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THE STATE, CLASS AND LAND GRABBING IN PEASANT SOCIETIES

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Abstract

The paper discusses the state, class and land grabbing in peasant societies. This study is a non-statistical research. The source of data collection is secondary. Descriptive data analysis and qualitative research design form part of the research methods. Harvey's accumulation by dispossession theory forms the theoretical framework. The findings of the paper show that there are three ways peasants are dispossessed of their indigenous and communal land through grabbing. This include first, dispossession inform of inflicting a crisis with over accumulated surplus capital. Second, when government gives the rights to the use of land to the indigenous people (peasants) and the big corporations on the same land in a particular society, knowing fully well that the peasants cannot compete with the big corporations. Third is when the state forcefully acquires the communal land of the indigenous people for the purpose of urbanization projects. The paper argues that peasantry is a class, and as a result, further finding shows that peasantry can be stratified into rich peasants, middle peasant and poor peasants. In another way, peasantry as class can be stratified into rich peasants, middle peasant and poor peasants. The paper recommends among other things adherence to Article IV (1) of the Declaration of Rights of Peasants which states that peasants have the rights to own land, collectively or individually, for their housing and farming. To the extent of this provision, governments of countries should see to its full implementation. The paper concludes that the role of the state is to regulate and shape the social class formations and their relationships in a peasant society.

Keywords: The State, Class, Land Grabbing, Peasant and Peasantry.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a connection that exists between the state and class relation in peasant societies. A discussion of state and class relations in peasant societies therefore, is crucial in order to place peasantry within the state and its class relations. Three primary qualities exist in the class relations in peasant societies. First, the class has access to a means of production, which is not mitigated by wage relations; second, the means of production is particularly land and not capital per se; and third, labour is socially defined at the household, kin, or community level. The conflicts that arise between the peasantry and other classes are somewhat flexible and context specific. These divergences do not arise from a mode of production specific to the peasantry themselves, but rather from their domination by and incorporation in the mode of production prevalent in the social formation as a whole. This is in sharp contrast to the directly antagonistic nature of the proletariat/capitalist divide. For the peasantry, capital's domination flows with the fates of economic autonomy (Marx, 1904). “The struggles against land grabbing is a struggle against capitalism, neoliberalism and predatory economic model.” Across the developing countries, there are cries against “the extent to which land grabbing threatens peasant and family farming, as well as nature, the environment and food sovereignty” (LaVia Campesina, 2011, p. 19).

As long as there are class relations, including those in peasant societies, the state will continue to be important in facilitating the extraction of surplus labour from direct producers. The main position of this paper is that, in peasant societies, peasantry is characterised by exploitative class relations between households, kin, or community and thus called into question all approaches asserting the social homogeneity of the peasants as a class in a state. The role of the state in regulating and shaping the social class formations and their relationships in a peasant society is differentiated according to the political economy of the state.

The objective of this paper is to discuss the state, class and land grabbing in peasant societies. Class relation in peasant societies is important in the study of peasant economy because much of class relation in peasant societies is of everyday experience. Peasantry as a mode of production and peasants as a class cannot be isolated from the economic activities and engagements prevalent in any state. This is because peasants are a class in a state and, land ownership and usage are central in the study of peasants and peasantry.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The Concept of State

The term ‘state’ and ‘government’ or ‘bureaucracy’ has been used interchangeably by some people as if the terms are the same. Some, in the course of discussing state end up discussing either the structure of the government or the workings of the bureaucracy (Ekekwe, 2009). Marxist school of thought sees state as the instrument or mechanism, the ruling or dominant class maintains and defends within a defined territory over other classes within the same territory. However, for the purpose of this paper, some definitions of state from available literature are reviewed.

Ake (1981) sees state as a social institution that has the ultimate coercive power, which makes exclusive claim to the legitimacy use of coercive force. One other definition of state sees it as essentially a class-structure, an organization of one class dominating over the other classes that is seen as a machine used by the capitalists to keep the working class and the poor

in subjection (Engels, 1884). Lenin (1918) see the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another through the creation of order which legalize and perpetuates the oppression by moderating the conflict between the classes.

State is the most inclusive organization which has formal institutions for regulating the most significant external relationships of the men within its scope. It is the basic political unit, a grouping of individuals who are organized in a definite territory for the pursuit of secular common welfare, the maintenance of law and order and the carrying out of external relations with other groups similarly organized (Anifowose & Enemuo, 1999). One central point about the state from the above definitions is that, state is a special form of social organization.

The Concept of Class

There has never been any generally accepted definition of the concept of class. This is why Ekekwe (2009, p. 61) observes that the concept of class "has been variously defined by many scholars, thus adding to the heard view that social scientists hardly agree on definitions. Quite a few people get unduly apprehensive when the concept of class is used in an analysis." Class means different thing to different people and as result, McNall (1971, p. 291) puts it succinctly as cited in Ekewe (2009) that "class, then is a variable which differs from society to society, and should be viewed as a continuum. This is more especially in a capitalist economy."

Also the notion of class, as it is used by Marxists, differs radically from the notion of class as used in bourgeois social theory. According to modern capitalist thinking, class is an abstract universally defined by the common attributes of its members according to their income in a year.

For dialectical materialism however, the notion of class includes the development of collective consciousness in a class – arising from the material basis of having in common relations to the labour process and the means of production. Classes emerge only at a certain stage in the development of the productive forces and the social division of labour, when there exists a social surplus of production, which makes it possible for one class to benefit by the expropriation of another. The conflict between classes there begins, founded in the division of the social surplus, and constitutes the fundamental antagonism in all class (Marx, 1902).Class is a group of people sharing common relations to labour and the means of production (Seen http://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/c/l.htm).

Summarily, Erik Olin Wright outlines five varieties of the concept of class as followings: 1) Class as subjective location; 2) Class as objective position within distributions; 3) Class as the relational explanation of economic life chance; 4) Class as a dimension of historical variation in systems of inequality; and 5) Class as a foundation of economic oppression and exploitation (Wright, 2003).

In another instance, as society continues to evolve, Lenin (1965) sees class from another standpoint by declaring that:

> Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which

> they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy (p, 421).

The Concepts of Peasant and Peasantry

Etymologically, the word "peasant" comes from the 15th Century French word *païsant* which means coming from the *pays*, the countryside (Hilmi, 2013). The concept peasant has attracted different definitions from various writers from historical, social scientific, activism and normative points of view. However, Elman (1985) explains that peasant communities tend to be small, tradition bound, and resistant to change. Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, peasant societies are "part-societies" or "part-cultures" in relation to some larger civilization, colony, urban centre, state, or elite class.

Article 1 of the Declaration of Rights of Peasants- Women and Men (2009) defines a peasant as:

> A man or woman of the land, who has a direct and special relationship with the land and nature through the production of food and /or other agricultural products. Peasants work the land themselves, rely above all on family labour and other small-scale forms or organizing labour. Peasants are traditionally embedded in their local communities and the take care of local landscapes and of agro-ecological systems. The term peasant can apply to any person engaged in agriculture, cattle-raising, pastoralism, handicraft-related to agriculture or a related occupation in a rural area. This includes indigenous people working on the land.

One of the leading peasant studies scholars in the person of Shanin (1973), defines peasantry as having "four essential and inter-linked facets" namely: the family farm as the basic multi-functional unit of social organisation, land husbandry and usually animal rearing as the main means of livelihood, a specific traditional culture closely linked with the way of life of small rural communities and multi-directional subjection to powerful outsiders.

Peasants tend to be distinguished from farmers, since the former were said to aim at subsistence and produce cash crops primarily for survival and to maintain their social status rather than to invest and expand the scale of their operations, as was allegedly the case with the latter (Wolf, 1955).In another instance, peasant is referred to as subsistence or smallholder farmer (Morton, 20017). Subsistence farming has been also been defined by Barnett (1997) as farming and associated activities which together form a livelihood strategy where the main output is consumed directly, where there are few if any purchased inputs and where only a minor proportion of output is marketed (Cornish, 1998). Smallholder agriculture is used more generally to describe rural producers, predominantly in developing countries, who farm using mainly family labour and for whom the farm provides the principal source of income (The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO), 1979).

UN FAO (1979) further states that the term peasant also applies to landless, with the following categories of people that are considered to be landless and are likely to face difficulties in ensuring their livelihood include: 1) Agricultural labour households with little or no land; 2) Non-agricultural households in rural areas, with little or no land, whose members are engaged in various activities such as fishing, making crafts for the local market,

or providing services; 3) Other rural households of pastoralists, nomads, peasants practicing shifting cultivation, hunters and gatherers, and people with similar livelihoods.

From all the above definitions of peasants, it can be concluded that the term "peasants" is thematic to the rural other than urban activities and settings engaged by the following sets of people: family farmers, small rural community farmers, land husband men or women, sustenance farmers, small rural agriculturists, rural small-scale farmers, small landholder farmers, landless agricultural labour householders, self-employed rural farmers, who either works on his/her own land or others people's land or who aspire to obtain land of their own (or both).

The Concept of Land Grabbing

The concept of land grabbing has myriad of definitions. According to Makki and Geisler (2011), the meaning, substance and form of land grabbing on a large-scale acquisitions differ. Some land deals (between governments and foreign companies) are as yet projected and not actual. They are dominated mainly by leases rather than sales. Nevertheless, Murphy (2013) defines land grabbing as a term coined by the media to describe large-scale purchase or leases of agricultural or forestlands on terms that do not serve those already living on the land. Land grabs are manifest in a huge increase in foreign (and domestic) investment in land, concentrated in some of the world's poorest—and hungriest—countries. Some of the drivers behind land grabs predate the global food price crisis, such as the rise of the biofuel industry from approximately 2004.

In this study, land grabbing denotes the forcible acquisition of land from the indigenous owners of the land by large multinational corporations and domestic capitalists through government approvals for private commercial purposes. This has made land to be a commodity. Usually, in land grabbing, the indigenous people from which the land will be taken away from are not consulted and the land takeovers are permanent.

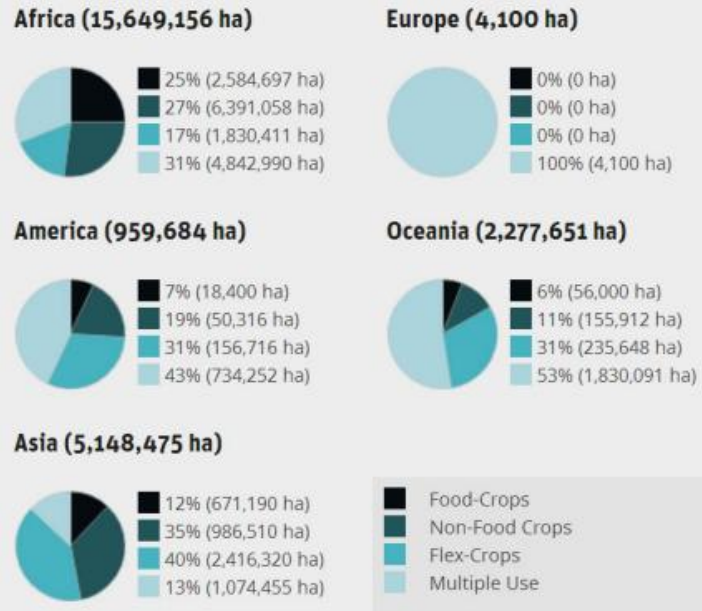


Figure 1. Top target regions for foreign farmland investment (since 2000)
Source: Land Matrix (2013) as cited in Odoemene (2015).

Land grabbing has contributed to industrialisation across African countries, but this has at the same time disposed the indigenous people of their communal land with little or no compensations. This is why Borras and Franco (2011) and Mbow (2010) argue that this development has resulted in many large-scale land investments in some countries' farmlands especially among the third world countries. Sub-Saharan Africa has been noted as a primary target of and destination for such investments in land. Empirical research findings show that Africa since 2000 accounts for more than 60% of global land grabbing (Brüntrup, 2011; Deininger et al., 2011). Anseeuw et al. (2012), GRAIN (2012) and Deininger et al. (2011) report that there are about 62% of about 1217 publicly reported land grabbing cases across the world, which covers a total area of about 56.2 million hectares (ha) that are located in Africa.

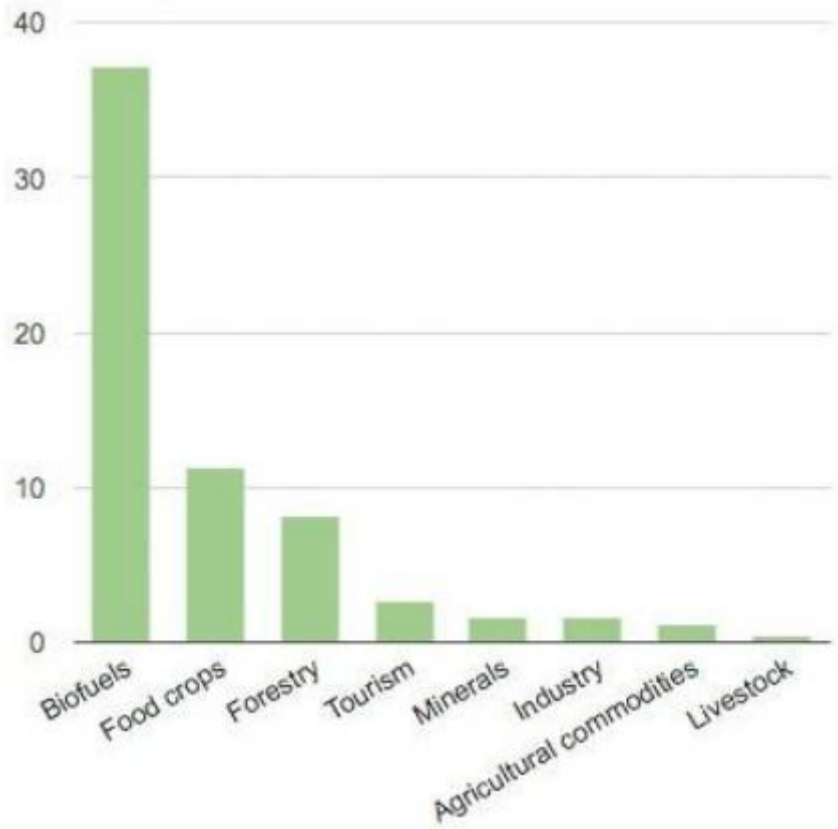


Figure 2. Global land acquisitions by sectors (in millions of hectares)
Source: Land Matrix (2012) as cited in Odoemene (2015).

Theoretical Framework: Accumulation by Dispossession theory

The accumulation by dispossession theory is attributed to Harvey (2003), which is an update on Marx's theory of primitive accumulation. Marx's theory of primitive accumulation sheds light on the ways in which people are being subjected to dispossession. According to Das (2017, p. 591), recent works in literature have discussed "Marx's idea of primitive accumulation" to include Engels (1977), Ashman and Callinicos (2006), Batou (2015), Bonefeld (2011), Brass (2011), De Angelis (1999), Frank (1977), Glassman (2006), Gillepsie (2016), Gordon and Webber (2008), Hartsock (2006), Millar (1978), Patnaik (2008), and Perelman (2000). According to Marx (1977, p. 875), primitive (or original) accumulation is "the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production (and

subsistence)" and "creates the two basic classes of capitalist society (capitalists and workers)" (Das, 2017, p. 591).

The central argument of the accumulation by dispossession theory is that colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism are all processes of asset appropriation, which land is one of the assets, which has been acquired and this has led to commodification and privatisation of land through forceful expulsion of peasant populations. Attah (2013), Odoemene (2012) and Sparks (2012) explain that the accumulation by dispossession highlights the conversion property right- land inclusive, which are owned commonly, collectively and by the state, into exclusive private right through grabbing. This illustrates a conceptual issue in land grabbing where public land are converted into government, companies, and industrial/commercial ownership, an act that dispossesses the indigenous land owners of their natural property rights. Harvey (2013) illustrates the fact that this is outright suppression and dispossession of the land owned by the peasant population through corporatisation and privatisation of public land asset. This has also provoked the lower class (i.e., the peasants) into widespread local resistance, and in most cases, what they receive is suppression by the companies, industry owners and government.

Accumulation by dispossession theory has also been explained by others outside Harvey's (2009). According to these other writers on the theory, there are other ways land grabbing has been against the peasant population. For example, first, that accumulation by dispossession comes inform of inflicting a crisis with over accumulated surplus capital in the core regions of the indigenous people such as has been the case in Laos where lands with big rubber plantations were acquired by big corporations from the common lands and private lands of indigenous people (Baird, 2011). Second, in Philippines where mining rights were given and was exercised by the indigenous people using primitive technologies (Hilson & Yakovleva, 2007), but "by the dawn of the twenty first century, most untapped gold, copper, iron, bauxite, nickel and diamonds had been identified as effectively indigenous "property" (Moody, 2007, p. 56). According to Holden, Nadeau and Jacobsen (2011, p. 143), "the rights of the indigenous Philippines to live on these mining lands was protected by the Philippines law and justice system. But the mining industry also has a right to mine in these locations." This is the reason for conflict between the mining corporations and the indigenous people of the Philippines (Holden et al, 2011).

The third way of accumulation by dispossession is in Bolivia on its natural gas reserves. According to Sponk and Webber (2007), Bolivia's population is made up of over 62% indigenous people. Sponk and Webber (2007, p. 42) further state that Bolivia, in the "last decade been a lot of struggles between the central government and local population."The central reason to the struggles in this South American country is the resistance by the majority indigenous people against government privatisation of the natural oil and gas fields (Sponk & Webber, 2007).

In Nigeria, this third way of accumulation by dispossession by the government was witnessed in Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo State in 1970s when the State Government acquired a vast land in Ajoda, a popular town amongst other rural areas in Ibadan for urbanisation extension project. According to Obuene, Akanle and Omobowal (2022), due to critical infrastructural deficit in Ibadan, Ajoda was selected for the implementation of the project, which led to indigenous people been disposed of their communal land when they were moved to new towns. "However, this quest for communal land in Ajoda by the state government did not go

down well with the indigenous people, who were afraid of expropriation and displacement that could endanger their indigenous authority over their communal land" (Obuene et al., 2022, p. 149).

Odoemene (2015) exemplifies more recent cases of land accumulation by dispossession in Nigeria, especially in Taraba, Kwara and Cross Rivers State, explains thus:

> These are in Gassol community in Mutum Biyu Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State, where there exists a commercial land deal with Dominion Rice Farms and Integrated Limited; in Shonga community of Edu LGA in Kwara State, where there exists a government land transaction with Shonga Farm Holdings Nigeria Limited (formally Kwa Zimbo Enterprises Ltd.), a company established by emigrant white Zimbabwean farmers; and in Ekong-Anaku village of Akamkpa LGA of Cross River State. Wilmar International Farms is situated and operates in this community. These three cases of land acquisition allow an in-depth perspective on the questions of interest (p. 4).

Methods

This study is a non-statistical research, which its source of data collection is secondary. Descriptive data analysis and qualitative research design also form parts of the research methods.

DISCUSSIONS

Peasantry as a Social Class

According to Petra and Merino (1972), peasantry is a social class but with sub-units that are complex according to means of production. However, Ergil (1974b) believes that dividing peasantry into various classes is determined by the pattern of political behaviours of the peasantry since it is dominated by various segments of the society namely: the landlords and rich peasants who are in the elite class; and the poor peasants and landless who are the labourers' class who economically dependents on the landlords and rich peasants. Ergil (1974a) in another study observes that globally, peasants are in solidarity amongst the exploited classes of peasantry anywhere and anytime.

Elman (1985) is of the view that where peasantry is seen as a social class, the production unit of that class is the family, but does not mean that all families are of the same size. This is because families are technically and economically classified to be either large three-generational extended families or the nuclear unit of one set of parents and their unmarried children.However, Marx (1902) argues that the basis upon which the stratification systems rest is the relation of aggregates of men to the means of production. The major modern classes are the owners merely of labour-power, owners of capital, and landowners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and ground-rent. Classes are aggregates of persons who perform the same function in the organization of production. These classes also exist in peasant societies.

In relation to development of productive activities and explaining peasantry as social class, Katz (1993) highlights that the victory of the peasantry as a class encouraged a certain development of the productive forces in Western Europe. This is not to say that the peasantry emerged triumphant when and because it facilitated productive development. Peasants had provided the main impetus of economic growth throughout the medieval period; aristocratic

rule systematically blocked productive development. The success of peasant class struggle following the general feudal crisis was a result of their superior capacity for concerted action relative to that of the lords. Nevertheless, Giddens (n.d., p. 116) argues that "if peasant class struggle was defined by the need to destroy the feudal regime, the emergent capitalist landowners replaced it with the regime of private property, successfully reconstituting themselves as an altar-native ruling class. The liberation of the peasantry as a class made it necessary for the lords to find new ways of extracting a surplus; the subsequent disintegration of the peasantry made it possible.

Class stratification in Peasant Society

Every society is made of classes. Peasantry is a class in every society it is found. There are class stratifications in every peasant society, each relating to one another. Each strata plays its role, which may be political, economic, social, religious etc. However, the social stratifications that exist in some peasant societies, may not themselves be peasants but derive their income from sustenance farming economy. Mondal (2021, p. 3) advises that "in any classification of peasants, land tenancy and land size play an important role. Thus, both these combined together play an important role in determining the criteria for peasant classification."

Ergil (1974b, p. 71) avers that peasantry can also be divided into rich peasants, middle peasant and poor peasants, which "suggests an array of the peasantry with different strata, one over the other in the single order. The middle peasants, however, do not stand between the rich peasants and the poor peasants; they belong to a different sector of the rural and market economy."The rural society is dominated by the landlords and the rich peasants at the top and the landless and poor peasants at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The poor peasants are the least militant class of the peasantry (Patnaik, 1976).

Victor Goldkind while discussing peasantry as social class, explains that peasantry can be stratified into three. First, economic stratification based on land ownership and land use; second, family prestige, social origin, house type and location, spoken language, religious worship, and food consumption; and three, political stratification using leadership hierarchy and decision-making for progress (Goldkind, 1965). Patnaik (1976) explains that there is growth of capitalism in a peasant community, which has brought about some sort of exploitation among the peasantry, which become class character. Class stratification in a peasant class is first, the big landlords, and second, the agricultural labourers, who also include the sharecroppers.

Mondal (2021, p. 3) commenting further on stratification of peasant class states that "in addition to the classification of peasants by sociologists, there are economists who have classified peasants into the landlords, the rich peasants, the middle class peasants, the poor peasants and the agricultural peasants." In another stratification of a peasant society, Little (2008) explains that in any society that has peasants as the majority, there are classification of the society according to small traders, necromancers, martial arts instructors, bandits, minor officials, priests, moneylenders, elites, scholars, and large land owners all play roles within a peasant society.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the paper argues that in peasant societies, peasantry is characterised by exploitative class relations between households, kin, or community and thus called into

question all approaches asserting the social homogeneity of the peasants as a class in a state. The role of the state is to regulate and sharp the social class formations and their relationships in a peasant society.

Every class relation in peasant societies is important in the study of peasant economy because much of class relation in peasant societies is of everyday experience. Peasantry as a mode of production, and a class cannot be isolated from the economic activities and engagements prevalent in the state. No society is void of peasantry as one its class formations and it is the class relation that exists in a state that determines its economic and socio-political differentiations.

It is the state that regulates and shapes the social class formations and their relationships in a peasant society, which is differentiated according to the political economy of the state. Class stratification in peasant societies are according to small traders, necromancers, martial arts instructors, bandits, minor officials, priests, moneylenders, elites, scholars, and large land owners all play roles within a peasant society -- but they are not peasants. Their incomes derive ultimately from the farm economy, but their lifestyles, standards of living, values, and social status are all distinct from those of peasant farmers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Article IV (1) of the Declaration of Rights of Peasants - Women and Men on the heading "Peasant Right to Land and Territory" state: Peasants (women and men) have the right to own land, collectively or individually, for their housing and farming. To the extent of provision, governments of nation should see to its full implementation.

i. In line with Ibiam and Faga (2021), it is further recommended that there should be a holistic review of legal frameworks on natural resources across countries especially in the developing countries so that indigenous people should have some measure of ownership and control rights to natural resources in their rural communities.

ii. In order to avoid conflict between the indigenous people and the corporate land grabbers, governments of the countries should involve the indigenous people who are the original landowners through social contract in the allocation of land.

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