



Scaling up Responsible Land Governance

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CREATING SPACE: REFORMING INFORMAL LAND TENURE AND THE RIGHTS OF PREVIOUSLY EXCLUDED GROUPS

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Abstract

As governments around the developing world attempt to improve or reform property rights, individuals, communities, and policy makers ask: Is it possible to create space for women and minority groups to exercise their rights as institutions are increasingly formalized? What types of governance systems exist before reforms change the ways that individuals and communities manage their land and natural resources? Despite the best intentions, lack of information, social norms, physical barriers, and the unintended consequences of reform may keep certain social groups from benefitting from improved systems. Using qualitative data from focus groups and key informant interviews as part of a larger longitudinal evaluation of a community land in rural Liberia, we provide a careful analysis of existing governance structures, the expectations of community members, and the needs of women and minority groups prior to the proposed implementation of a rights-based land reform in the Republic of Liberia.

Key Words: Communal property rights, Women's Property Rights, Qualitative Research, Program Evaluation

The duality of local resource governance in rural Liberia: Evidence using multiple types of data [‡]

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1 Introduction

How does local resource governance - defined as the management of communally-held natural resources and the creation and enforcement of rules governing their use - function in rural Liberia on the eve of national land reform? This question is invariably important for understanding resource governance at the community level during periods of institutional change, yet to date scholars and policy makers have little evidence to go on as they support the implementation of property rights reforms for rural communities. How do different kinds of data, including fine-grained quantitative data collected with household surveys and detailed narratives collected through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, help provide a more complete picture of how communities manage their natural resources? In what ways do multiple sources of data provide a more nuanced picture of potentially complex or sensitive topics, such as the rights of women and minority groups or the challenges facing local governance prior to reform?

Within political science, scholars argue that analyzing different types of data together can improve the quality of research. Quantitative data allow researchers to run probabilistic analysis of general trends across a large population and over a wide range of topics. Within specific research designs, including randomized experiments, it is possible to identify the causal effect of specific interventions. At the same time, quantitative data may describe situations or exhibit patterns which are difficult if not possible to understand without more information about context. Various examples of cutting-edge research show that qualitative and quantitative data (e.g. Posner 1995; Paluck and Green 2009; Blattman et al. 2014; Blattman et al. 2015) can be used together to provide better evidence of the phenomenon at hand. In a review article of the *American Political Science Review*, Sydney Tarrow (1995) explained: “A single-minded adherence to either quantitative or qualitative approaches straightjackets scientific progress. Whenever possible, we should use qualitative data to interpret quantitative findings, to get inside the processes underlying decision outcomes...We should also try to use different kinds of evidence together and in sequence and

look for ways of triangulating different measures on the same research problem.” (474).

We explore the gains from analyzing qualitative and quantitative data together through an exploration of local resource governance systems. We define governance systems to include centrally organized (national) resource administration such as regulations overseen by national ministries of mines, or agriculture, customary structures and community-level structures, often rooted in authorities with real or imagined first-come status to a specific geographic location. Data were collected under the guide of a rigorous impact evaluation of the Community Land Protection Program (CLPP) and contain information about several specific issues related to resource governance, including the conferral of decision-making authority, the distribution of benefits from resources, and the exercise of collective-choice property rights associated with common resources such as use, transfer and exclusion.¹ Resource governance arrangements, especially those that delegate decision-making authority to local leaders, shape local power dynamics because of the high probability of unequal distribution of benefits from communally-held resources. Land reform occurs within the context of these existing structures, and its consideration of these structures can either solidify or undermine existing local control of natural resources with consequences for the impact of reform.

We argue that the evidence suggests that local resource governance in rural Liberia is characterized by strong dualities which are difficult if not impossible to identify and explain without multiple types of data. First, our data show that communities manage resources with local rule-based systems that are tailored to and enforced according to community

¹The Community Land Protection Program promotes an integrated community land protection model that supports communities to protect their lands and natural resources and use community land and resource documentation processes to create positive intra-community change leading to enhanced agricultural productivity, entrepreneurship, and employment. As Liberia’s land reform process began in 2009, Namati/IDLO and SDI approached the Liberian Land Commission and requested permission to pilot an innovative community land documentation process in River Cess County. The NGOs and the Land Commission signed an MOU that loosely laid out the various components of a community land protection movement in Liberia. From that time until today, SDI and Namati have been assisting rural communities to document and protect their land and resources according to the agreed process in the 2009 MOU, which now forms the core of the process set out in the draft Land Rights Act. Pilot activities in 20 communities in River Cess County showed promising results and created further opportunities for expansion in other rural areas of Liberia (Knight et al., 2012).

needs. These systems entail local norms, practices, and rules that govern the use of communal spaces, sanction behavior, structure interactions with external actors, and manage conflict. In the quantitative household survey, community members report high levels of satisfaction with these systems and with their leaders overall. Yet, the household survey data also report that leaders engage in irresponsible or illegal behavior that suggest that this information is not the complete picture. Turning to the qualitative data, interviews and focus-groups suggest that while unique community-based rule systems function for local problems, community authorities are ill-equipped to deal with other areas of local resource governance: investor relations and conflicts between communities. Reference to the use of violence in dealing with outside investors and the unsolicited discussions on ongoing land conflicts reflect a system of local resource governance that works at the micro-level but is strained by processes involving outside actors.

Women and minority group property rights exhibit the second duality. The dominant narrative in Liberia is that women face challenges in exercising their rights in Liberian communities, especially in areas dominated by neocustomary governance structures.² On the one hand, according to survey respondents, women are significantly less active in local resource governance in the community. They are less likely to enforce rules; attend fewer meetings; and are less likely to speak their opinions about matters involving property rights. Yet respondents are divided about whether women and members of minority groups actually have weaker property rights. A significant proportion of the community believes that women have equal access to land. Specifically, only 34% of quantitative survey respondents believe that women have been disadvantaged or overlooked because of the community's rules for customary or traditional land in the last year. Qualitative data help explain this seemingly divergent finding: while authorities in many communities rely on neocustomary structures

²Following Boone (2014), we identify most rural governance structures for a bounded geographic area rooted in a real or imagined hereditary authority with ties to first settlers or 'indigenous' inhabitants of that particular area. Such governance structures are sometimes referred to as 'customary' in other contexts, but we prefer the term neocustomary as it takes into account the rupture with historic institutions caused by the human trade (including the massive movement of people that took place during the trans-Atlantic slave trade); colonization; and civil conflict.

to maintain legitimacy and power, the central Liberian government is in the process of introducing a rights-based framework that structures access to resources based on individual property rights. This framework is emerging as salient in some locations for some individuals, although it is by no means universal. Rights-based values are changing the ways people understand women and minority group access rights and the socially acceptable responses to questions about the access of different groups. Variation between individuals in the same community suggest that this is a fast changing issue.

Our findings are based on quantitative surveys of 2,100 individuals in 79 communities in three rural Liberian counties and 49 focus groups and semi-structured interviews in nine communities in the same counties. 23% of study communities are in Lofa county (ethnic group majority Lorma/Kpelle), 22% communities are in Maryland County (ethnic group majority Grebo), and 56% communities are in River Gee County (ethnic group majority Grebo)³. An important scope condition for the findings presented here is that they reflect the situation in mostly remote communities in Maryland and River Gee Counties, where members of the Grebo ethnic group are in the majority. Some of the findings that depart from previous research may be a result of the differences between local resource governance in rural Grebo communities as compared with the rest of the country. Key activities surrounding natural resources found in these areas are logging, hunting and fishing, gold and diamond mining, household use of river water for drinking and cleaning, rubber and palm oil extraction, and farm cultivation of swamp rice and other crops. Data were collected in February and March 2014 with additional data verified in July 2014.

Especially in the lead up to a high-stakes national-level policy reform that will alter fundamental property rights, our analysis has many benefits. Building on previous contributions to understanding political behavior in developing countries, this research demonstrates the importance of analyzing different kinds of data. In particular, qualitative data can help explain puzzling or seemingly contradictory patterns in quantitative data. They can also

³Due to rounding, percents do not sum to 100.

identify instances when social desirability bias may be affecting survey responses and help researchers understand why this is the case.

From a policy perspective, this research provides a nuanced portrait of local resource governance in rural Liberia communities prior to a large-scale change in policy with wide-ranging impacts on these communities. Understanding the state of resource governance prior to changes in policy can help members of government and civil society who will support communities during this process. Our research suggests that some areas of local resource governance are changing even in advance of the official land reform, in part as a response to previous policies, such as the 2003 Women’s Inheritance Act, and perhaps also as a result of changing international norms around issues such as women’s property rights.

2 Theory

2.1 Qualitative and quantitative data together

Research in political science points to various ways that qualitative and quantitative research complement each other. First, situating qualitative research within quantitative data helps researchers avoid the pitfall of generalizing from a one time event and provides a less dramatic, but more true-to-life, assessment of patterns over time or for a general population. As Tarrow (1995) explains: “A sequence of contributions using different kinds of evidence led to a clearer and more nuanced understanding,” (473). Several examples of research on politics in developing countries provide examples of how qualitative and quantitative data complement each other.

For example, Posner (1995) uses qualitative data to complement survey data from a natural experiment. Posner identifies striking differences in the ways that political and ethnic identity functions in communities on either side of the Zambia - Malawi border in his quantitative data. Historical information provided by interviews and focus groups conducted with community members helps explain the divergent answers to survey questions and provides

another source of evidence that supports his theory of political identity. Paluck and Green (2009) and Blattman et al. (2014) also use qualitative measures and qualitative research to complement an experimental impact evaluation. In each study, quantitative measures suggested changes in individual behaviors as a result of an outside intervention. Specifically, Blattman et al. (2014) use qualitative observations and semi-structured interviews to explain why the survey data showed a reduction in violence associated with land disputes in rural communities following small changes to local institutions.

2.2 Local resource governance

In Liberia, as in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, natural resources are often located on communally-held lands surrounding communities. These communities have developed local and informal governance structures based on shared norms outside of central, statutory policy (Alden-Wily, 2000; 2009). Research has shown that such institutions can be an efficient way to manage communal natural resources (Ostrom, 1990; 1992). Indeed, Ostrom (2009) notes, “When users... have full autonomy at the collective-choice level to craft and enforce some of their own rules, they face lower transaction costs as well as lower costs in defending a resource against invasion by others,” (421). Such rules for resource use must be “congruent with local conditions”, able to be monitored and enforced, and not be overruled by higher government policy (Ibid.). A rich literature considers which characteristics tend to make such local institutions successful, in that they produce positive outcomes for communities, and the effect of central government policies on these institutions. (e.g. Andersson et al 2015; Bartley et al 2008).

However, there are often limits to what local institutions can do on their own, particularly in face of new external challenges around resource use and control. Communities continue to face pressure from national governments and domestic and international investors to cede access or control of the resources on these communal lands for business ventures, and statutory land laws often, even if inadvertently, are constructed in ways that can further weaken local

institutions. Traditionally, policy interventions recommend strengthening individual property rights in areas experiencing land pressure (PLAAS, 2010). For example, in Rwanda, recent nation-wide land reforms have focused on individual titling (e.g. Ali, Deininger, and Goldstein, 2011). The literature from economics continues to do so (e.g. Field, 2003 & 2010; Galiani and Schargrodsy, 2005). However, following a movement co-lead by community rights advocates, land reforms in countries like Liberia increasingly attempt to address the pitfalls of reforms that exclude the voice of the community (Knight, 2010; Lawry et al 2015). Understanding the nuances of existing resource governance systems and where they stumble is key for providing stronger guidance around how reforms can work effectively in such contexts.

Through an impact evaluation of community land titling which created the opportunity to collect the data described in the paper, related research now aims to clarify whether strengthening communal land rights can improve land and natural resource management and provide greater economic benefits to the surrounding community (Hartman, et. al., 2015). Within the overall context of the impact evaluation, this paper provides a rich description at baseline of local norms governing natural resource use, including their strengths in the local context, their breakdown when attempting to deal with larger issues, and the potential for neocustomary governance institutions to perpetuate practices that are exclusionary of certain subgroups. Local institutions include leadership and authority over communal resources such as water, forests, and farms; community-based rules that manage resource development and access; and specific property rights, including the right to possess, inherit, and transfer both individual and communal property within a community. Changes to these institutions could have either a strengthening or destabilizing effect on community governance.

3 Setting

Liberia is a West African nation of roughly four million people that suffered two civil wars from 1989 to 2003. Five main features of the setting are relevant to this study.

First, Liberia’s land tenure context has historically been characterized by two parallel property rights systems (Bruce and Kanneh, 2011). Following the settlement of the territory that would become coastal Liberia, settlers set up a statutory system of land ownership based on fee-simple titles. The majority of inhabitants in the inland rural areas use community-centered tenure systems, often based on collective ownership coupled with some individually held property (Bruce 2008; Bruce and Kanneh, 2011).

Second, women were not traditional land owners in Liberia. In certain contexts, women and lower status men were treated as property themselves and used to settle debts or as payment (Beldsoe, 1976). While they may have had specific spheres of influence including decision-making authority over certain agricultural decisions, historically Liberian women had many fewer property rights than men (Beldsoe, 1970). In 2003, in an effort to address this problem, the post-war Liberian government passed the 2003 Women’s Inheritance Act. The Act provided women with specific property rights, including the right to inherit one third of their husband’s property and formalized the idea that women, like men, could be owners of property. However, marriage remained a key institution that mediated women’s property rights (Namubiru-Mwaura et al., 2012). While research shows that women are involved in land and natural resource management, “women’s decision-making power over land and natural resources appears to be particularly limited [compared to men], as land is often still viewed as the domain of men and male-decision-making” (Namubiru-Mwaura et al., 2012: xviii).

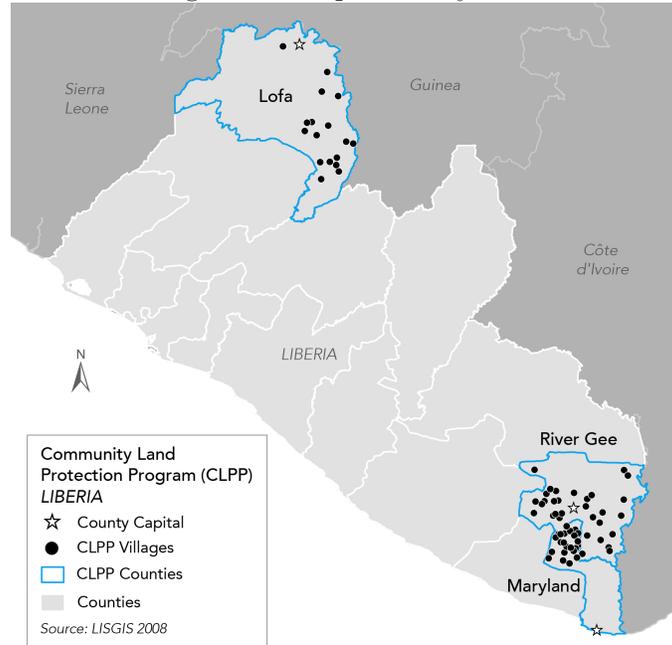
Third, following the end of Liberia’s 14-year civil war in 2003, conflict over land and natural resource rights continued to be a threat to postwar land and natural resource rights as waves of refugees sought to return to their homes and the government sought to increase investment in infrastructure and natural resources (USAID, 2010).

Fourth, as a result of the post-conflict land situation, the Liberian government, in consultation with international partners, began a process to implement a national land reform. This process is already ongoing. Liberia's current government has made key reforms to the country's land tenure system that aim to address a number of the inequalities and grievances created by the previous policy framework. These include: 1) the passage of the 2009 Community Rights Law, which provides for community ownership of forest resources authorized by the national forest agency; 2) the creation of the Liberian Land Commission, also in 2009, whose mandate includes the development of a comprehensive new national Land Rights Policy, which was adopted in 2013; and 3) most recently, the development of a draft Land Rights Act to realize the vision set forth in the Land Rights Policy (Stevens, 2014).⁴ These reforms are rights-based. That is, they draw on a legal framework that recognizes both the equal right of all Liberians to exercise rights over property throughout Liberia and the rights communities to govern the access and use of their communally held natural resources. The reforms aim to change a status quo that includes variation in local governance structures, the exclusion of specific social groups, and the increasing vulnerability of rural community members to the loss of access to their life sustaining natural resources.

Fifth, infrastructure in the country, government processes, and other factors have meant that land reform has unfolded unevenly. As a result, while some new ideas about how individual and communal land and resources will be managed have trickled into communities, the results have not been uniform. The extent to which public information campaigns have begun to change people's understanding of property rights is unclear, especially in rural areas that are often beyond daily connection with the central government.

⁴At the time of writing, the Land Rights Policy is being reviewed by the Liberia legislature with a ruling expected in the first half of 2016.

Figure 1: Map of study area



4 Data and measurement

Baseline data were collected from February to March 2014 (with additional data verified in July 2014) by enumeration teams under the oversight of researchers at the University of Michigan (UM) and Yale University, in collaboration with The Cloudburst Group. Three quantitative survey instruments were administered at baseline for this study: a large-N household survey, a Community Leader survey, and a Community Diary survey. The fourth source of primary baseline data is qualitative transcripts of focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

4.1 Quantitative data

The quantitative household survey dataset comprises 2,100 observations from 79 communities.⁵ The household survey instrument was designed to collect data on community structures

⁵Delays in funding for the baseline data collection unfortunately led to reduced time spent training enumerators in-country, which led to the loss of data during the first three days in the field. Errors in programming and uploading with the electronic data collection software led to losses of data during the first three days in the field. A 'recollect' of the lost data in Lofa county was completed in mid-July 2014,

and institutions, tenure security, perceptions of local leaders and land governance, and background information on socioeconomic conditions of households, including assets, ethnicity, religion, education and marital status.

Approximately 10-15 households were selected in each study village for the household survey, as well as two or three community leaders to complete the leaders' survey and the community diary survey. Households were randomly selected according to a protocol that involved making a simple map of the community and selecting respondents based on the size of each quarter (or neighborhood). Both the head of household and the most important female (defined as the female who makes the most decisions in male-headed households) were interviewed in each household surveyed.

Community leaders surveyed (N=209) include the Town Chief, youth leader, women's leader and minority leader (if applicable). The Community Diary survey (N=156) was designed for continued use during monitoring and evaluation as a high-frequency data source on land investment, land governance, and the incidence of land conflicts.

4.2 Qualitative data

The qualitative data at baseline consist of 49 semi-structured interviews and focus groups in nine communities. The qualitative data focused on four main themes: 1) natural resources in the community (their existence, use, and governance), 2) investor relations, 3) the overall community governance structure, and 4) the rights of women and minority groups. Key questions concerning natural resources dealt with the value of natural resources in the community and resource governance. With respect to investors, researchers sought to collect a snapshot of communities' ongoing experience with investors and probe about strategies for managing conflicts with investors through the use of a hypothetical scenario in which an investor does not deliver on promised benefits. Understanding of local community governance structure was developed through discussions of governance practices, community

but further issues with the electronic data collection software caused data to be lost permanently for 11 communities.

rules, and rule enforcement. Finally, particular attention was paid to the rights of women and minorities to access land and to participate in community decision making.

5 Quantitative findings

The quantitative findings describe a notable duality in both natural resource governance and minority and women’s property rights. First, the data on natural resource governance structures show variation in the types of authorities with control over land and resources. Overall, authorities use a rule-based system and respondents report high levels of confidence with this system.⁶ However, there are also reports of irresponsible and illegal behavior by leaders. From the information contained in this baseline dataset, it is unclear how leaders manage problems that extend beyond the community and involve outside actors.

Second, the data on women’s property rights show that women have less power in land and natural resource governance, but that respondents were divided on whether women enjoy weaker property rights. Questions about their participation in community decision making shed light on the ways that women engage in natural resource governance and access their property rights. The survey also assessed respondent’s knowledge of Liberian property law and in particular women’s property rights. The survey has fewer questions relating to the position of minorities in community life, but survey respondents are similarly split in assessing whether outsiders and minorities have been negatively affected in the past year due to traditional community land practices.

⁶Note that this stands in contrast to other research that documents high levels of breakdown in historic land governance systems at the local level (e.g. Namubiru-Mwaura et al. 2012). We attribute this to the location and type of community included in our research, and in particular the fact that most of the communities were located in River Gee and Maryland counties and were very rural and isolated compared with other communities/clans where research has taken place.

Table 1: General summary statistics from baseline survey

| Survey question | Mean | Mean if female |
|---|------|----------------|
| How many community meetings have you attended in the last month? | 1.84 | 1.40 |
| Does this community have Land Governance Council? | 55% | 54% |
| Were you involved in planning by-laws for natural resource management? (cond) | 33% | 21% |
| How satisfied are you with rules that govern your community land? (0 - 5) | 3.68 | 3.48 |
| How satisfied are you with enforcement of rules governing community land (0 - 5) | 3.56 | 3.43 |
| Are these rules fair? (0 - 5) | 3.66 | 3.43 |
| Do you feel your opinions are heard about and used in land management? (0 - 5) | 2.29 | 1.83 |
| Do you feel this group has been disadvantaged over the past year? WOMEN (0 - 5) | 2.55 | 2.64 |
| Do you feel this group has been disadvantaged over the past year? POOR (0 - 5) | 2.46 | 2.48 |
| Do you feel this group has been disadvantaged over the past year? STRANGERS (0 - 5) | 2.62 | 2.66 |
| How many women were made leaders in your community over the past 12 months? | 1.20 | 1.12 |
| Wives have the right to inherit their husband's land | 79% | 0.77 |
| I have the right to decide who will take/inherit my household's land | 79% | 0.75 |
| Referring to a community 'ladder of power' (10 is most powerful): | | |
| Where are the community members on the ladder? (0 - 10) | 6.55 | 6.47 |
| Where is the town chief on the ladder? (0 - 10) | 8.60 | 8.65 |
| Where is the Land Governance Council on the ladder? (cond) (0 - 10) | 5.19 | 5.01 |
| Where are women on the ladder? (0 - 10) | 5.93 | 5.73 |
| Where is the paramount chief on the ladder? (0 - 10) | 8.17 | 8.08 |
| Where are youth? (0 - 10) | 6.67 | 6.59 |
| Where are elders? (0 - 10) | 8.55 | 8.58 |
| For community leaders involved in natural resource management: | | |
| They are trusted and honest? (0 - 5) | 3.52 | 3.44 |
| They can conserve and protect our community lands and forests? (0 - 5) | 3.57 | 3.48 |
| They can do patrols and punish rule breakers? (0 - 5) | 3.64 | 3.55 |
| They can give unequal benefits to a few favored families? (0 - 5) | 2.67 | 2.72 |
| They cannot do any work: they are lazy or drunk? (0 - 5) | 2.38 | 2.49 |
| They take bribes or are involved in illegal forest activities? (0 - 5) | 2.49 | 2.55 |
| They can act in secret: they are not open with the community? (0 - 5) | 2.57 | 2.69 |
| They fail to consult with the community about land decisions? (0 - 5) | 2.53 | 2.63 |

5.1 Community governance

Respondents answered questions about both how governance worked in their community and their perception of the how well systems worked. The types of authorities that make decisions and enforce rules about property rights in communities are mostly local. The majority of respondents identified Town Chiefs and traditional landlords as the authorities with the most decision-making power over issues of land and natural resource usage and

outside investors. Elders are most frequently cited as the authority who would make the decision about whether to sell or lease land to an outside investor (22%), followed by the Town Chief (20%), the whole community together (19%), and the landlord (15%).⁷ When it came to land ownership, over half of the respondents stated that the traditional landlord or the elders owned the community land. Most household survey respondents name the landlord (39%) as the owner of their community land, followed by the elders generally (21%) and the whole community together as a group (17%).

In about half of the communities included in the survey, respondents stated that community-members formed natural resource governance committees. Respondents suggested that they were appointed by elders, rather than selected democratically. However, when it came to assessing the power of these committees to take decisions, respondents ranked them lower than other authorities in the community, including women and youth.⁸

A third of respondents also reported that their leaders took bribes, were involved in criminal activities or were ineffectual at their jobs (30% reported that leaders abused alcohol). Exactly the kinds of issues that local authorities have a hard time resolving remained unclear in the survey data. Qualitative information provides an opportunity to fill in these gaps.

5.2 Women's property rights

The quantitative survey sought to understand women's participation in governance structures and women's property rights in their community in two ways. First, survey questions about participation and leadership in natural resource governance structures and knowledge of property rights are analyzed by the sex of the respondent. Second, a set of questions focused on the respondent's view of women's property rights.

Data on meeting attendance show that women participate less in in local government

⁷Landlords are typically elders with specific real or imagined ties to first settlers or indigenous groups who created a particular community.

⁸Household survey respondents were asked about the relative power of different individuals and groups in the community, such as the Town Chief, the Land Governance Council, elders, women, and youth, on a scale where 10 represents the most power to make important decisions and 1 represents the least.

Table 2: Summary statistics on natural resource management leaders from baseline survey

| Leader | Owns community land | Makes decisions to sell or allocate community land to outsiders |
|---|---------------------|---|
| Government in Monrovia | 9% | 8% |
| Town Chief | 8% | 20% |
| Paramount chief | 2% | 2% |
| First settlers/landlord | 39% | 25% |
| Elders | 21% | 22% |
| Land Governance council | 0% | 4% |
| The whole community together as a group | 17% | 19% |
| Don't Know | 0% | 1% |
| Other | 3% | NA |

than male survey respondents. Men report attending two community meetings per month compared with women, who attend only one. While few men report that they never participate in land and natural resource management meetings, a quarter of women are not involved. When asked about their relative authority over natural resources in the community, respondents described women as the least powerful group (the only group ranked less powerful than women were appointed community committees).

Respondents are divided about whether women have the same property rights as men. About 60% of respondents report that women and men do not enjoy equal property rights (women have more limited usage and ownership rights). However, both men and women demonstrated high knowledge of statutory property law, including laws that state that women do have the right to inherit property. These differences in the quantitative data indicate a discrepancy between recognition of Liberia's property rights framework, which recognizes the legal right of women to own land, and community land governance and transfer practices, which often exclude women. Discussions during qualitative data collection on this topic illuminate community attitudes about female membership in the community and how understanding of this insider or outsider status affects access to property.

6 Qualitative findings

In this section we present evidence on the duality of local resource governance in rural Liberian communities in two key arenas of governance: community-based property rights and women and minority property rights.⁹ By community-based property rights, we mean the local, geographically bounded norms, practices, and rules that govern the use of communal spaces, sanction behavior, structure interactions with external actors, and manage conflict. Women and minority property rights refers to the rights that women and members of ethnic and religious minorities have over individual and communal property in the community.

We find that two categories of institutions govern community-based property rights: 1) local institutions generated and maintained at the community level, and 2) regional / national institutions. The ways in which these institutions are distinct or overlap is not shaped by an administrative framework or procedures, but rather by the success or failure of the local institutions to manage their resources on their own, and in cases where this is not possible, seek assistance from the national government. This arrangement, while it creates flexibility, also creates gaps in the ways that local communities can deal with critical resource management issues. Even though the recent experience of war produces strong acceptance of regional and national rule of law to mediate disagreements and avoid violent conflict, local leaders have struggled remarkably to secure resolution of the land conflicts their communities face. This is a marked contrast to the authority that leaders enjoy at the local level. We would like to note that these findings pertain only to the geographic areas covered by our study, which include Lofa, Maryland and River Gee Counties. In particular, most of our data is collected in Maryland and River Gee counties, which may explain some key differences in our findings on local governance structure and previous research (e.g. Namubiru-Mwaura et al. 2012). We also find that some rural Liberians identify a rights-based framework that allows women and members of minority ethnic groups to enjoy equal property rights.

⁹Despite the geographic spread of communities throughout Northwest and Southeast Liberia, there was much consistency in the descriptions of both areas of governance. The one exception to this observation is a markedly higher presence of ethnic tensions in Lofa county, compared to the counties in the Southeast.

However, at the same time, other people report that a neocustomary framework based on first-comer status and dominated by men excludes certain parts of the community from specific property rights.

6.1 Community-based property rights

The communities included in this study describe a dual governance structure for local affairs, where some aspects of life are regulated at the community level with local structures, but in other cases the community reaches out to the Liberian government for assistance, particularly in the case of disagreements with outsiders. The self-management practiced by communities includes the regulation of social behavior, community-based rules for managing shared resources, and the establishment of processes for outsiders to gain access to community land and natural resources. We show that while use of communal resources and intra-community sanctions are governed by internally coherent community-generated norms, practices and rules, relationships with investors and intractable land conflicts are not. Instead, understandings of these aspects of community property rights vary within communities, and both community-based practices and national-level institutions show signs of breakdown.

Using communal resources

The quotidian negotiation of land management and land governance occurs at the hyper-local level, often directed in tandem by local government officials and traditional authorities. Qualitative data verify the quantitative finding that in most communities, the Town Chief and landlord are most often the key authorities for community-based property rights and natural resource management. These officials lead a governance system that includes a governing body composed of elders, youth leaders and women's leaders. Leaders monitor and enforce both rules that reinforce behavioral norms and rules specific to preserving communal resources. Community rules are not created or enforced by the central government. In some communities, participants in qualitative data collection exercises report that they have writ-

ten rules (for example, in Community 8¹⁰), but often these rules are unwritten (Community 1, Community 9).¹¹

Sanctions

General sanctions about inhabitants' individual conduct cover prohibitions on stealing, cursing, fighting, and adultery as well as rules designed to promote and protect community natural resources. In some cases rules governing individual behavior are directly linked to community-level natural resource governance. For example, rules against adultery are specifically designed to avoid poor farm yield for everyone in the community, signifying the communal responsibility that individuals have for production both on communal and on family land.

In some cases, not only adultery and sexual assault but consensual sex in certain geographic areas is prohibited to protect agricultural production at the community level. In Community 2, the youth leader explained that if such actions place: "according to our people, the production will be very very poor that year...productions of crops, and the ground hull, the rats, the snakes will go into the farm and destroy the rice" (Community 2, Youth Leader KI Interview, February 21, 2014).

Punishment for rule breaking is usually a fine. Fines almost always include paying rice and other foodstuffs for a communal meal that is cooked on the spot. They may also include a monetary contribution that is held in the communal town treasury until the community encounters a suitable purpose for dispensing the money.¹² Punishment may also include corporal punishment, which is usually a proscribed number of lashes in public. Sometimes there is the option to pay money to avoid physical punishment.

Some rules governing natural resources control access to prevent overuse or pollution of

¹⁰Village names have been removed to protect the anonymity of participants.

¹¹Further research that verifies the existence of written rules would be key to understanding the differences between communities where rules remain unwritten and those with documentation.

¹²Town treasuries were a common occurrence in the study communities. The treasury appears to be a communal pot of money that is held by one or several local authorities and either used for public buildings and infrastructure or as assistance to town members without enough to eat.

the resource. Preventing pollution of the community water source is a key concern, and most communities do not allow people to wear shoes into their drinking water source. For example, a respondent in the women's focus group in Community 9 explains, "you talked about water, the water that is there before you reach to the waterside there they get the palm branch that where you stopping your slipper, you can't put your slipper in the [water] because we drinking the water that one of the laws there," (Community 9, Women's Focus Group, March 12, 2014). Another community (Community 3) has set specific times for fishing. Many rules concern the permissions required to harvest materials from the resource-rich forest surrounding a community. Some actions are commonly prohibited, such as clearing certain areas for farmland or killing certain animals. "You can't just get up go in the bush and do things on your own, to dig diamond or cut log on your own way," reported the Town Chief during a Key Informant Interview in Community 3 (February 14, 2014). Respondents in Community 1 describe practical rules for sharing communal natural resources, including rules for cutting palm and for clearing certain farmland before brushing it. A general theme is that community members must contribute to the community in order to benefit from it.

Cooperation

Managing access to and investment in common resources requires cooperation directed by local authorities. Investment in the maintenance and improvement of common resources and collective goods is usually another requirement for residents. The same community bodies that create and enforce rules about community work dictate when and how community members and outsiders can access shared resources.

Often community work entails agricultural labor on a community farm or road improvements in concert with neighboring towns. Controlling the snake population in inhabited areas is also a communal responsibility. Like other forms of rule breaking, shirking this duty also results in a fine. A youth focus group respondent explains, "... When you call for general work; town work you don't go there you break the rules that is fine like the bordering towns

around us when we are going to clean the roads we all go,” (Community 4, Youth Focus Group, March 3, 2014).

In six communities, respondents described the processes governing communal agricultural projects in detail.¹³ Each community has their own arrangement for who works on the farm – the whole community or a specific subgroup – and their own practice for using the yield and distributing its benefits. Community 2 has a community farm that began in 2013. They grow rice and cassava, some to eat and some to sell. Proceeds from sales of farm products fund communal infrastructure. Community 3 has communal working groups for individual farms, known as "Koo" in Liberian English, and the women make a communal farm, growing rice, beans, and peanuts. The food is sold and the proceeds are kept in the community treasury, but some women are dissatisfied with a lack of transparency surrounding what the chairlady does with this money. The yield from the community farm in Community 5 is used to help members of the community facing hunger, as discussed in the youth focus group, where a participant states, "They will make the farm after making the farm any rice come from out of the farm if this lady is stranded for food she can go and credit," (Community 5, Youth Focus Group, March 18, 2014). Community 4 has a communal farm and plantation with rice, cassava and banana. They also have a paper farm project. In this community, they divide the yield between members who participate in the cultivation.

Companies and individual “investors” go through a modified process to gain approval to harvest resources from a forest, and they usually must pledge a percentage of the revenue they make through this endeavor back to the town. In Community 5, the community regulates access to the bush and to the forest because of the community’s desire to control resource consumption in these areas and because of the potential to incite conflict if an outside investor does not know the boundaries of land controlled by the community: "...Nobody is allow[ed] to enter the bush without the permission of the town people and just get there

¹³The lack of information on this topic does not mean that such institutions and processes do not exist in other communities, but rather that the qualitative interviews, which follow an open-ended format, followed other topics in greater detail.

and take any of the logs or resources," (Community 5, Hunter's Focus Group, February 18, 2014). Before going into the forest, the "elders them too you will sit down and your talk because the human being business, we got boundary with different town, maybe you could easily go there and then something happen to you and then you come to the town people," (Community 5, Women's Focus Group, February 18, 2014). In Community 2, describing the way that the community deals with outsiders who want to use communal resources, the Youth Leader explains, "A pit sawyer come and we gave them place to go and saw so and we gave them certain... portion of place to go and do sawing and we give you certain amount of pieces of planks to give to the community. If that portion of place finished, you come back and say I still want to work but the place your gave me is finished then we give you another place," (Community 2, Youth Leader KI Interview, February 21, 2014). In Community 3, for communal resources, such as trees, outsiders have to pay some fee (often a percentage) to the town for their access. There is a time limit on outsiders use or engagement in natural resource exploitation.

During qualitative interviews, respondents suggested that they rarely turn away an outsider who requests access to resources. Community 8 also welcomes outsiders who arrive to farm. As the Town Chief explains, "The land we get here is too big, many people from different towns settle on our land every year, we can ask them every farming year to bring rice to us they will bring rice to [Community 8] for our community" (Community 8, Town Chief KII, February 11, 2014). This system allows the community to keep a store of rice for the community. Community 8 also engages in price setting for locally manufactured goods, which is a rarer practice than simply negotiating a percentage of the commodity harvested or the revenue from selling it. A respondent describes, "The oil in this town here we can sell oil that \$20 dollars for snap, when that red oil (palm oil) that is \$15 dollars for snap nobody can put price up here I don't care oil price goes, you can't sell oil \$30 dollars or \$40 dollars," (Community 8, Women and Youth Focus Group, February 11, 2014).

Investors

In contrast to the confident hyper-local governance of community land and natural resources, some issues exist in a space where both the local authorities and the national government have responsibility, creating more challenges for communities. This leads to a duality in perceptions of quality, and the actual success, of land and natural resource governance. Two key scenarios where both tiers of this dual governance structure are visible are disputes with investors operating in the community and land conflicts with surrounding communities.

Focus group and interview respondents were presented with a scenario about a rubber company that promised to build a school and a clinic in a community if allowed to operate there and then failed to do so. Respondents were then asked to discuss what the fictional village should do to remedy the situation. Most individuals suggested that both local authorities (including elders and traditional landlords) and the national government could play a role in normalizing relations with investors. Strategies for dealing with investors locally include collective action, such as strikes and roadblocks, sometimes using the town flag to symbolically assert control over the area where the company operates (a tool that was described in three study communities). Some of these strategies invoke traditional spiritual and religious practices. For example, in Community 4, the Women's Leader stated that the "traditional power" is more important when dealing with an investor. Traditional powers include invoking of the "devil", a traditional figure in community governance who is understood to play a role in enforcing sanctions on community members and outsiders alike who do not comply with community-level authorities.¹⁴

Some respondents stated that the traditional people are not corruptible, so they are the ones that protect the town from government officials who might be bribed by an outside company (Community 1, Youth Focus Group, March 14, 2014). Traditional responses to a

¹⁴In some areas, the Devil plays an even more contentious role. Residents believe that if an outsider sees the devil then they will die shortly thereafter. Thus invoking the devil emerges as a significant form of resistance to and control over an outsider presence in a community. We thank Caleb Stevens for his clarification on this point.

slight by an investor also appear attractive to communities because they activate a hierarchy that already exists to organize the community and present a united front. They allow the community to take a stand without immediately resorting to violence, since outsiders are understood to lack the kind of traditional power that is asserted against them. In Community 7, the Town Chief describes the importance of traditional power for the community, "Our action is that we will have a tradition rule...tradition rule it can stop the people," (Community 7, Town Chief Key Informant Interview, March 8, 2014). Additionally, a Youth's Focus Group discusses how the community would use the traditional symbol of the town flag to demonstrate the seriousness of a situation before the advent of violent confrontation:

R: ...We the tradition people we went and tie on the machine and say this machine is not going anywhere, you move it now then that is a challenge to us.

I: If the tradition flag is up the machine will not move by itself they will force it to move or so?

R: When they move it, it can move.

I: I thought it get certain power...

R: No, for example, when two towns fighting your carry government flag there, secondly we don't just branch that is tradition, and that there you will be afraid you will never that machine.

I: So what is the traditional flag color?

R: Green.

I: So when they go beyond that one now what will be the action?

R: We exchange fire.

R2: When the traditional is posted up then that violence coming now,"

(Community 4, Youth Focus Group, March 3, 2014).

While traditional actions serve as a means for a village to demonstrate seriousness, there is also consensus that the government should resolve a dispute with an investor: "The first thing we will call their manager and when there is resistance we will like to take a law suit because you will not take the law in your hand to fight someone, you will not get there to fight and to do any other thing no, but taking law step court procedure," (Community 5, Hunters' Focus Group, February 18, 2014). Similarly, another respondent in the hunters' focus group would bar the company from entering the bush and then "talk to the law procedure" – from the lowest level of government upwards – township commissioner, district commissioner, superintendent, representative (Community 5, Hunters' Focus Group, February 18, 2014). The chief of Community 2 states that if an outside company did not comply with its contract with the community then we would bring in higher-level government authorities such as the Statutory District Superintendent. The chief further explains that if the Government does not stop the company from breaking its contract and the outsiders continue to try to work, he will force the government to intervene by calling a strike and causing other problems for the company (Community 2, Town Chief KII, February 21, 2014).

Though some respondents like those above indicate that they would complain first to local or regional government authorities, others feel that the national court system should be the venue for the adjudication of this dispute. This opinion often stems from widespread awareness in communities of the need for a written contract with investors, and the knowledge that this contract can be used as evidence in legal proceedings. Women in Community 9 stated: "When they do not do what I told them, then the rubber grow now they start tipping it, I will carry the report to the government because we already sign the paper I will just put my paper down and say this is what the people promise me, then that the government that will look inside... We take [the] legal step now they will not blame us we will go to court the people not want pay attention to us," (Community 9, Women's Focus Group, March 12, 2014).

Like the local traditional responses, allowing the courts to mediate such a dispute with

investors is often seen as a way to avoid a violent conflict with the investor. However, in some conversations, respondents indicate that they would consider violence, either as a last resort if the courts fail to act, or to catalyze faster government intervention. In one community, a respondent explained, "We will apply violence, yeah violence then government will rush into it quickly," (Community 2, Youth Leader KII, February 21, 2014).

Conflicts between communities

Conflicts pertaining to land boundaries with surrounding communities are a second example of a situation where respondents indicated that local authorities could not manage communal land and natural resources alone. This is especially the case when local authorities have tried and failed to resolve a dispute themselves and then tried to involve the government. During qualitative data collection, respondents often first explained that local authorities should be the ones to resolve conflicts between communities. In Community 9, respondents indicated that conflicts could be decided locally: "When they tell you to bring one bag of rice you bring it we cook it we eat it we decide the conflict," (Community 9, Youth Leader KII, March 12, 2014). However, when asked to provide a concrete example of an instance when this method was successful, the respondent brought up a case of an outstanding dispute that could not be resolved locally and where the government had been involved. The issue concerned an encroachment by the group living on one side of a shared creek, and when the informant is asked about how that problem could be solved, he explained: "It can be solved by the government and also both town," (Community 9, Youth Leader KII, March 12, 2014).

In Community 2, the chief describes a boundary dispute with neighboring areas, including a neighboring district, and suggests that the town has brought the case before the Statutory District Superintendent (Community 2, Town Chief KII, February 21, 2014). Another respondent in Community 2 describes two land disputes with neighboring towns. In the first case, the other town "carried" the respondent's town to the government authorities; in the second case, the respondent's town is the first party that brought the case to the government

(Community 2, Women's Leader KII, February 21, 2014).

All of the reported conflicts were ongoing, and respondents expressed exasperation with the government's lack of desire or ability to enforce an end to the conflict. This kind of protracted state of fuzzy borders and competing claims indicates that systems are failing. Oftentimes in interviews and focus groups land conflicts were mentioned spontaneously, without prompting, often with the hope of eliciting assistance from researchers in reaching a timely resolution of the issue. One hunters' leader asks, "Yes on the land dispute we want for you to help us to empower the authority people, the government because this land here we have been talking, talking until we don't know what the government is doing now this land business they took people from here to Monrovia that went in the house of senate they give document and all but still people still putting up resistance," (Community 5, Hunters' Leader KII, February 18, 2014).

In Community 7, the Town Chief expresses frustration: "My first question concerning about the land dispute business, like the way we put it before the government if the government don't want to solve that problem then always we still continuous to have problem with the people how will it be solve," (Community 7, Town Chief KII, March 8, 2014). The Youth Leader of the same community explains that he is eager for a resolution that is not soon in coming, "We forward it to the government and the government see reason on it. I think yesterday and day before yesterday people went in the bush to see the boundary land but the people cross the boundary until they come near the town to plant flower and cocoa.... I want the government to just come bring compact open the line clean tell the other man here is your potion and you tell the other man here is your potion.... we told them the first time they visited us here, the second time they went in the bush they saw the first boundary. They went back and call us.... [Then the county inspector and land commissioner came] The only appeal is let government see about it. Because we tire of war," (Community 7, Youth Leader KII, March 8, 2014).

Deep uncertainty exists about how these land conflicts can be resolved and what towns

can do to avoid losing out in the end. Disagreement has emerged in several locations about whether the best course of action is to plant anyway on contested land or to respect government requests to stay off the area until the case is resolved. In Community 2, while the land case is being resolved (sitting with the superintendent) the chief states that if the people of the other town don't stop crossing the boundary line then they (the people of his town) will also go there and brush the land in order to make a claim to their space so that everything is clear when the government "starts throwing history around" (Community 2, Town Chief KII, February 21, 2014).

The same local authorities who by all accounts effectively manage social life and resource consumption in villages flounder when they try to protect their community's interests in the larger governance system. Outside of the local context, where local control has created a system that is tailored to the community and widely accepted, local leaders struggle to be heard. When setbacks occur in the regional or national government's adjudication of disputes, faith is lost that the government has the willingness or ability to resolve disputes at all, and the power of local leaders to organize the village's response is compromised. This is a marked contrast to the legitimacy that local leaders wield when conducting business within the community.

6.2 Women and minority property rights

There is a clear division in the ways that people in rural Liberian communities understand property rights of women and minority group members. Some individuals report that all people, including women and minority groups, have the right to own, inherit, and use property. Other people categorically reject the rights of women or the rights of members of non-majority ethnic groups over natural resources. The data show high levels of variation and fluctuation within and between communities on the kinds of rights that women and minority group members enjoy.

Equal rights for all individuals

Some individuals stated clearly that women had equal rights over land. In several cases, the Town Chief spoke in a general way about women's property rights. For example, in one community the Town Chief explained that women have property rights and equal access to land through inheritance. In another community, the Town Chief explained: "Women have the right to land ... people can buy land here, so if a woman got her money to buy land, she can buy the land," (Community 2, Town Chief KI Interview, February 21, 2014). These kinds of explanations of how women use, inherit, and own land are in line with the household survey that found that over half of respondents reported that women had equal access to property. However, the interviews suggest that such practices are relatively new. One Youth Leader explained that women do have equal rights for inheritance (in his view that is the "law") but that this wasn't what was practiced in the past, and as a result, the people are still being "sensitized" on this issue (Community 2, Youth Leader KI, February 21, 2014).

Similarly, some residents of rural villages reported that members of minority ethnic groups also had strong land rights in their community. A Women's Leader in Community 1 explained: "No, they part of us, since they're citizens of this same nation, so they are part of us and they have contact with our children, we put together, and they part of us," (Community 1, Women's Focus Group, March 13, 2014). In another community, a Women's Leader stated that members of minority ethnic groups could buy land. As an example of the ways that members of minority communities participated, respondents in several villages suggested that minorities actively attended community meetings where decisions were made.

Neocustomary property rights

In contrast, some respondents described a governance system rooted in neocustomary understandings of power and authority that excludes women and minority groups from full property rights. In a focus group with younger adults, respondents explained that women's ownership of land was "prohibited traditionally": "We have our perception that we take

women from out[side the community] and a woman is a stranger so that is why she cannot own land here," (Community 1, Youth Focus Group, March 14th, 2014). The youth explained that if a man dies, his wife can choose someone else in his family and marry them, but if she refuses or marries outside her former husband's family then she does not have access to property. Women respondents were often the most concrete in explaining how the system worked in practice. When asked about land rights, a member of a women's focus group explained:

"It is for the boy children... for example I who here, I am a Kru by tribe from way Sas Town side. I left my home I come way here. I come married to a different man and it is my brothers then there [in Town X] taking care of the things. How will I claim that Cocoa farm? I think it will be for the boys. In the place I am married my husband things will be for me... When the man is willing to go [to a woman's place of origin], the woman convinced the man and he say my woman let us go if your father get properties there, if your brother them will help you, we can live by it. But that [situation] is one of understanding [it is not given]. I can talk with my brothers and they [might] give us that piece but most especially it is for the boys children," (Community 9, Women's Focus Group, March 12, 2014).

Access to land and a role in decision-making is often mediated by a woman's husband and unmarried or otherwise unattached woman have limited recourse. As a result, perceptions about a woman's right to inherit from her father, husband or other family member varied significantly. In one community, a focus group of women explained that, in their understanding, women can inherit land from father, but they still would not participate in "land business" the way men do. Women with children can inherit land from their husband, but it's not guaranteed. A woman without children would have to prove she deserves to stay (Community 3, Women's Focus Group, February 14, 2014).

Respondents described such norms and practices as historically rooted. A Women's Leader in one community explained: "The people never gave women land from the beginning and so they cannot get it now," (Community 2, Women's Leader KI, February 21, 2014). In another community, a respondent explained: "No that the man get the land... girl children are strangers [here]... We met this rule here (this rule is an old rule)," (Community 4, Hunter Focus Group, March 2, 2014).

Neocustomary property rights similarly limit the property rights of members of minority ethnic groups. Interviews suggest that the rights that minorities can access vary across communities and even individuals. In some instances, members of minority groups may enjoy rights nearly equal to those of individuals understood to be "indigenous" to the community, but in many communities rights are limited. In practice, being an "outsider" reduces the kinds of property an individual can use or own and how the individual can participate in community governance structures. For example, in Community 7, a participant in a focus group of youth stated: "There is no selling land to strangers here," (Community 7, Youth Focus Group, March 8, 2014). In another community, a respondent explained that the "strangers" were weak in the community and had "small rights":

"For example, you see this woman husband that Lofa County man [stranger], but the way he is in this town, he get small right, they not get equal right, they will take you to be stranger, you not from the town, you not born in the town so if you doing something, you will be having only small rights there," (Community 8, Women and Youth Focus Group, February 11, 2014).

In several communities, members of minority groups are excluded because they are not permitted to participate in "traditional" activities: spiritual and religious practices that also play a role in community governance, including providing sanctions to rule-breakers. A member of the focus group with hunters in Community 4 explained:

"Because [strangers are] from a different area when [we] make Society [traditional practices] in town they not part of the people [it], so when the society going [we]

call them and say this is the law that we [the indigenous people of the community] make... the only reason the people can bring the society out it when a serious issue arises... so when the Devil come in town that night when they [the Society] make the law then they all them [the indigenous people and the strangers], none of them may break the law people living among us," (Community 4, Hunter Focus Group, March 3, 2014).

Finally, specific communities struggled with politicized ethnic cleavages, sometimes fed by the legacy of the Liberian civil war. Particularly in certain communities in Lofa county, specific ethnic groups complained that other communities had taken their land during the civil conflict. While parallel inter-ethnic cleavages did not emerge in all places, the differences between groups with and without indigenous ties to a particular place suggested the possibility for inter-ethnic land issues if competition for resources increased.

7 Conclusion

Overlapping statutory and neocustomary regimes in property rights in Lofa, River Gee and Maryland Counties in Liberia can be understood as dualities. The first duality lies in the management of communal land and natural resources. Within the community traditional authorities confidently dictate rules about access to land and natural resources, resource use, and land investment. However, when problems arise with outsiders who ignore community-based enforcement mechanisms, local leaders turn to the government and court system for help, but they struggle on this stage to effectively push forward their claims.

Groups who have traditionally been denied full property rights – women and ethnic minorities – experience the second duality. Neocustomary practices do not tell the full story about opportunities for these groups to access and inherit land. Rather, the current landscape of access to land is varied and rapidly changing, as awareness of national property rights legislation spreads into these areas. Interpretation of this type of complex data suffers

when multiple data sources are not available to triangulate findings. These dualities are best understood through the complementary use of quantitative and qualitative data, as they are not as apparent when either data source is considered alone.

Adding to existing literature about communal natural resource management, this paper provides a snapshot into the overlapping property rights regimes experienced by communities in rural Liberia on the eve of comprehensive land reform. These data inform the understanding of how previous national policy changes gradually have been adopted by residents of the country's remote areas. Accordingly, though acceptance of previous policies has occurred slowly and unevenly, evidence suggests that information about property rights has spread to these areas.

Moving ahead, it will be important for those involved with the land reform to understand the wide variation in rural Liberian communities with regard to the role of different types of local and national authority and the perspective of women and minority groups. An important scope condition of the research presented here is that the data originates from specific regions of the country. As noted above, geo-specific location of the research may explain why the findings differ from previous research on these topics. However, if wide diversity of perspectives both within and between communities exists in the regions where this study took place, it is likely that such diversity exists throughout the country. It will be important for reformers to take advantage of the important steps that some communities have already made toward protecting community natural resources rights within a rights-based framework and including women and minority groups. At the same time, it is imperative for the reform to provide the opportunity, the skills, and the tools to those leaders and community members who still express views not that are not in agreement with the current Liberian land reform agenda to adapt and follow the new framework. In the future, enforcement of changes to community natural resource management and land tenure governance will be key to the success or failure of the reform. Such a nuanced approach will permit the reform to support natural resource management at the community level and allow both individuals,

communities, and the government to reap the greatest benefits from natural resources.

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