtract fees for "management services" from the stumpage revenues before passing on the remaining monies to the District Assemblies and chiefs. The appropriation of revenue began provisionally in 1999 as the newly semi-autonomous Commission sought to find ways to become "self-financing." At first the Commission took forty percent of the proceeds from stumpage fees—a substantial sum—then took sixty percent for a few years, a considerable amount of dollars in 2001, and has now returned to forty percent. Among many other mid- and high-level officials and experts, the Administrator of Stool Lands described this appropriation as "totally illegal," since the constitution unequivocally requires that all "rents, dues, royalties, revenues or other payments whether in the nature of income, or capital from the stool lands" (267(2)(a)) be paid into accounts at the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands and then disbursed in set proportions (267(2)(c) and 267(6)). Through this legal chicanery, the Forestry Commission takes whichever share it wishes, and goes unchallenged by other organizations who are oblivious or unwilling to confront the administration and its industry and donor allies.

While the beginning of this section described domestic and international pressures for general democratic reform, it remains to be seen why there were or were not local forces pushing specifically for forestry reform in the 1980s and 1990s. Local mobilization is an indispensable complement to national and international pressure to institutionalize local democracy (Agarwal 2001; Beckman 1975; World Bank 1998, 2000). In concluding the previous section, I mentioned how mobilization around forestry (and rural issues generally) was shaped by rural differentiation, political cooptation and repression, and migration. Here, in addition, I highlight recent political repression, exclusive focuses on input distribution programs, religious, political, and gender discourses, fracture in labor unionization, and chieftancy disputes.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many producer organizations sprouted up but have either been used for political control or as short-term, donor-dependent groupings to access inputs such as credit, seeds, or fertilizer (as with the Peoples Participation Programme, Sasakawa Global 2000, the Adventist Development Relief Association, and others). In the 1980s, the incipient Rawlings regime created party bodies throughout the countryside—Committees for the Defense of the Revolution—to settle unemployed Ghanaians ejected from Nigeria, and to maintain social stability and political control. When the time for elections came in 1992, Rawlings created the Ghana National Association of Farmers and Fishermen to distribute subsidized inputs to supporters. The Association, though now quite feeble, consequently retains elitist bias and shallow connections to poor or distant farmers (CORAF and ODI 2000). The class and geographical fissures of such associations and federations are also key, as the dominant large farmers may focus their lobbying efforts only on support for cocoa prices or inputs, or to release land from the forest reserves for farming.

The Trade Unions Congress was beset by corruption, infighting, and urban-bias, which was compounded by devastating retrenchments under structural adjustment (Nugent 1995). It did have a small-scale wood-workers wing. This wing, along with other small-scale carvers and

artisans have lobbied, but their information, organization and impact has been limited (Amanor 2000). As in much of West Africa, there are almost no civil society organizations seriously working on agriculture or forestry policy. Also important is a Ghanaian political dynamic in which young radical upstarters “small boys,” contest against entrenched, traditional conservative “big men,” with each in turn invoking accountability, transparency, and representation less as principles for government and more as reactionary critiques used to gain access to state powers and resources (Nugent 1996; Rathbone 2000). The persistence of chieftaincy disputes may have played a role in diffracting common mobilization (Berry 2001). While women’s interests in forestry have been somewhat championed by First Lady Rawlings through her 31<sup>st</sup> December Women’s Movement, the movement has not strayed far from prevailing centralized programs and top-down projects, and may have served more as an attempt to extend political backing (the role of women and discourses of gender in forestry and rural politics has otherwise been grossly understudied). Additionally, with baffling economic stagnation since the 1980s, many men and women have turned towards the proliferating churches that build on older concepts of pre-destination to proffer miracles-on-request, forecasts of heavenly intervention into earthly woes, and the wisdom that “the ultimate source of transparency and accountability is God” (Githinji nd: 5; see also Darkwah 2001; Meyer 1998; Pobe 1992; cf. MacLean 2002).

Mixed within these forces that blocked organization by rural resource users were discourses designed to elicit obedience to centralized state policies and management by rural people, as well as to gain consent by both rural and urban inhabitants to violent rural coercion should that rural self-discipline break down.

Resistance is partly thwarted by occluding the institutional context with particular narratives of agro-environmental change. Contemporary discourses interweave historical colonial narratives and technocratic global environmental accounts with Ghanaian circumstances. The resulting medley places the blame for deforestation on the shoulders of vilified self-interested farmers, “indiscriminate” chainsawyers, and reckless bush-burners. The heady years of the 1980s were capped by widespread bushfires in 1983 that remain a potent historical marker in peoples’ minds. Expert proclamations refer to, and resonate with, these historical memories of decay and chaos (Amanor 2002; Gboloo 1998). The tales of distress are accompanied by solutions to educate farmers, obey laws, and plant trees. These popular tropes were and are disseminated through technocratic forestry education, unimaginative under-funded academics, popular environmental awareness campaigns by churches, NGOs, and political parties, and in state-dominated, urban-based educational curricula and news media. Each of these bodies are complicit as they have an interest in re-presenting technocratic conceptions of agro-environmental change (often co-opted from technocratic global environmental discourses) in their environmental education programs; depicting deforestation as a problem of knowledge and seedlings, posits themselves as the logical solution and group for funding.

This is not to say that rural resource users are dupes, or that even if some do agree with these discourses in whole or in part that they would be able to follow the accompanying prescriptions. Rather, I want to emphasize that, as Gramsci (1971: 7, 10-11, 56) observes in his analysis of Italian and Russian political history, hegemony involves domination by formal instruments of law and enforcement, but also through popular consent elicited by the state in collaboration with institutions of civil society, such as churches, civic associations, trade unions, schools, etc.:

“When the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks.” While local appropriation of environmental concern could potentially be empowering, conditions for rural mobilization upon such appropriation have been overwhelmingly unfavorable. The potential role of civil society in enlarging debate and popular understanding of ecological processes and connections has thus been subverted.

When the state does use violent coercion to enforce its edicts, it sparks off a re-circulation of these same discourses of rural backwardness, thereby legitimating such forceful repression to historically more critical and proximate urban constituents. During the 1980s and 1990s, battles became regular between the police (occasionally accompanied by the military), illegal loggers and transporters, and political civil society associations, replete with violent threats, hefty fines and sentences, car chases, and AK 47's (Hope 2001; Otchere 2001). Simultaneously, forestry problems and technocratic narratives began to be featured regularly in popular culture, in advertising campaigns, schools, churches, in Nigerian and Ghanaian movies, on popular television shows such as Taxi Driver, and in almost daily accounts on the radio, in the newspaper, and on televised news. Today, one sees popular contempt and militaristic prescriptions not confined to the government-dominated papers but extending to popular magazines and organizations targeting younger and more female audiences. Such discourses also obfuscate the legal and illegal urban-rural connections contributing to deforestation, including investment by urbanites in chainsawing and charcoal production destined largely for towns and cities (Amanor 1996; FOEG 1997; Gyasi and Uitto 1997).<sup>14</sup> Cyclical rural-urban migrants and aspirant rural cosmopolitans (many of them young) thus bring divisive elitist disdain back to villages in addition to faux Nikes.

The Rawlings and Kuffour Administrations have recognized, as did T. F. Chipp eight decades ago, that neither force nor rhetoric alone will suffice in culling obedience. Thus, despite massive mission failure, these Administrations have been able to retain control through a combination of enforcement with state-sanctioned violence and legitimization to the broader public through cultural discourses of population pressure and ignorant, self-interested farmers, chainsawers and burners. These discourses and threats of violence combine with the aforementioned contravening forces and structures that militate against rural mobilization for policy and institutional change, together shedding light on the means by which the governments have been able to selectively invoke subsidiarity in their aim to avert decentralization.

## **CONCLUSION: STRENGTHENING PROCESSES OF ALLOCATING POWERS**

The argument of this paper—constructing subsidiarity, consolidating hegemony—is that successive governments in Ghana have constructed discourses that, given the importance of certain agro-environmental and economic processes, decentralization is not in the public interest, and have done so as an attempt to help legitimize contested centralized regimes and associated violent enforcement under which only select interests have benefited from forest resources.

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<sup>14</sup> While a political ecology of Ghana remains to be written, these conventional narratives of environmental change occlude how forest destruction results from institutional structures, debt, corruption, export agriculture and mining, and the failure to create employment in other sectors in the midst of global over-production.

Subsidiarity thus appears as such a powerful principle because with its representations of agro-ecological and economic processes come to have profoundly political implications.

The point is not that there are no limits to decentralization, there are. While higher-level coordination is completely justifiable, and quite necessary, it requires careful consideration of the structural extent and form warranted by agro-ecological processes and economic dynamics. Discussions of subsidiarity thus may be overly preoccupied with the level of government, without commensurate attention to its form. So while forestry must involve coordination, equity, minimum standards, and the like, colonial and post-independence governments in Ghana have used general and ambiguous “ecosystem-scale logic,” and discourses of national economic development, to justify a form of centralized control that could be used for pervasive and despotic rule, rather than, say, attempting to create a representative and accountable central coordinating body limited to certain matters.

The interests benefiting from forestry have changed over the years, as have the conditions for resisting and changing forestry policies and management structures. Forestry policy in Ghana, despite its appearance of consistency, was thus a negotiated and contingent outcome of material and mental struggles operating at multiple temporal and spatial scales. As Lund notes (2001):

The fact that some institutions, rights and social relations appear to endure and remain stable or clear is not a sign that nothing is happening. On the contrary! Various actors, individuals and organisations are actively reproducing these social relations ... Consequently it is not only change that requires action – the reproduction of a certain state, the maintenance of social relations and the continuous enjoyment of rights also require it.

(emphasis in original)

The broad historical continuity of “subsidiarity rhetoric” in Ghana resulted not from some sort of institutional lethargy, but rather was produced in the midst of struggles and challenges spanning different scales of history and geography (see also Keeley and Scoones 2000: 29).

In concluding, I am not going to try to catalogue all the measures that would be necessary to decentralize the Ghanaian Forest Service. Rather, I will focus on how, if subsidiarity is so susceptible to selective invocation, we can actually arrive at more appropriate allocations of powers and resources.

First, there is a need for more high-quality, detailed, empirical research on agro-ecological dynamics, and research that is explicitly participatory. Many of the claims made to justify certain management arrangements lack serious scientific research. But research effort alone is insufficient; it must be truly participatory research able to accept new viewpoints, methodologies and evidence—Keeley and Scoones (2001: 13) for instance ask, “...who does science for policy?” Environmental research in this regard should take lessons from the wealth of experience gained in attempting participatory, decentralized agricultural research and extension (Scoones and Thompson 1994; Smith 2001). Potential topics include changes in forest cover (Fairhead and Leach 1998), rates and characteristics of regeneration and succession, watershed ecology, river siltation, erosion, local and regional patterns, and determinants of humidity and rainfall, cocoa ecology, etc. Too many studies sit on dusty shelves and hence these investigations must break down the barriers between active, expert, research scientists and passive informants,

transforming both in the process, incorporating multiple expertise and heightening free debate and democratic government.

A second sort of study needed is the interpretation of the empirical agro-ecological findings for their management implications. A crucial lesson here is that representations of technical issues can have political implications, and hence policy-making processes must also be participatory and broad-based. In the past, empirical studies (limited as they were) were interpreted willy nilly behind close doors by a few experts or government officials, and then these readings occasionally presented to the public or drilled into students' minds without opportunities for discussion, criticism, and revision. So while many donors are now focusing on developing appropriate policies rather than channeling money into projects, this approach can only work if there broad-based, participatory processes to generate and interpret policies. In this regard, substantial experience—unfortunately much of it negative—has been gained around water privatization and formation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (Abugre 2000; Amenga-Etego and Grusky 2001; IEO 2002). Also, a variety of promising “Deliberative Inclusionary Processes,” together with their characteristics and limitations, have been helpfully reviewed by Holmes and Scoones (2000). The evidence presented in this essay points to the importance not only of principles for environmental governance, but of the processes through which those principles are interpreted and implemented, and, by implication, the broader socio-economic and political contexts in which such processes of allocating resources and authority are embedded (cf. Coglianesi and Nicolaidis 1996). The content of policies cannot be addressed in isolation from processes of policy formulation and interpretation. In this respect, it is disturbing that there is not a single organization in Ghana that focuses on forestry policy or agricultural policy. Instead, select NGOs send staff to backroom meetings with donor and government officials, as through the Natural Resources Management Council, while legislation is devised by the Ministry without broad consultation and then rushed through parliament in order to meet donor conditionalities. The recently formed Forestry Forum could potentially provide an avenue for circulating and exchanging these sorts of empirical and policy-relevance studies (Frimpong 2002). The aim of these sorts of policy discussions is to empower the public to decide what is or is not “practicable.”

There must also be some way for the public to monitor the conduct of such research. People potentially affected need to have access to both scientific and policy study processes and information. That means informing people about studies, and making available proposals, drafts, discussions, findings, etc, providing resources to compensate people for the time spent participating, and making researchers accountable to the communities they study (this could come through administrative or financial means). Policy processes must do more than produce information and consultations, they must “raise the capabilities of the poor and disenfranchised to understand, interact and negotiate with ‘outsiders’” (Holmes and Scoones 2000: 37). The Forestry Forum, as merely an intellectual platform, presents a danger of simply bolstering entrenched elites with more contrived studies, since rural people lack organized forums to effectively voice their concerns (Amanor 2000). The National Commission on Civic Education and the Environmental Protection Agency, for instance, could play larger roles (cf. Porter and Young 1998). It would also mean allocating portions of forestry funds to investigate and address forces that inhibit people from influencing forestry research and policy discussions.

Fourth, if these science and policy studies are not being conducted well, or policy and management remain inappropriate, or the public is unable to monitor either of the two, the public needs to have some means of recourse, some mechanism to enforce its views and needs. This would mean increased attention to basic issues of rural socio-political organization and democratic government. Unit Committees, for instance, are the basic link between citizens and local government, but are severely under-developed and misunderstood. The disorganization and low turnout of 2002 local elections shows that democratic representation will require more work to become institutionalized (the aim of the British-funded Brong Ahafo Decentralization Support Project). These four recommendations could be built into existing forestry projects.

The aim of these recommendations is to open up policy-making processes to the public; in other words, to strengthen natural resource democracy. The experiences in Ghana provide a cautionary tale for others where decentralization is blocked, being considered, or ongoing (see Wunsch 2001). It also provides a political wake up call for future issues of regional integration (as with the African Union) and global environmental governance.



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- To promote national-level administrative, legislative, and judicial reforms necessary to accomplish environmentally sound decentralizations and to enable public interest groups to hold governments and private actors accountable for their environmental management performance; and
- To develop regional networks of independent policy research and advocacy groups that are effective in promoting and utilizing the above reforms in the interests of improved environmental management.

EAA achieves these objectives through three inter-related efforts: 1) Decentralization, Accountability, and the Environment, 2) Environmental Procedural Rights, and 3) Non-Governmental Organization Capacity-Building.

The Decentralization, Accountability and the Environment effort aims to identify and promote policies and laws essential for effective, efficient, and equitable decentralization, including those establishing accountable representative authorities for local communities in participatory natural resource management; laws specifying the distribution of decision-making powers over nature among state authorities, civil, and private bodies; laws assuring just recourse; and laws ensuring an enabling environment for civil action. Through informed analysis, the effort aims to influence national-level policy-makers to develop environmentally sound decentralization policies and an enabling environment for civic action concerning environmental policy and its implementation. It reaches this audience directly and through the international financial and donor organizations, environmental policy research institutions, and international and local non-governmental organizations involved in environmental policy matters. This effort supports research on existing decentralization policies and on the enabling environment for civic action. To further these goals



it conducts research jointly with independent policy-focused institutions, the preliminary results of which are presented in this series.

The Environmental Procedural Rights component of the EAA initiative is designed to establish and strengthen an enabling environment for citizens and advocacy organizations both to enforce their constitutional rights to a clean environment and to meet their constitutional responsibilities to ensure sound environmental management. This environment includes fundamental civil liberties, such as freedom of association and expression, and basic rights, including access to information, justice, and decision-making in environmental matters. This component works at three levels. At the national level in pilot countries, the initiative supports the work of local policy groups to improve the law and practice of environmental procedural rights. At the regional level, the initiative supports networks of local organizations to promote legally-binding regional environmental governance instruments, similar to the European Aarhus Convention, that provide for procedural rights irrespective of citizenship and place of residence. At the global level, this component supports African involvement in a coalition of organizations to collaborate on the establishment of international environmental governance norms and on ensuring compliance by governments and private corporations.

The Non-Governmental Organization Capacity-Building component of the EAA initiative aims to strengthen a select group of independent policy research and environmental advocacy groups and their networks. This group includes, for example, the Lawyers' Environmental Action Team (LEAT) in Tanzania, Green Watch, Advocates for Development and Environment (ACODE) and the Center for Basic Research in Uganda, and the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) in Kenya. These environmental advocacy organizations seek to improve environmental management and justice by contributing to policy and legislative reform, and ensuring compliance to environmental laws and norms. The groups use a range of approaches and tools to influence policy formation, including policy research and outreach, workshops and conferences, public debates, press releases, and litigation. This EAA project component supports efforts in organizational development, capacity building in advocacy approaches and skills, and technical competence in specific environmental matters. Federations and networks of such NGOs, joint initiatives, and South-South collaborative efforts are also facilitated and supported.

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