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Title: Beyond property: Access and exclusions along Ghana’s charcoal commodity chain

Charcoal production and trade in sub-Saharan Africa has been described as profitable, providing income for over seven million people projected to increase to twelve million by 2030. Whilst lucrative, few actors particularly merchants, transporters and wholesalers reap the larger share of the charcoal income. Majority of the populations involved as producers and retailers work at subsistence-level incomes and remain vulnerable to falling deeper into poverty. While the sector is producing wealth, how is that wealth being concentrated among a few powerful actors? This study investigates the whole repertoire of mechanisms that different categories of actors employ to derive benefits in the charcoal market by following three charcoal chains all originating in the Kintampo Forest District in the Brong Ahafo region (the main charcoal production area) and going to Kumasi, Accra, and Takoradi, respectively (the three largest urban areas of Ghana). Incomes from the charcoal market are derived from direct control over farmlands and forest/bush lands, as well as a host of structural and relational categories of access mechanisms: access to markets, information, technology, capital, labour opportunities, social identity, social relations and authority. The study sheds light on the limited role of property, and highlights the role of extra-legal structures and mechanisms in shaping the incomes of powerful actors. Further, the paper illustrates how processes of market, force, regulation and legitimation constrain some actors to reap high incomes. The study uses this learning to provide guidance on the structures of access control in order to improve equity and wellbeing along forestry and other commodity chains in Ghana and beyond.