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Journal homepage: <https://www.sddubidsjplm.com>**Sharecropping arrangement in the contemporary agricultural economy of Ghana: A study of Techiman North District and Sefwi Wiawso Municipality, Ghana**Kwasi Baah<sup>1\*</sup>, Joseph Kwaku Kidido<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Office of the Provost, College of Art and Built Environment, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, \*Email: [mizawa@yahoo.com](mailto:mizawa@yahoo.com)<sup>2</sup>Department of Land Economy, College of Art and Built Environment, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana**ARTICLE INFO**

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**ABSTRACT**

The desire for plantation farms and the availability of fertile uncultivated lands coupled with the influx of migrant farmers into the plantation frontiers during the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries largely occasioned the emergence of the share cropping mechanism in the then Gold Coast. Using two districts in Ghana, this study examined sharecroppers land access mode in the contemporary agricultural economy of Ghana. Mixed methods research was used in this study and focused on sharecrop-tenants as well as the sharecrop-landlords as the key research respondents. The results show that across the two areas, *abunu* system of tenancy was the dominant sharecropping arrangement. The benefit share of the landlord has moved from one-third (1/3) per the traditional *abusa* tenant system to 50% under the modern *abunu* system for tree crop plantations. The tenant-farmers' percentage share has, however, declined from 2/3 to 1/2 under the current *abunu* system and in some cases the sharing arrangement is restricted to the proceeds and not the land. Again, the tenants now have to make upfront monetary payment in order to access land, which was not the case in the past. The share tenancy arrangement is on an evolutionary trajectory towards equalizing entitlements to proceeds, in a manner that seems to disadvantage the tenant farmers and keep them in the cycle of tenancy. The study underscores the need for further research to fully understand the drivers of these variations and emerging trends of the sharecropping land access dynamics for an informed policy response.

**1. Introduction**

Land is a critical resource and plays a fundamental role in the socio-economic development process. Indeed, many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations revolve around the land question. Its availability and access are significant for the sustainable development of agrarian economies (Lund, 2011; Ubink, 2008). For an agrarian economy like Ghana, land is an indispensable resource for the development of the economy and improving the general wellbeing of the people (Kidido, 2017; Kidido et al., 2017) especially the majority of the people in the agricultural sector. Thus, the mechanism for accessing agricultural land is critical for the productivity and general economic development outlook. A significant determinant of access to land is the prevailing land tenure regime (FAO, 2002). Land in the past was in abundance and those seeking land had absolutely free access under the customary tenure regime, which is a key supplier of land in Ghana (Kasanga, 1999). However, the customary land tenure systems are affected by factors including increasing scarcity of land, high population growth and the introduction of commercial agriculture, (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001). There is an increasing population pressure on the limited arable land in

many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), which has resulted in a gradual exhaustion of uncultivated land. The shortage creates intense conflict over land and land resources among close kin over right of inheritance and also between neighbours over boundary determination (Otsuka and Place, 2014).

There are various means through which agricultural land is acquired, including outright purchase, gift, license, inheritance, lease, sharecropping, and so on. Among the available land access mechanisms, however, sharecropping is said to be one of the most efficient means to access agricultural land by migrant-farmers and the landless poor in most of the rural farming communities in Ghana (Quaye et al., 2014; Amanor and Diterutuah, 2001). The sharecropping system is characterized by the sharing terms derived from the Akan parlance *abusa*<sup>1</sup> and *abunu*<sup>2</sup>. These two sharecropping agreements are the commonest customary share tenancies in Ghana and are mostly in respect of tree crops (Blocher, 2006). The system has become a dominant land relationship, even among close kin, which is increasingly replacing land inheritance for a growing section of the population (Amanor, 2006; 2010). During the colonial era in Ghana, the discovery and cultivation of crops such as oil palm, cocoa and coffee

<sup>1</sup> In the Akan language, *Abusa* means dividing into three parts and *Abunu* means dividing into two equal parts.

introduced capitalist and commercial agriculture to the multitude of the smallholder farmers which accordingly ignited changes in the way in which agricultural land was accessed (Ibn, 2013).

The share cropping system was well associated with forest zone where the sharing arrangement was the reward of the efforts required to clear the virgin forest and establish the cash crop farm (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001). The system granted the landless access to agricultural land and also served as a mode of land transaction which accorded the sub-chiefs and individual landlords the opportunity to gain their own cash crop farms by simply making their virgin lands available to the share cropped tenants and receiving back established cash crop plantations (Hill, 1963). Sharecropping also enabled landowners to keep fallow lands active so they are not misconstrued as abandoned.

Amanor and Diterutuah (2001) noted that the growing demand for plantation farms in cash crop cultivation belts resulted in a high demand for sharecrop lands. However, acquiring sharecrop land is increasingly becoming difficult due to scarcity of uncultivated land as well as increase commodification of agricultural land, a situation which has caused family members to request sharecrop lands from close kin just because they cannot simply get access to land within their own families (Amanor, 2010). This is because in most of the cocoa growing belts in Ghana, there is limited land for expansion (Quaye et al., 2014). Consequently, the sharecropping system that hitherto was the most patronized mode of agricultural land and easily accessible in most areas (Ibn, 2013), is evolving in response to the exigencies of contemporary times. Amanor and Diterutuah (2001) argued that the increasing scarcity of agricultural land has brought about a transformation in the nature of share cropping system in Ghana whereby tenant farmers who seek to engage in share cropland must have to put forward a reasonable fee before gaining access.

A number of studies have been done in Ghana on the sharecropping practices especially in the development of tree crops. For instance, studies on migrant labour supply in the early phase of the development of cocoa frontier in southern Ghana (Hill, 1957; 1963; Hunter 1963), working conditions of migrant farmers (Arhin, 1985), labour and productive relationships in the cocoa production in Ghana (Robertson, 1987; Austin, 1987). Amanor and Diterutuah (2001) also investigated share contract labour supply in the development of oil palm and citrus in southern Ghana. Conflicts emerging out of landlord and migrant labour relations in share tenancies have been investigated by Yelsang (2013) in the Brong Ahafo Region and Boni (2008) in the Sefwi areas. Da Rocha and Lodoh (1999) documented customary law principles on creation and operation of tenancies including agricultural tenancies in Ghana.

It is imperative to revisit the sharecrop debate in the face of virtual exhaustion of virgin forest coupled with growing

population to ascertain whether there are any changes in the system within the contemporary agricultural economy of Ghana. Using two agricultural districts, one in the forest cocoa zone and the other in the transitional ecological belt where mostly food crops are grown, we explored the prevailing narratives and practices of sharecrop arrangement. The findings offer appreciation of the current dynamics of the system and the way forward. The paper first examined the sharecropping tenancy and its evolution in Ghana. The structure of the rest of the paper covers the profile of the study districts, materials and methods, and presentation and discussion of the results of the study.

## 2. Overview of sharecropping tenancy in Ghana

According to Da Rocha and Lodoh (1999) share tenancy had been in existence even before the injection of money into the Gold Coast economy by the Europeans. A tenancy, under customary law, is an interest which confers upon the tenant a right to possess, occupy and use a land for a specified purpose for either an indefinite or specified period. A tenancy goes with terms and conditions which the tenant is expected to observe and live by so long as he or she is still in possession and occupation of the subject land. In a customary tenancy, a limited interest in the land is created. The grantor or landlord retains his ownership right in the land but only grants possessory and use rights to the tenant for a period of time, which may sometime be indefinite.

In Da Rocha and Lodoh (1999) customary tenancies in Ghana can be classified into two broad themes, namely gratuitous tenancies and tenancies for consideration. Usually tenancies for consideration are characterized by grants for agricultural purposes and the consideration could be in cash (as in seasonal or annual tenancies) or crop sharing (as in *abunu* and *abusa* tenancies).

The sharecropping tenancy emerged in response to some factors. Firstly, it was a form of a disguised land sale in view of the traditional abhorrence to land sales (Asiama, 2008; Amanor, 2008). The system provided the farmers and the town chiefs an opportunity to alienate land without being challenged by the paramount chiefs or members of their lineages as breaching the customary prohibition of land sale (Amanor, 2008). *Abusa* land tenancy for example allowed the tenant to retain a third of the land established by his/her effort into cocoa plantation together with the land (Amanor and Diterutuah, 2001; Hill 1963). According to the Amanor and Diterutuah, this sharecropping arrangement where the tenant became entitled to the farm together with the land was more peculiar in Akyem Abuakwa (see Hill, 1956). Despite the customary abhorrence of land sales in the Akyem Abuakwa area, land sales were somehow tolerated if the *Okyenman* was rewarded with a portion of the proceeds by the sub-chiefs (Amanor and Diterutuah, 2001; Addo-Fenning 1997). In an effort to gain access to land sales proceeds from the subchiefs, the paramount stool of the Akyem Abuakwa made effort to extend the concept of *Abusa*<sup>3</sup> to land sales and cultivation of

<sup>3</sup> The *Abusa* concept was previously applied in the mines. It referred to a system of rent payment by miners to landlords for the use of land for minerals exploitation (Amanor and Diterutuah, 2001). Sarbah (1968: 73) recounted that "Owners of land where gold and other minerals are found give permission to miners to work thereon. These men open mines and

export crops in the late nineteenth century (Amanor and Diderutuah, 2001).

Secondly, increased land demand by migrant farmers and attempts by paramount chiefs to claim a monopoly over the land alienations also encouraged the development of the sharecropping tenancy in Ghana. With the development of cocoa frontier in the Gold Coast and its attraction of migrant cocoa farmers particularly from the northern protectorates and the Sahelian countries, land demand increased, and this created new interest in land. Amanor (2008) noted that paramount chiefs claimed authority in the alienation of land and maintained that, their consent was necessary in land transactions. This incapacitated the town chiefs and families' ability to alienate land without reference to the paramount chiefs. Consequently, alienation of land to the migrant farmers by town chiefs and families was made on sharecropping basis requiring no involvement of the paramount chiefs (Amanor, 2008). Indeed, with time the subchiefs and other family heads also developed interest in the development of the export crops of cocoa and oil palm but lack the necessary capital and labour. Thus, instead of outright sale of land (which is often challenged by the paramount chiefs), the landowners devised an arrangement where they could tap into the labour and capital resourcefulness of the landless migrants to established plantation farms and still retain land ownership (Amanor and Diderutuah, 2001). "Migrant tenants cleared mature forest and planted cocoa plantations using their own capital. They maintained the cocoa plantation and the yield was divided into thirds, with the tenant taking two thirds" (*ibid*:5). Sharecropping contract arrangements predominated from the 1920s (Austin 1987; Hill, 1956) following the influx of migrant cocoa farmers and the subsequent development of active land market.

Amanor and Diderutuah (2001) also observed that the *abusa* and *abunu* systems have undergone transformation from the hitherto relations that was typical of the classical colonial cocoa economy into share contracts relationship. The decline in migrant labour forced the local owners to open up to the local youth. According to Amanor and Diderutuah, most farmers found the cost of hiring the labour (migrant farmers) as expensive and unaffordable and consequently turned to sharecrop their lands with the youth. This mechanism of land access has of course evolved beyond the migrant labourers to include local youth and close family relations of the landowners. The share contract arrangements metamorphosed into a relationship between close-kinsmen, children and their parents, maternal uncles and between siblings (Amanor and Diderutuah, 2001). It is also now a subject matter of written contracts drawn up to clearly define the procedures and this must be endorsed by witnesses.

The sharing arrangement directly relates to the nature of the sharecrop arrangement. Aidoo (1995) noted the application of the sharecropping principles and what a tenant or his landowner can gain from the tenanted land depended upon the respective contributions to the farming operations. The share

tenancies are shared based on two main principles- *abusa*, which is on a 1:2 and the *abunu* on 50:50 basis (*ibid*).

The *abusa* sharing arrangement was the original mode of operation of share tenancy in Ghana as documented by Hill (1956) and collaborated subsequently by other researchers including Amanor and Diderutuah (2001), da Rocha and Lodoh (1999) and Okali (1983). The sharing ratios depended on whether it was an *abusa* labourer or *abusa* tenant system and also on the respective contributions of the parties. Under the *abusa* tenant arrangement, the tenant is entitled to two thirds share while under the *abusa* labourer, the landlord is entitled to two thirds. The *abusa* labourer applied to cases of already established farm where the labourer is engaged as a caretaker and supplied with inputs to manage the farm and rewarded with a third of the proceeds from the harvest. In the case of *abusa* tenant, the tenant-farmer bears the expense of clearing and cultivating the virgin forest land allocated by the landlord and consequently receives two-third share (Amanor and Diderutuah, 2001, Aidoo, 1995) of either the physical farm or proceeds.

The *abunu* system (50:50 basis) ensures equal share between the landlord and the tenant. It emerged in response to land scarcity where landlords now demand equal share with the tenants. As noted by Amanor and Diderutuah (2001), *abunu* arrangement is most likely to be practiced in areas where land is scarce. The object of sharing could be in respect of the produce or the farm itself (Da Rocha and Lodoh, 1999). Where the sharing relates to farm itself, the farm is physically divided into two when the agreed crops mature. Where cash crops such as cocoa is involved which has a longer life span, the tenant essentially retains the portion of land received for generations (Aidoo, 1995). Amanor also opined: "In some arrangements the cocoa plantation was then divided between the chiefly stool and the sharecrop tenant, and the portion worked by the tenant was recognised as their own land" (Amanor, 2008:70). In some parts of Ghana, such physical division of the farmland does not confer proprietary rights to the tenant in respect of the portion of land received. However, as noted by Aidoo (1995) in areas where there is abundant uncultivated land, the transfer of complete rights in the land occurs.

### 3. Study areas profile

The geographical scope was limited to the Techiman North District in the Bono East Region and Sefwi Wiawso Municipality in the Western North Region. Apparently, these areas belong to two different ecological zones and located in different regions of Ghana. However, they both witness an increasing influx of migrants due principally to the availability of fertile arable land in those areas. These two districts were purposely chosen because of the high concentration of migrant farmers in the cocoa sector as well as cashew and food crops cultivation (See Boni 2008, Kidido et al. 2017, GSS, 2014). These areas provide a snapshot of sharecropping system in the country at least for the forest belt and transitional savannah ecological zones where

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sink shafts, and the customary rent is known as *Ebusā*, which is a division into three parts of whatever the mines produce, whether gold, or quartz, or other minerals. To the landlord belongs one-third".

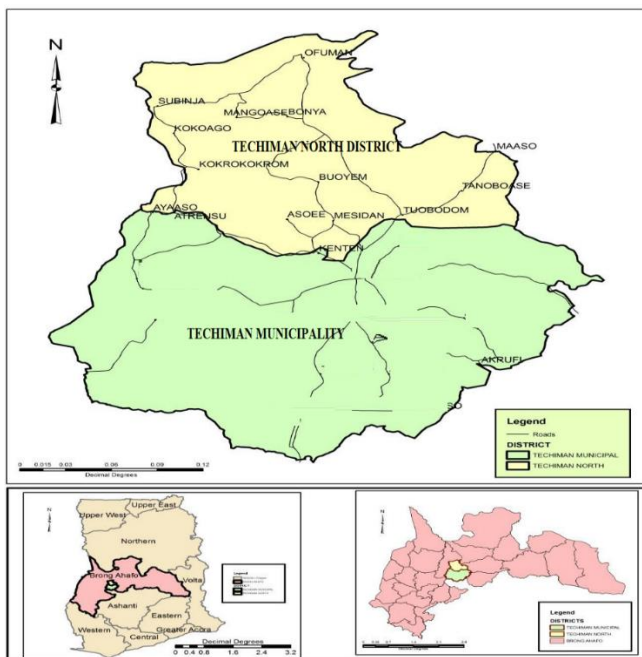
sharecropping is dominant. A brief profile of the study areas is given below.

### The Techiman North District (TND)

The District is situated in the Bono East Region and covers an area of approximately 389.4 square kilometers. It is bounded to the North-East by the Nkoranza North District, North-West by the Wenchi Municipality, the North by the Kintampo South District and the South by the Techiman Municipality (Figure 1).

The TND is made up of 21 communities/settlements. According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the number of households in the district was estimated at 13,490 with a total population of 59,068. The major occupation in the district is agriculture and its related activities. This is attributed largely to the vast fertile arable land across the length and breadth of the district. This situation has attracted migrant farmers especially from the northern part of the country to the area. Major crops grown within the area include cocoa, cashew, mango, maize, cassava, and tomatoes among others.

Figure 1: Map of the Techiman North District



Sources: Adapted from Kidido (2017)

### Sefwi Wiawso Municipality (SWM)

The SWM is situated in the Western North Region and shares administrative boundaries with Bibiani-Anwhiaso-Bekwai District to the East, Juaboso and Bia Districts to the West, Aowin- Suaman Districts in the South and Wassa Amenfi West District in the South-East (Figure 2). The Municipality is made up of more than 24 communities/settlements and covers an area of approximately 11,011.6 square kilometres.

The municipality had an estimated population of 139, 200 of which 36,336 are migrants (GSS 2010). Agriculture is the major economic activity in the Municipality. Nearly, 74.1% of household within the Municipality are engaged in agriculture of which 98.8% of them are engaged in crop

farming. Some of the crops include cocoa, palm tree, plantains, cocoyam, cassava and maize.

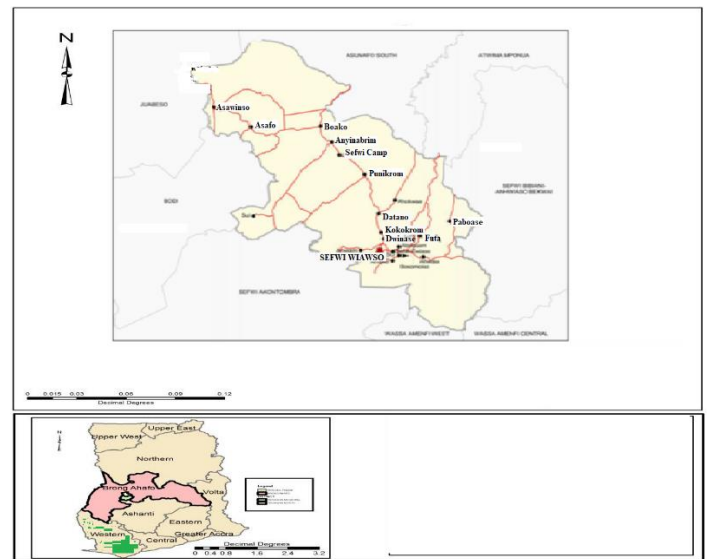


Figure 2: Map of the Sefwi Wiawso Municipality

## 4. Material and methods

The study adopted mixed methods research based on a case study design. This method combines qualitative and quantitative approaches (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). Mixed method is a class of research approach whereby the researcher combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques, approaches, concepts or language into a single study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In designing the research therefore, *a within-stage mixed-model design* was adopted which Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) defined to involve the use of questionnaires that include a summated rating scale (quantitative data collection) and one or more open-ended questions (qualitative data collection). The respondents of the study were interviewed using questionnaires which combined both closed and open-ended questions.

Multiple sampling techniques (both probability and non-probability) were applied in the sampling process. The communities covered within the study areas were sampled through simple random sampling technique. In this regard, the list of all the communities in the TND and the SWM was gathered from the GSS 2010 PHC records. The names of the communities were then written on pieces of papers, which were folded and shuffled in a container. Eight (8) communities each out of 21 and 24 for the TND and SWM respectively were randomly selected. About a third of the communities were thus sampled and this number was deemed good enough for the purpose of the study given the available resources and time.

**Table 1: Respondents in the Study Areas**

Techiman North District	Sefwi Wiawso Municipality				
	Community	Tenant Respondents	Landlord Respondents	Community	Tenant Respondents
Tuobodom	8	3	Dwenase	6	4
Tano Boase	3	3	Kokokrom	6	3
Bono	5	2	Aboboyaa	4	4
Maasu					
Aworowa	5	3	Datano	6	2
Krobo	4	2	Punikrom	7	3
Akrofrom	3	3	Domeabra	3	1
Ofuman	4	2	Boako	5	3
Jama	2	2	Asafo	5	4
Tempo.					
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>24</b>

Source: Field data, 2018

The target groups were sharecropping tenants and sharecrop landlords. Since the exact numbers of tenant-farmers as well as landlords involved in sharecropping arrangements were not available, snowballing and purposive sampling techniques were adopted to reach the tenant-respondents. According to Bugri et al. (2007:78) in snowballing the sample emerges through a process of reference from one stakeholder to another and is quite an effective technique of building up reasonable-sized sample quickly. In all, 120 respondents made up of 76 sharecrop-tenants and 44 sharecrop-landlords were interviewed through snowball sampling techniques (see Table 1).

Quantitative data from the questionnaires was analysed using the SPSS software version 22 after coding the responses into the software. The software was used to generate simple descriptive statistics and tables contained in this report. Open-ended qualitative data was summarized and organized under relevant themes and patterns. Aspects of direct qualitative quotes from the respondents during the interviews are used in this report alongside the quantitative data. The results of the survey are presented in the next section.

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1 Demographic characteristics

Appreciating the demographic characteristics of respondents helps one to lay the basis for subsequent analysis of issues along some of those characteristics (Kidido, 2017). Table 2 shows some selected demographic characteristics of the respondents (tenant-farmers and landlords) including the age, community membership status and regions of origin. These characteristics are useful to understand the age profile of both landowners and their tenant farmers. Importantly, to help appreciate which group of people are engaged in share cropping and their place of origin.

**Table 2 Demographic characteristics of respondents**

Issue	Tenant Respondents	%	Landlord Respondents	%
<b>Age of respondents</b>				
20-29	3	4	0	0.0
30-39	16	21	0	0.0
40-49	31	41	16	36.4
50-59	19	25	17	38.6
60 and above	7	9	11	25.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Community membership</b>				
Native/Indigene	20	26.32	39	88.64
Stranger/Migrant	56	73.68	5	11.36
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Region of origin</b>				
Western	8	10.53	19	43.18
Eastern	15	19.74	3	6.82
Brong Ahafo	24	31.58	20	45.45
Central	1	1.32	0	0.00
Northern	15	19.74	0	0.00
Upper East	6	7.89	2	4.55
Upper West	7	9.21	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field data, 2018

Majority of the tenant-respondents (41.0%) were between ages 40-49. Only 4.0% and 9.0% were below 30 years and above 60 years respectively. This is a reflection of the fact that the active age of tenant farmers who supply labour in exchange for land or farm proceeds is between 30-50 years. Below and beyond this range, the farmer may be too weak for vigorous farming activities or may be young to be independent to start one own farm.

On the part of the landlord respondents, the age range was relatively high above 40 with majority of them between ages of 50-59 (38.6%) followed by those between ages 40-49 (36.4%) and then 60 and above (25.0%). The indication here, and as noted by Kidido (2017) and Boni (2008), is that in both TND and SWM, the power of allocation and control over agricultural land especially at the family level rest in the hands of the elders or senior family members. The respective studies in the TND and Sefwi areas revealed that the elders principally lead the acquisition and disposition of family lands. This may be so because, most of them appropriated the community lands for themselves in the past when vacant lands were in abundance and are therefore currently in control of those lands. The privilege of possessing land by the elders enabled them to engage in sharecropping relationship with the youth, including indigenes and strangers. For instance, Amanor and Diderutuah (2001) noted that in the Eastern Region of Ghana, following the decline of labour supply from the Sahelian regions, elders turned to local youth and other indigenes for labour supply on sharecrop and wage labourer basis.

One of the key determinants of access to lands under customary tenure system is the community membership status of the individuals (Bugri, 2008). This is because land is viewed as a sacred commodity which is tied up with people's communal identity (Amanor, 2006). As a result, one's citizenship and social identity go a long way to define his access, ownership and use of a communally owned land (Kuusaana and Eledi, 2015). Much the same way, the inherent right to dispose of or make a customary grant of land is determined by the community membership status of the grantor. The data in Table 2 indicates that majority 56 (73.68%) of the tenant farmers engaged in sharecropping arrangements were migrant/strangers who have migrated from different parts of the country to the study areas to take advantage of the fertile arable land. Even though the natives/indigenes were comparatively in the minority, 20 (26.32%), it indicates that a sizeable number of them also access arable land through sharecropping arrangement. This confirms the argument by Amanor and Diderutuah (2001) that the sharecropping system has undergone a transformation from the hitherto relations that was typical of the classical colonial cocoa economy to a point where the sharecropping relationships are no more between migrant-labourers and land owning citizens but also between the local citizens as well as the local youth and the land owning family elders.

However, indigenes form the majority 39 (88.64%) of landlords who have engaged sharecrop tenants. Only 5 (22.36%) of the landlords were migrant/strangers who had engaged sharecrop tenants. The phenomenon is not surprising because, it is the natives/indigenes who are members of the landowning community with customary ownership right over the lands and can therefore make such customary grants. Strangers/migrants who have rights over lands to make such grants were those who acquired land through means such as purchase or gift in the past. The data focusing on the specific sharecropping arrangements relating to sources and sizes of land, nature of sharecropping arrangements and the emerging changes are considered in the next sections.

## 5.2 Sources of land and land sizes of the sharecroppers

Over the years, tenant farmers have gained access to lands for farming through sharecropping system. Depending on the sharing arrangement, however, some of the tenant farmers do not own the lands in their possession. This is because; some tenants are engaged as caretakers of existing farms while others gained access to the lands for seasonal or annual tenancies. Details of the land sizes held by tenant farmers are depicted in Table 3.

**Table 3: Acreages held by tenant-farmer, the source and term of sharing**

Issue	Response	Percentage (%)
<i>Land size</i>		
1-5	10	13.16
6-10	28	36.84
11-15	19	25.00
16-20	5	6.58
None	14	18.42
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<i>Grantor of land</i>		
Family head	22	28.95
Chief/Queen	4	5.26
Subject/usufruct	42	55.26
Migrant Farmer	8	10.53
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<i>Sharing term</i>		
Abunu (1:1)	62	81.58
Abusa (1:2)	5	6.58
1 Box/Harvest	9	11.84
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Source: Field data, 2018*

Out of the 76 tenant farmers interviewed, 14 (18.42%) did not own the land they held. This is because, 3 (8.82%) of them gained access to their lands to cultivate maize and 2 (5.88%) cultivate cassava. These food crops tenancies were on *abusa* sharing term of the proceeds and largely seasonal. Another, 9 (26.47%) tenancies involved the cultivation of tomatoes with a sharing arrangement quite different from the food crops. According to the respondents who were engaged in the tomatoes farming, their landlords were entitled to a box of tomatoes for every harvest session till the end of the harvest period (see section 5.3). Such landholdings for food crops and vegetables cultivation did not grant ownership rights. However, an overwhelming number of the tenants 62 (81.58%) acquired long terms land rights through the *abunu* sharecrop system. The key suppliers of land to these tenants were family heads, chiefs/queens, subjects/usufructs and migrants/strangers. Majority of the grantors (55.26%) were subjects/usufructs of the land-owning communities.

### 5.3 Nature of sharecropping arrangement in the study areas

The study identified that the sharecropping system as practiced in the study areas, featured two main sharing arrangements including *abunu*, and *abusa* as presented below.

#### *The Abunu arrangement*

The *abunu* sharing arrangement was the most practiced in the study area. As depicted in Table 3, majority (82%) of the 76 sharecrop-tenants interviewed accessed their farmlands under *abunu* arrangement. When respondents were asked to explain the processes involved to execute an *abunu* sharecropping arrangement in the study areas, the respondents echoed the modern view of the system as elucidated by Da Rocha and Lodoh (1999), and Boni (2005). That is, the *abunu* arrangement takes a form whereby a sharecrop-tenant is allocated an uncultivated land which he/she clears and establishes a farm by his/her own labour and capital without any support from the landlord. The tenant-farmer provides tool, food, input or seeds without any assistance from the landlord. The sharecrop-tenant is granted the right to cultivate food crops in the young plantation and keep the proceeds for his/her own sustenance. When the farm is fully matured, either the net proceeds from the harvest or the established farm is shared into two equal halves for the parties. Under the *abunu* arrangement, the sharing arrangement specifically involves the established farm itself. Majority of the respondents (93.33%) indicated that their *abunu* arrangement related to the established farm itself with land ownership right in respect of the portion of the farm received after sharing. Kasanga and Kotey (2001) had earlier observed that with this kind of tenancy involving tree crops like cocoa, the tenant-farmers' right over land appeared to remain in perpetuity as cocoa tree could last well over 70 years. This arrangement is essentially a disguised outright mode of land grant (see Amanor, 2008).

It is instructive to indicate that, the *abunu* system was found to be gradually changing from the traditional physical division of the established farm to the sharing of the produce/proceeds of the farm. This is because, 6.67% of the respondents noted that, their share arrangements related to the proceeds/produce (*apasu abunu*) and not the farm itself. This phenomenon was noted at Bono Maasu in the TND where a landlord opined:

*When the farm is shared between the parties, the landlord will not be able to manage his portion of the farm, but the sharecrop-tenant will do so for his portion. It is therefore better to allow the tenant to manage the entire farm and then get his share of the proceeds at the end of the harvest”* (Interview, 55-year-old landlord, Bono Maasu, 2018).

Another landlord concurred that they do not share the established farm even though the arrangement may be *abunu*:

*If you share the farm with the tenant, your portion may die because you do not have the strength to manage it yourself. Hence, it is a common practice here to allow the farmer on the farm to do everything and then you share the proceed with him equally* (Interview, 58-year-old landlord, Bono Maasu, 2018).

Landlords are perhaps gradually turning away from the physical division of the farm, which means permanently parting away with a portion of their lands to the sharecrop-tenant. This also potentially keeps the tenant farmers in the continuous state of tenancy. This is because, where the physical farm is shared as was the case with *abusa* tenant system, the tenant became the owner of the portion received together with the land (see Amanor and Diterutuah, 2001; Hill, 1956). However, if the sharing is related to the proceeds, the tenant cannot independently claim direct ownership of any part of the land. Thus, the tenant remains in tenancy that transcends to successors.

#### *The abusa arrangement*

The *abusa* arrangement of the sharecropping system was not widely practiced among the respondents. Only 6.58% of the tenant farmers were engaged in this kind of share tenancy arrangements (see Table 3). This form of sharing arrangement does not confer ownership right to the land on the sharecrop-tenant, unlike what it traditionally used to be. According to Da Rocha and Lodoh (1999) the traditional *abusa* arrangement hitherto entitled the sharecrop-tenant to a portion of the farm. In the SWM, the *abusa* arrangement confirms the observation by Boni (2005) that the sharecrop-tenant is usually engaged on an established or existing farm to maintain it by weeding, spraying, pruning and finally harvest the produce. Such a sharecrop-tenant is classified as a caretaker of the farm. He receives 1/3 of the net proceeds as his share while the remaining goes to the landlord.

At the TND, however, there was no evidence regarding the engagement of a sharecrop-tenant on an existing cash/tree crop farm. However, *abusa* sharing arrangement in the area was rather associated with some food crop farms such as cassava, maize and beans. Under this system, the sharecrop-tenant is granted access to the land to clear it and cultivate some particular food crops. The tenant bears all the cost including inputs, chemicals, weeding and labour. At the end of the harvest, the sharecrop-tenant takes two-third (2/3) of the produce while the landlord takes one-third (1/3). Even though the sharecrop-tenant pays *asedie* or *aseda*<sup>4</sup> to gain access to the land, the tenant is only entitled to a use right in the land for the cultivation period of the subject crop, which could be annual or seasonal. At the end of the period, the land reverses to the landlord or renew for another season. The *abusa* phenomenon in the TND best fits the description of seasonal and annual tenancies noted by Da Rocha and Lodoh (1999).

#### *One-box-per harvest arrangement*

<sup>4</sup> *Asedie* or *aseda* is an Akan expression meaning thanksgiving or thank offering to show appreciation.

The study discovered that beside the traditionally known sharing arrangement in the form of *abunu* and *abusa*, there was another mode of sharing specifically associated with tomatoes in the form of one-box – per every harvest in the TND as noted earlier. Hitherto, the mode of sharing of tomato (either the produce or the net revenue) was *abusa* by which case the sharecrop-tenant took 2/3 while the remaining went to the landlord. However, factors such as erratic or unstable market for the commodity coupled with the high cost of inputs has necessitated a general consensus between the tenant-farmers and the landlords to reduce the latter's share to a single box of whatever harvest is made at any time of the season. The difficulty about this mode of sharing relates to the fact that, in most cases, the very first and the last harvests from some farms do not exceed one full box. The question then remains, who is entitled to such a harvest – the landlord or the tenant? Some landlords and the tenant-farmers expressed their opinion on how such cases are resolved. For instance, a landlord at Tuobodom noted:

*Usually, my sharecrop-tenant does not make me aware if the first harvest results in such a situation so I insist that any time the last harvest does not exceed a box, it should be given to me. (Interview, 43-year-old landlord respondent, Tuobodom, 2018)*

One sharecropping tenant also opined:

*I incur all the cost. My landlord only releases the land and does nothing else so once the harvest does not exceed a box, he is not entitled to anything (Interview, 37-year-old sharecrop-tenant respondent, Tuobodom, 2018).*

Clearly, this new arrangement is fraught with contestations and misunderstanding between the tenant farmers and their landlords should there be poor harvest in any around of the harvest cycles. There are no pre-defined arrangements that anticipate and address the harvest outcomes that are unable to meet the quantum for sharing. There is some form of contestation for the harvest by the parties if it does not exceed one box.

### **Monetary consideration requirement**

One prominent change gathered in terms of land grant under the sharecropping system is the payment of money to landlords before taking possession of the land. From the result in both TND and SWM, majority 117 (97.5%) of the respondents both the sharecrop tenants and landlords indicated that payment of money is now a requirement before one can take possession of a sharecrop land. For instance, Kasanga (1999) earlier observed that accessing land or granting of tenancies in the past was virtually free and simple because land was in abundance. Indeed, hitherto, prospective sharecrop-tenants were required to present some drinks and cola nuts according to customs. Amanor (2006) opined that before a sharecrop arrangement could be concluded, the

prospective sharecrop-tenant was expected to present drinks and make *aseda* payment to the family head or landlord in front of witnesses who would also collect witness fee. The study noted that, what Amanor described as witness fee was variously referred to as '*ntaasie*'<sup>5</sup> at the SWM and '*asedie*'<sup>6</sup> at the TND.

While the amount required per acre is standardized and known by all at the TND, respondents at the SWM indicated that the amount required per acre is not fixed but rather subject to negotiation between the landlords and tenants. An amount of hundred Ghana Cedis (GH¢100.00) per acre is paid as consideration by sharecrops tenants in the TND. However, the respondents in SWD indicated that the landlords determine the amount per acre based on their own financial needs, which can be very outrageous and unaffordable. The situation is similar to the situation in Ankasa community in the Central Region of Ghana where Asaaga and Hirons (2019) found that landlords now accept only monetary payment before allocating land for sharecropping and charge amounts based on acreage allocated.

It was revealed that the demand for and or payment of monetary consideration plays a significant role in the completion of the sharecrop agreement. Upon the payment and or receipt of the money as well as the witness fees, all the parties, including the panel of witnesses are bonded by the deal. In the event of disputes, witnesses can be called upon by any of the parties to attest to the land grant. The receipt<sup>7</sup> can also be produced as evidence of the transactions. The payment essentially has similar effect as the payment of '*trama*' in the case of outright sale. Sarbah (1968) opined that the contract for the sale of land becomes binding upon the payment of earnest-money "*trama*". Payment of consideration and witness fees essentially seals the sharecrop contract creation process.

The demand for monetary consideration before access to a sharecrop land connotes both negative and positive implications (see Table 4). At one instance, it proves to be a very worrying situation for some tenant-farmers because they do not have the money to pay. Overwhelming majority (85%) of the respondents both landlords and tenants concurred that the money payment prevents poor farmers from being able to access land on sharecropping terms. For instance, a 44-year old farmer at Aworowa lamented of the implications of the monetary payments. He noted:

*I have the strength and the will to farm but no land. If you want to do sharecropping too, they are demanding for hundred cedis (GH¢ 100.00) per acre which I cannot get (Interview, 44-year old tenant farmer, Aworowa, 2018).*

<sup>7</sup> This must be registered in order to derive legal effect from such instrument as required by Land Registry Act, 1962 (Act, 122). Section 24 states that "instrument .....shall be of no effect until it is registered".



**Table 4: Implication of the demand for monetary consideration on sharecrop land**

Implication	Response	Percentage (%)
Landless poor unable to access share crop land	102	85.00
Tenants commitment on the farm increases	5	4.17
Guarantees landowners commitment to the arrangement	2	1.67
Rights of the tenant is secured	11	9.17
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field data, 2018

The payment, nonetheless, helps to provide security for the tenants on the sharecrop land. For instance, 11 (9.17%) of the respondents indicated that once the sharecrop-tenant pays the amount involved, including the witness fee, his tenure on the land is guaranteed. This is partly because the constitution of witnesses includes close relations of the landlord or the land grantor. These close relations who are potential source of insecurity to the tenants are bonded by their participation in the transaction as witnesses. They witness the agreement and also benefit from the witness fee and therefore cannot turn around to deny the existence of the land grant in the event of death of the original land grantor. The monetary consideration payment and issuance of written receipts also serves as informal land documentations. Asaaga et al. (2020) found that informal documentation increases tenants perceived or *de facto* tenure security. They noted that share crops tenants who possessed written informal documents felt more certain and confidence in their use of allocated plots. As revealed in this study, some respondents (9.2%) noted that the monetary payment secures their land rights in the share crop land transactions (see Table 4). The monetary payment albeit a burden for the poor tenants, the associated outcomes in the form of written receipts signed and witnessed gives some measure of assurance to the tenant farmers.

The up-front payment also ensures commitment especially from the tenants to productively use the allocated land for mutual benefits. When a tenant is made to commit to the sharecrop land development agreement with the payment of consideration, the tenant is less likely to abandon the land or lukewarmly work on the land as failure or delay might lead to the initial amount invested going down the drain. However, the overall willingness of the tenant to work on sharecrop land through proper land use practices and investments to increase productivity is very much depended on their tenure security whether perceived or real as well as risks uptake from poor yields. On the element of tenure security, there is strong evidence of positive relationship between tenure security and productivity at the on-farm level. For instance, in Ghana, Abdulai et al. (2011) and Goldstein and Udry (2008) found a positive and significant effect of tenure security on farm productivity. They noted that secure rights tended to facilitate farmers investment in soil improvement and natural resources management practices which enhances yields. Asaaga et al. (2020) collaborates the importance of tenure security in sustainable management practices and investment by

landholders in Ghana. In their view, legal (documented rights) forms of tenure as well as perceived or *de facto* security-related factors such as duration of occupation of land and land disputes are all crucial in the farmers' investment decision to employ sustainable practices that guarantee productivity.

It is instructive to indicate that, the tenure security impact on productivity is not in isolation. It is linked to other factors such as access to credit (Abdulai et al., 2011), policy support and climatic factors. Thus, sharecrop tenants with some amount of tenure security whether legal (*de jure*) or perceived (*de facto*) coupled with access to credits might potentially increase their commitment towards achieving high productivity. The current *abunu* system where the tenant farmers bear all the expenses of clearing and maintaining the farm including supply of labour besides the initial payment of consideration, mean that failure to use the land or invest in land management practices to increase productivity will unleash disproportionate risks on the tenant farmer. The tenant farmer under this arrangement has reason to put in a lot of effort to minimize potential risks by showing commitment and productively using the land to recoup investment made.

Despite the monetary concerns, the sharecropping arrangement is preferred by both the landlords and the tenants. Landlords expressed willingness to release their lands on sharecrop terms. The sharecrop-tenants were equally willing to take up land under sharecrop arrangement. All the 44 landlords interviewed indicated that they were willing to release their lands on sharecropping terms in future. What sharing terms they would prefer, 40 (90.91%) indicated *abunu*, while 4 (9.09) indicated one-box per harvest for tomatoes in the TND.

From the tenant-farmers' perspective too, even though they pay before gaining access, it was less expensive as against an outright purchase, which is even difficult to come by. The system also favours both parties since the landlord eventually get a farm and the tenant now becomes a landowner for his share of the farm. A sharecrop-tenant stated:

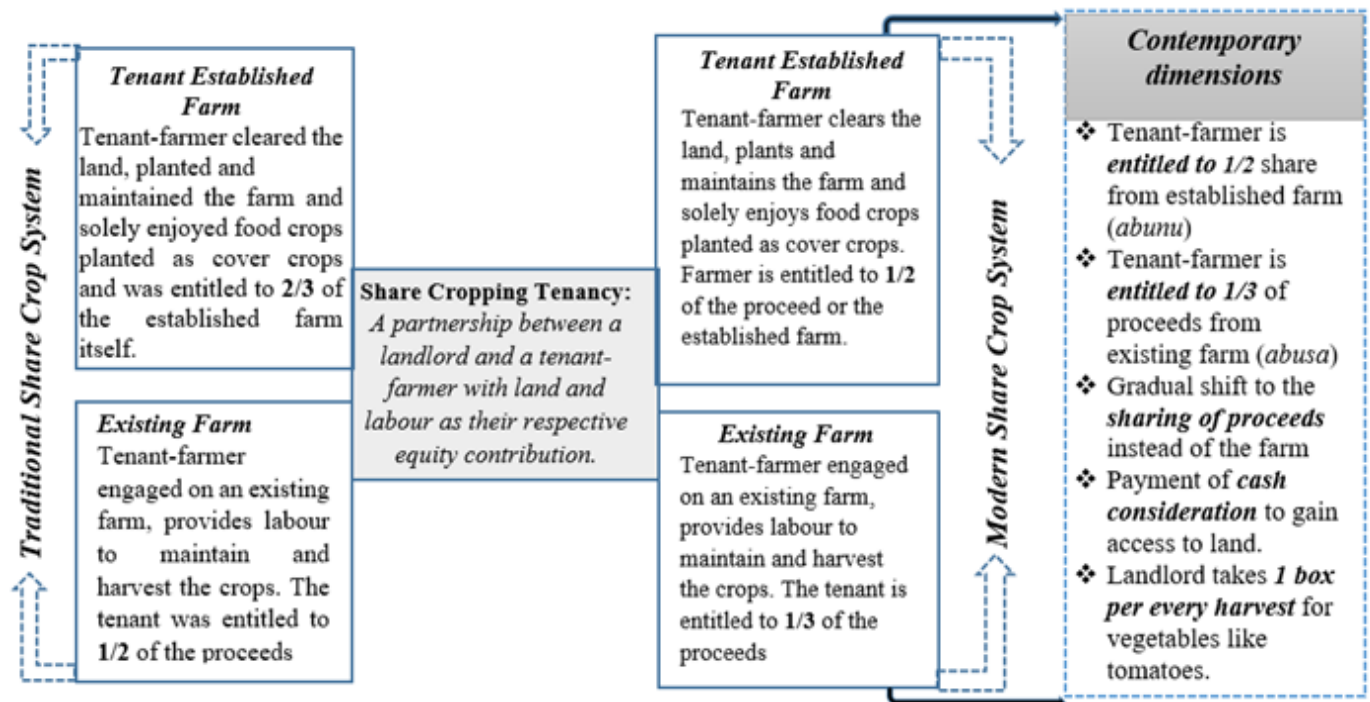
*The sharecropping enables landlords to get a farm which is a legacy for the family he will eventually leave behind. The sharecrop-tenant also gain access to a land by making use of his strength* (Interview, 46-year old tenant farmer, Boako, 2018).

The sharecropping arrangement has the propensity to ensure efficient utilization of land for the common good of the participants (landlords and tenants) and the society. In the view of Kasanga and Kotey (2001) this form of economic utilization of land promotes economic efficiency by allowing redistribution of lands from landlords to tenant-farmers with the capacity to develop them. As indicated by some of the tenant respondents in this study, it is a means for people to access land and potentially own land (see Kasanga and Kotei, 2001; Amanor and Diterutuah, 2001). Given the novel usefulness of the sharecropping tenancy, the next section discusses the evolving implications of the system.

#### 5.4 Moving towards equity or inequality?

The sharecropping land access mechanism is a contractual arrangement that creates a partnership between a landowner and a tenant-farmer. The equity contributions of the parties are in the form of farmland by the landowner and the labour supply by the tenant-farmer. This relationship is visualised in Figure 3. Depending on the pre-agreed terms, either of the parties may take care of the cost of inputs as part of equity contribution. The benefit sharing can relate to either the proceeds from the farm or the established farm itself.

(50%) share of the farm he/she establishes while the landlord takes half (50%). This is the *abunu* arrangement which emerged along the line in view of the growing land scarcity (Amanor and Diterutuah, 2001). Thus, the benefit share of the landlord has moved from one-third (1/3) per the traditional (old) *abusa* system to 50% under the modern *abunu* system. The tenant is now entitled to 1/2 (50%) share even where the tenant bears all the labour cost and cultivates the virgin land into a cocoa farm (Figure 3). These arrangements prevail in



**Figure 3: Conceptual framework on the dynamics of the sharecropping land access mechanism**

Source: Author's Construct, 2018 based on field data and extracts from Da Rocha and Lodoh (1999),

In the past, the sharecrop-tenant farmer was entitled to two-third (2/3) share of the farm established with his labour and farm inputs while the landlord took one-third (1/3) for equity contribution of land. Hill (1956) captured this arrangement as *abusa* tenant (cf: Amanor and Diterutuah, 2001: 14). Again, where the farm was already established by the landlord, the tenant only served as a caretaker of the farm and upon harvest was rewarded with half (1/3) of the proceeds and the remaining share went to the landlord. This is the *abusa* labourer arrangement as discussed elsewhere in this paper. These were the prevailing arrangements during the evolutionary phase of the share crop tenancies in the cocoa agricultural economy of southern Ghana as depicted in Figure 3. Da Rocha and Lodoh (1999) described this previous structure of the tenancy as the traditional view of the sharecrop system (Figure 3).

However, the contemporary share tenancies have experienced a turn of events from the traditional system. Different sharing arrangements emerged along the line in relation to permanent crops like cocoa. The sharecrop-tenant is now entitled to half

the TND and SWM (see Table 3). It is the dominant form of share cropping in the study areas with 62% of share contracts under the *abunu* system. Amanor and Diterutuah (2001) also found that 47% of farms in the Akyem Mamaso were under *abunu* arrangement. The traditional *abusa* where the tenant farmer took 2/3 share is now limited to only food crops.

There is also another emerging dimension of the *abunu* tenancy where the sharing is limited to the proceeds and not the physical farm. This was noticed among 6.67% of the share-tenant farmers interviewed. With this arrangement, the tenant farmer cannot directly claim the land or become a landowner but remains a perpetual tenant as opposed to the previous practices where the physical farm was divided, and the tenant became a virtual owner of the portion received. Clearly, the share tenancy is on an evolutionary trajectory towards a destination that seems to disadvantage the tenant farmers and keep them in the cycle of tenancy. In the past, when land was in abundance and labour relatively scarce, efforts of tenants who were engaged to developed virgin forest into cocoa farms were duly rewarded under the *share tenancy* arrangements. Perhaps, the higher share was to incentivize and attract the tenants into the arduous tasks of clearing the virgin forest. However, growing land scarcity coupled with excess labour force has contributed to the redefinition of sharecropping arrangements, which are now less favourable to the tenant farmer. Besides, the reduction of

percentage share from 2/3 to 1/2, and in some cases limiting the sharing to the proceeds and not the land, the tenant has to now even make upfront monetary payment in order to access land. The monetarisation of the sharecrop contracts is perhaps becoming widespread. Asaaga and Hiron (2019); Kidido et al. (2017); Amanor and Diderutuah, (2001) and Kasanga and Kotey (2001) have all reported instances of monetary consideration payment in sharecrop contract initiations. The rules of the game are evolving in response to the labour and land supply conditions.

Given the growing land scarcity and reduced rewards for labour, share tenancy especially with respect to permeate crops like cocoa or cashew may eventually phase out in the Ghanaian landholding arrangement. A study by Kidido et al. (2017) in the Techiman traditional area revealed that some landlords limited the share tenancies to only food crops. They noted that the landowners were unwilling to open up the sharecropping arrangements to cover permanent crops like cashew and cocoa. Similarly, Fiadzigbey et al. (1999) had also raised concerns about the sharecropping arrangements in Ghana. Their concerns bordered on uncertainty of terms, tenure security among others and recommended the phasing out of share cropping arrangements like “*abusa*” and “*abunu*” and “replaced with a more progressive system capable of protecting the interest of tenant/settler farmers and landowners” (Fiadzigbey et al, 1999:1 cf; Kasanga and Kotey, 2001:21). Yelsang’s (2013) study in the Bono area to understand the situation of Dagara migrant farmers also observed that sharecrops arrangements were bedevilled with disputes arising out of uncertainty of terms, undercurrent family contestations and weather-related factors. As a result, new sharing arrangements were devised to offset challenges associated with the sharecrop arrangement. Some of these arrangements involved prior agreement to give a particular number of bags of harvest to the landlord and payment of certain amounts upon harvest (Yelsang, 2013). The current dynamics of the system in the face of the growing scarcity of land threatens the system’s pro-poor advantages.

### 5.5 Conclusions and policy recommendations

Increasing population pressure on the limited arable land is resulting in a gradual exhaustion of uncultivated land. This development is perhaps affecting land relations under the share tenancy arrangements in the contemporary agricultural economy of Ghana. Share tenancy rules are redefined and renegotiated in a manner that appears to take back benefits, which hitherto were vested in the tenant farmer. The progressive nature of the share tenancy arrangement in Ghana, which afforded landless poor farmers to become landowners is on a reverse path largely driven by growing land scarcity and excess labour supply. The tenant’s stake in the arrangement is on a downward trend where the tenant remains in tenancy and will potentially never become a landowner through share cropping arrangement as it happened in the past. The share tenancy arrangement is on an evolutionary trajectory towards a destination that seems to disadvantage the tenant farmers and keep them in the cycle of tenancy.

Moreover, the access process has now been monetarized, induced by land scarcity, high population growth and growing competition for land for commercial agriculture. The data from this study shows that tenants now have to make upfront monetary payment in order to access land. There is also a new mode of crop sharing with regards to tomatoes in the TND. One box per harvest to the landlord irrespective of the quantum of harvest by the tenant. This arrangement becomes problematic for the parties in the event of poor yields where the harvest does not exceed 1 box. There is the need for pre-agreement that addresses such situations to avoid contestations. The study also underscores the need for further research to fully understand the variation and emerging trends of the sharecropping land access mechanism dynamics from the national perspective for an informed policy response.

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