

RURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

A research comic by Fellows from the
Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa
(MIASA)



What is this research comic about?

This comic is about rural transformations in Africa. Between February and May 2020, researchers from different countries worked together virtually and at the Maria Sibylla Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA). This comic gives you an insight into our research.

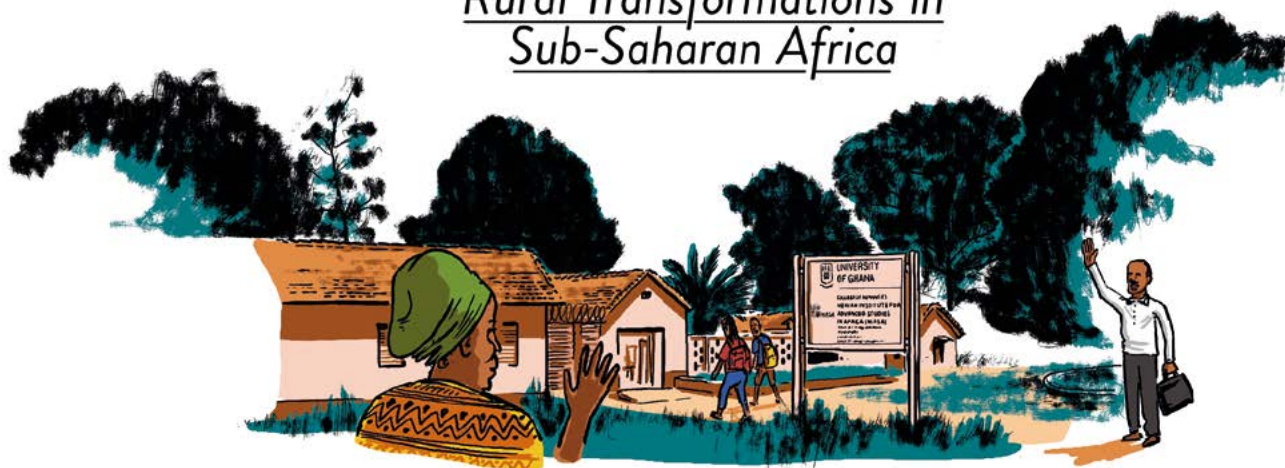
What is MIASA?

MIASA wants to reduce global asymmetries in knowledge production. It is a hub for exchange, networking and collaboration amongst researchers from Germany, Ghana, the African and European continents and beyond. MIASA is based on the beautiful campus of the University of Ghana, Legon (Accra). It is the first Institute for Advanced Studies in sub-Saharan Africa outside of South Africa. Its programmes are currently funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), while its local staffing, administrative and operational costs are funded by the University of Ghana.

How should I read this research comic?

There is no right or wrong way to read this comic. If you like, you can read it on your own. You can also read it aloud together with your friends or your family.

Rural Transformations in Sub-Saharan Africa



University of Ghana, Accra, 2020. A group of researchers from five different countries meet at MIASA to work together.



Maya, Osman
and Dzodzi.



Jann, Melina
and Prince.



Peter, Lisa
and Ifeanyi.



Evans, Uchenna,
Mike and John.



Their aim:



They want to better
understand rural
transformations in
Africa ...



... and learn
from each other.



Well
...



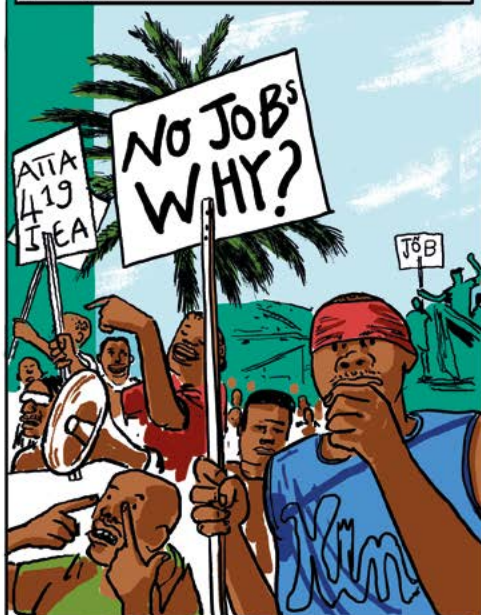
What does "rural
transformation"
actually mean?



In the last 30 years, livelihoods in rural areas in Africa have changed structurally. Each country has undergone different changes, but there are also some similarities.



The population is growing, and many young people are looking for work.



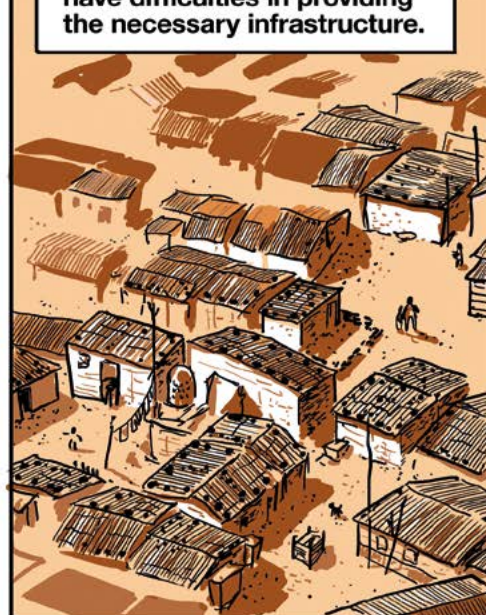
Poverty persists, especially in rural areas.



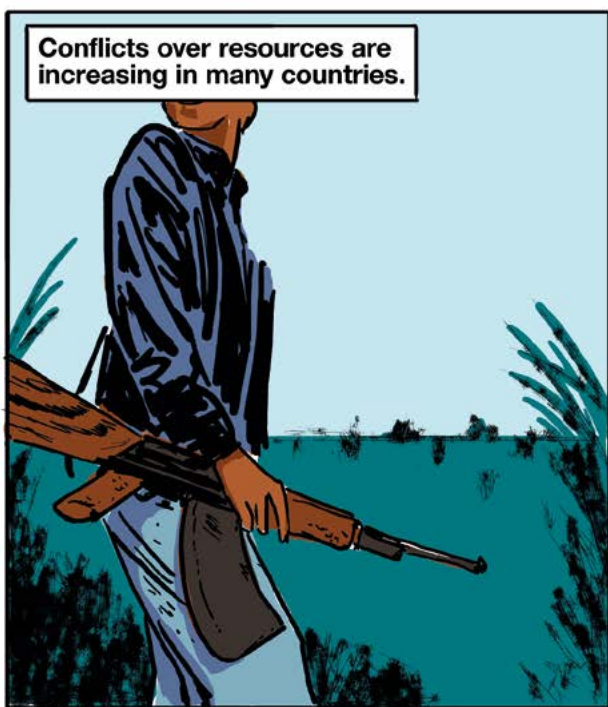
More and more people work in jobs outside agriculture.



The cities are growing, and have difficulties in providing the necessary infrastructure.



Conflicts over resources are increasing in many countries.



International and local investors buy large areas of farmland.



Digitization is driving change.



First, let's try to understand what happens when investors buy large tracts of land and convert them into plantations.



Land Investments



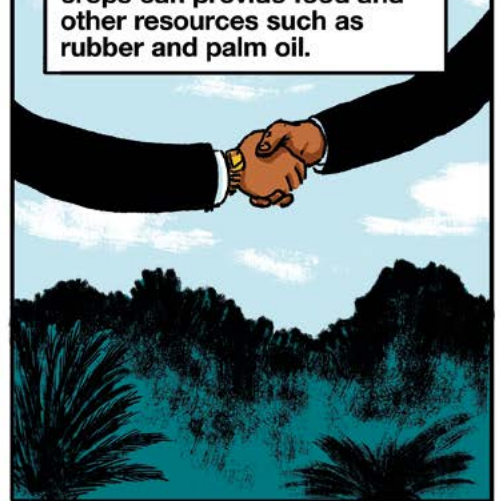
The global population is growing ...



... and the demand for food and other resources is increasing.



International and domestic investors are buying more and more land to grow crops, especially in low- and middle-income countries. These crops can provide food and other resources such as rubber and palm oil.



Since the year 2000, 80 million hectares of land concessions have been granted worldwide according to the database "Land Matrix".

14 million hectares in Africa alone.

In comparison, look at the size of some African countries:

Liberia
~ 11 million ha

Eritrea
~ 12 million ha

Malawi
~ 12 million ha

Senegal
~ 19 million ha

Let's take a look at Liberia.



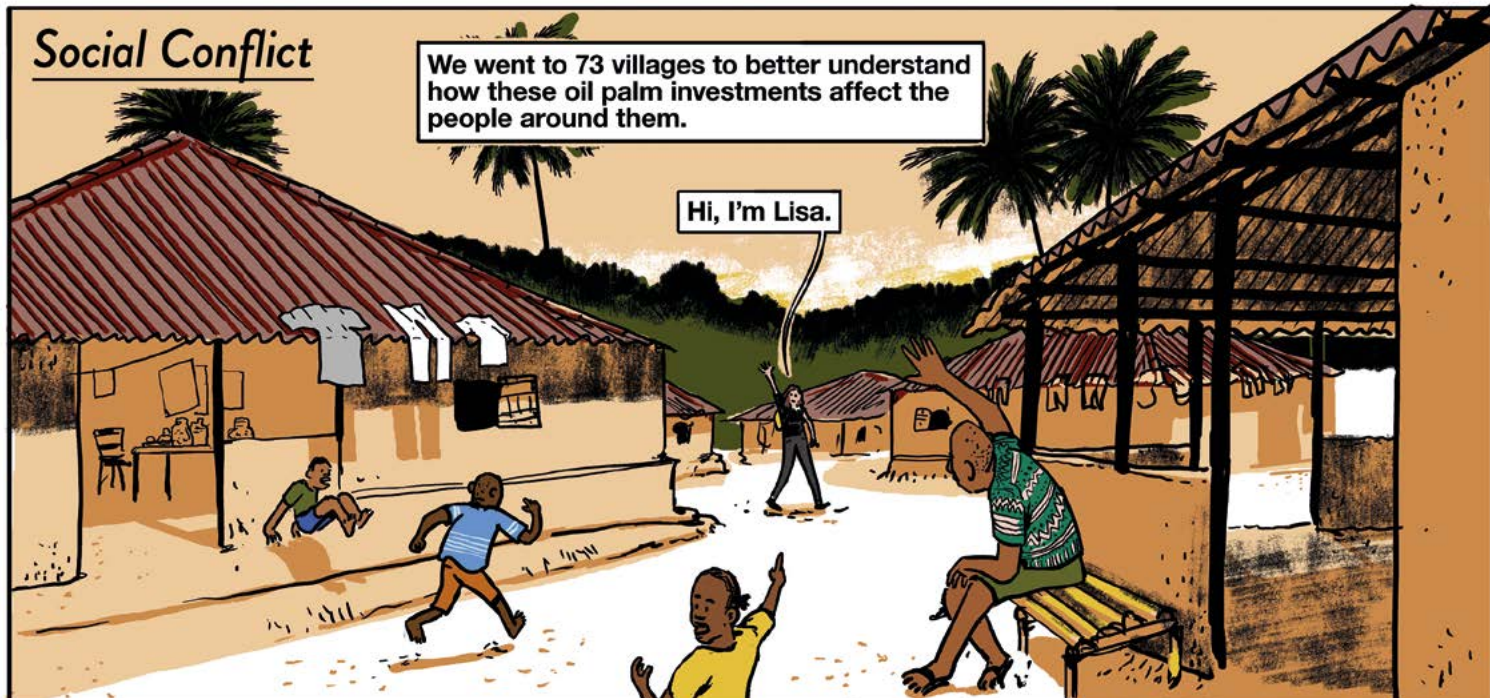
Specifically, at two oil palm investments in the counties Bomi, Grand Cape Mount and Grand Bassa.



Social Conflict

We went to 73 villages to better understand how these oil palm investments affect the people around them.

Hi, I'm Lisa.



My question: Do oil palm plantations contribute to social conflict?

What happened when the investor came to your village?



Some people reported that they benefitted from the investment.

I got a job on the plantation.



But others told me that not everything got better.

Well... I've lost quite a bit of land.

I used to grow rice here.



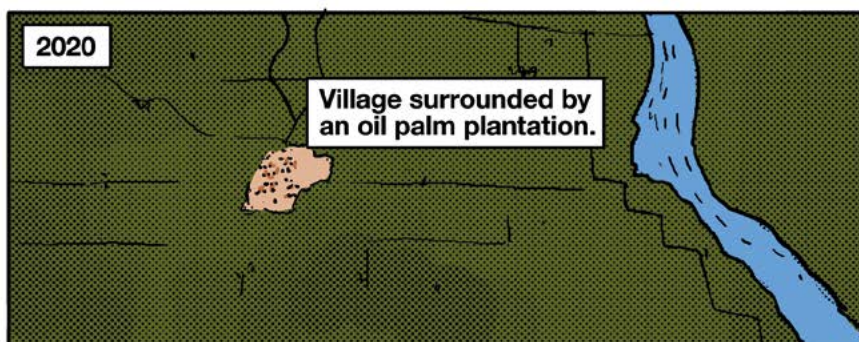
2006

Village surrounded by forest.



2020

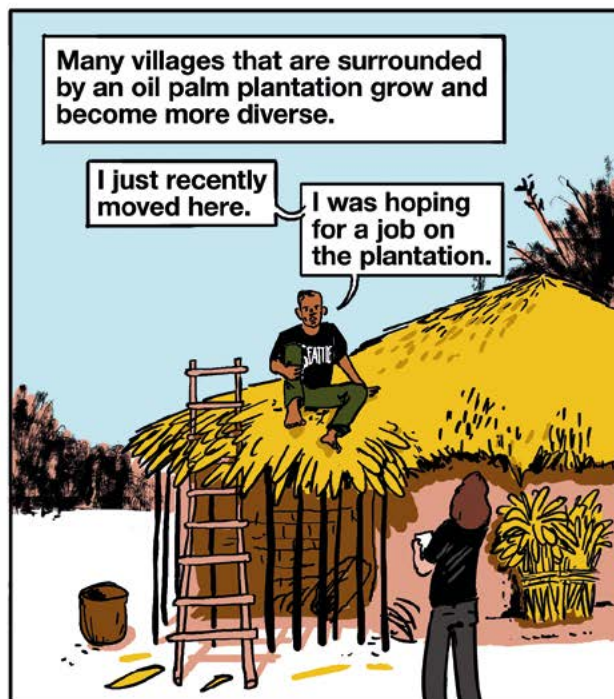
Village surrounded by an oil palm plantation.



Many villages that are surrounded by an oil palm plantation grow and become more diverse.

I just recently moved here.

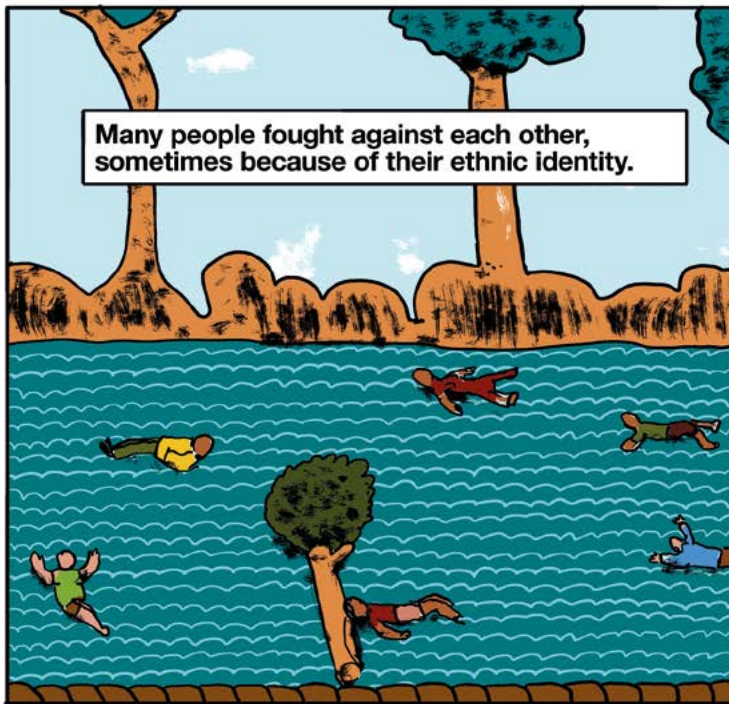
I was hoping for a job on the plantation.



There were two civil wars in Liberia between 1989 and 2003.



Many people fought against each other, sometimes because of their ethnic identity.



Despite this, most different groups...



Even if different groups get along well, social conflict are still more likely in villages near these plantations.



... get along well now. No matter if people live close to an oil palm plantation or further away.



This is particularly true in villages where people no longer help each other with work in their fields. Unmarried men are often particularly involved.



Is it because there are not enough jobs?

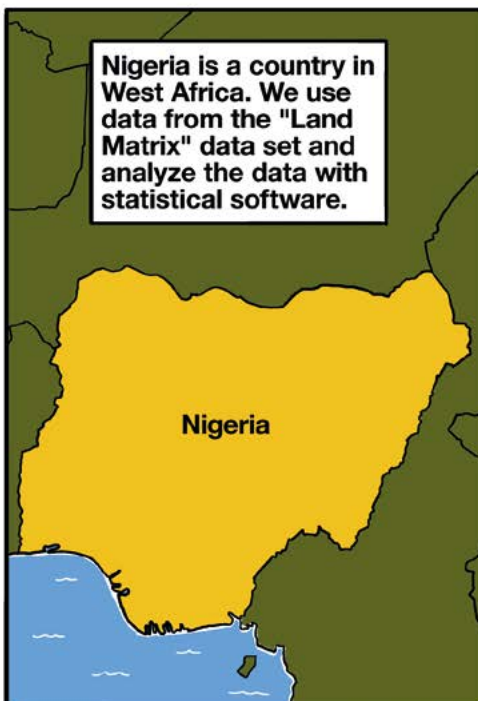


Employment

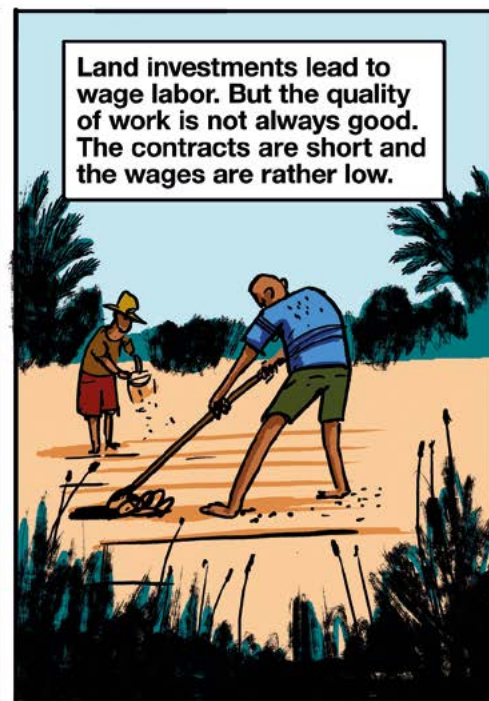
Let's try to find it out!
Evans and I want to know
how land investments are
affecting employment in
Nigeria.



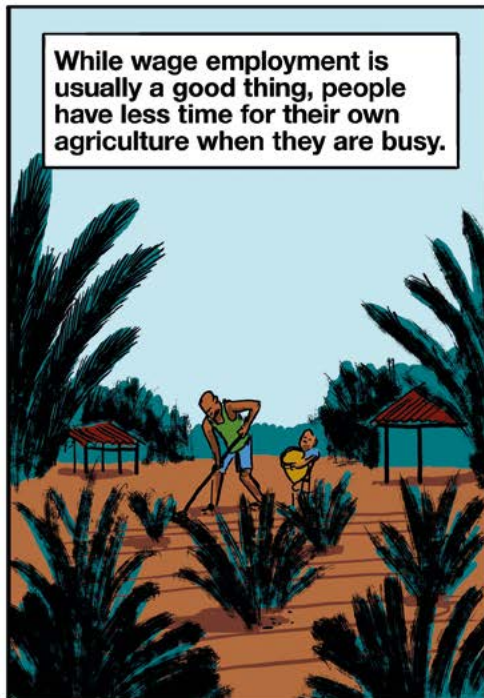
Nigeria is a country in
West Africa. We use
data from the "Land
Matrix" data set and
analyze the data with
statistical software.



Land investments lead to
wage labor. But the quality
of work is not always good.
The contracts are short and
the wages are rather low.



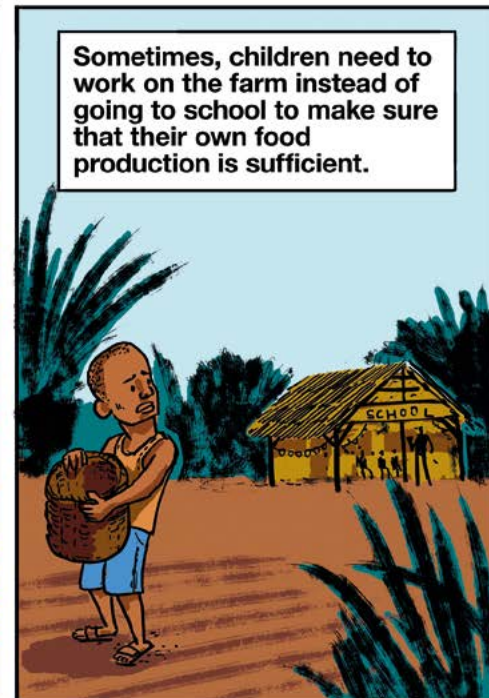
While wage employment is
usually a good thing, people
have less time for their own
agriculture when they are busy.



So they also produce
less food.



Sometimes, children need to
work on the farm instead of
going to school to make sure
that their own food
production is sufficient.



Women spend more time in farming than
men. If they have a wage employment,
they often make less money than men.



Some investors offer "contract farming" to local farmers: The farmers produce and the investor guarantees to buy the farmer's products at a certain price if they meet certain quality standards. Contract farming may have positive, but also negative effects for local farmers.

I look at the effects of contract farming schemes in a sugar cane plantation in the town Mumias in Kenya.

My study shows that intensive sugarcane production can create new opportunities for farmers:

For example technological transfers, ...

... improved access to markets, ...

... cash income, ...

... innovations and labor savings, ...

Innovation adoption is introduced and encouraged.

... and soil-testing practices.

But there are major challenges for farmers because of the high use of fertilizers and weedicides.

Farmers bear high costs because the inputs and technologies are very expensive. At the same time, the soil is deteriorating.

I am in frequent debt. It's very difficult to maintain my yields.

Contract farmers get all of these inputs from the sugar company. The investor instructs them how to use them.

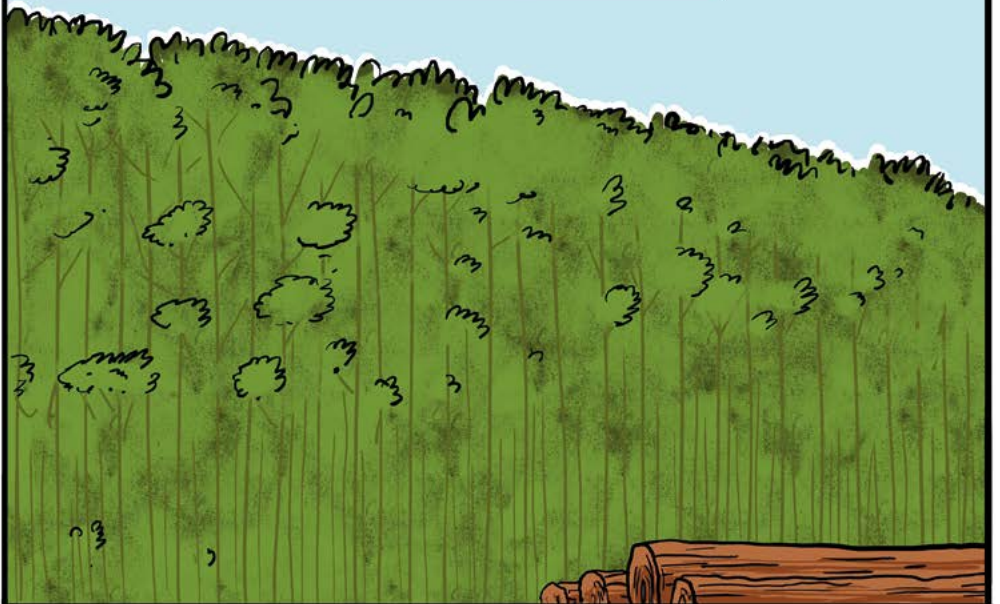
Livelihoods

The specific effects of investments tend to differ depending on the investment.

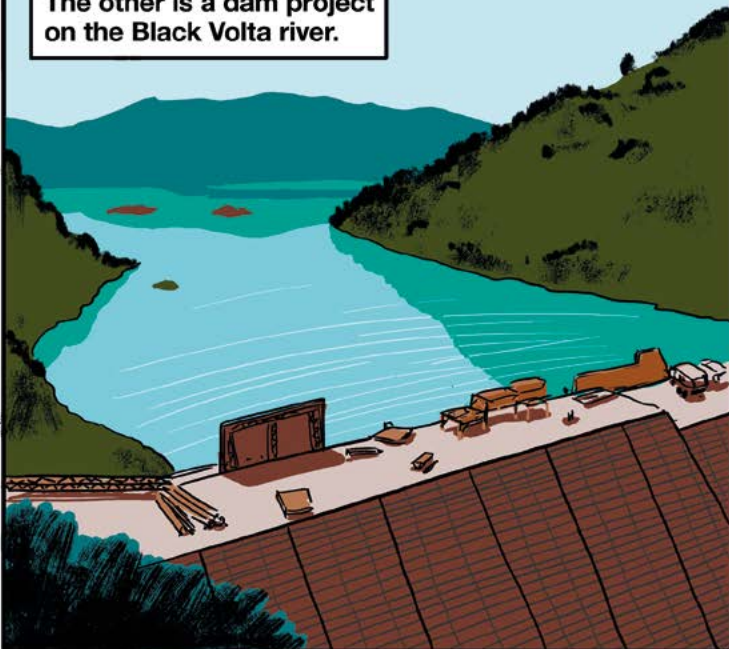
We have looked at the impact of two investments on livelihoods. Both are in Ghana.



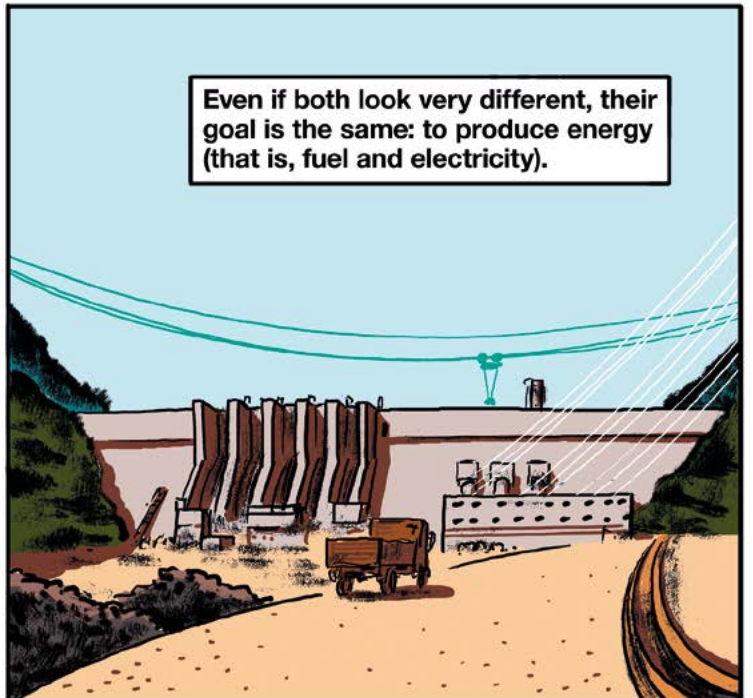
One project is a eucalyptus plantation in Sene West.



The other is a dam project on the Black Volta river.



Even if both look very different, their goal is the same: to produce energy (that is, fuel and electricity).



The investments bring some advantages to the population. They create jobs.



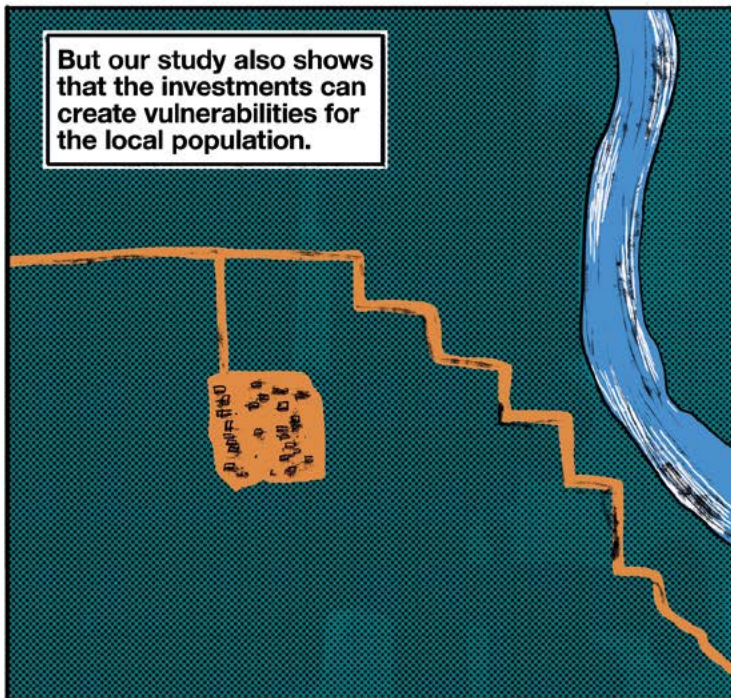
Sometimes, new water sources emerge in the villages.



And investments can bring social infrastructure to rural areas, for example electricity.



But our study also shows that the investments can create vulnerabilities for the local population.



If people don't have a land certificate, they can easily lose their land-related assets ...

People need secure land rights!



... including their farmland.



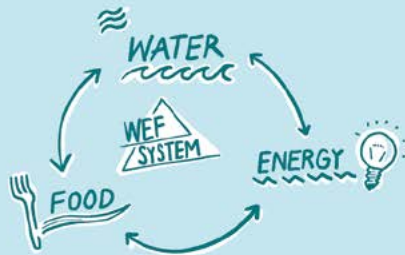
Sometimes, ponds and lakes become polluted ...



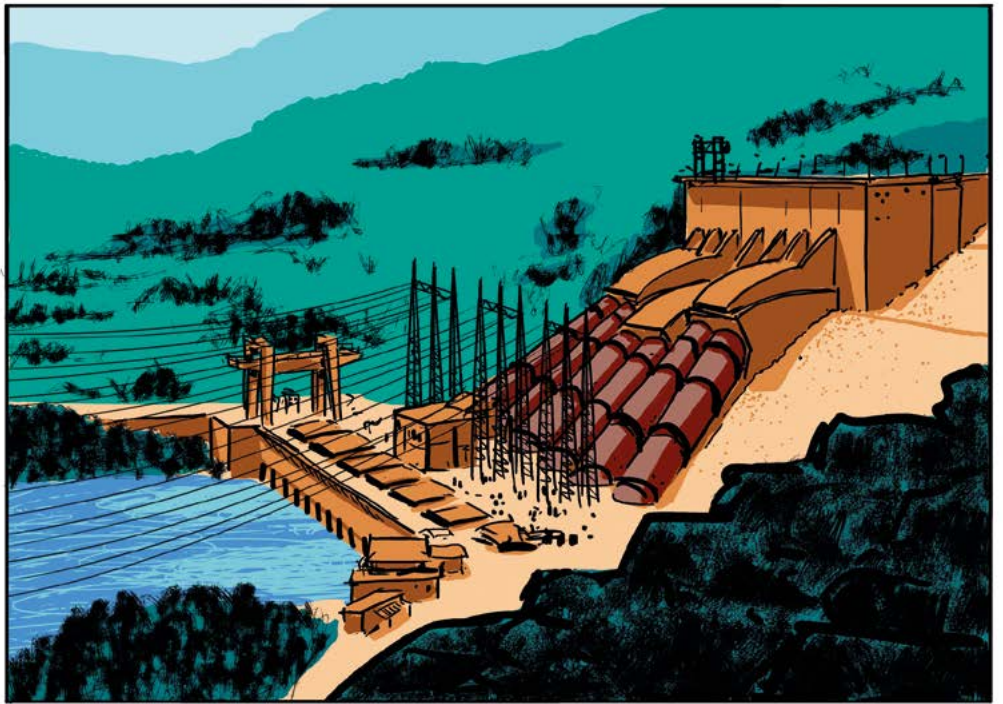
... and forest resources such as wood become unusable.



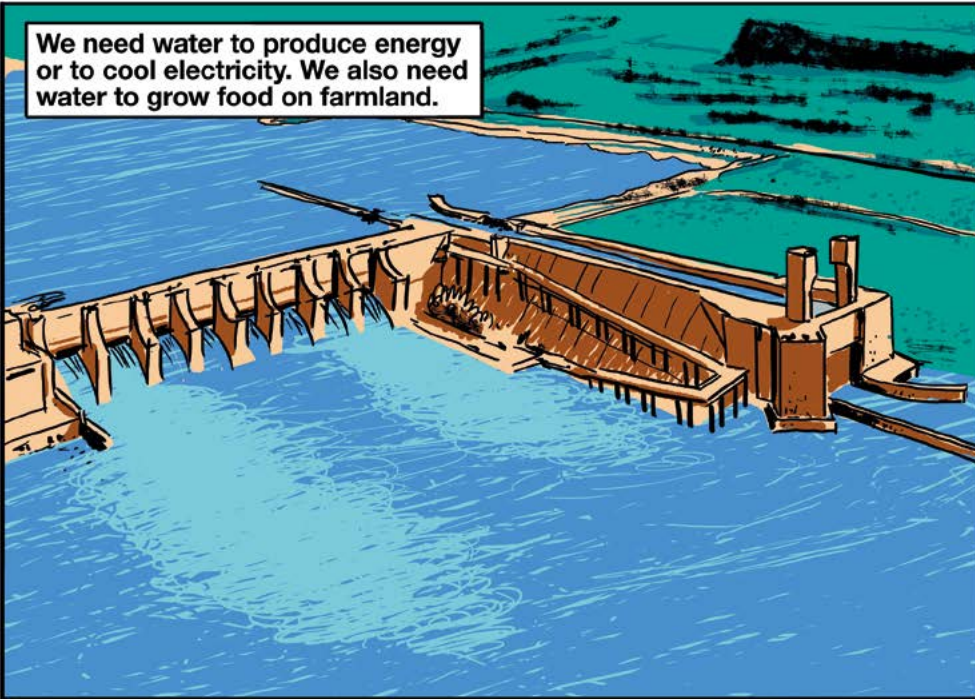
Water-Energy-Food Nexus



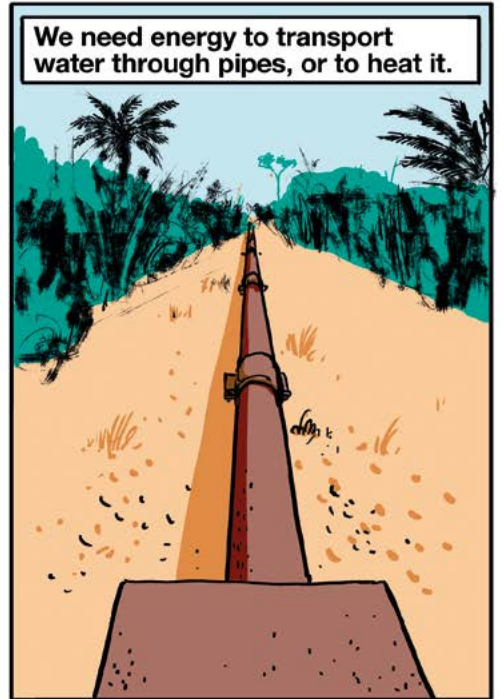
In my research, I focus on trade-offs between water, energy and food.



We need water to produce energy or to cool electricity. We also need water to grow food on farmland.



We need energy to transport water through pipes, or to heat it.

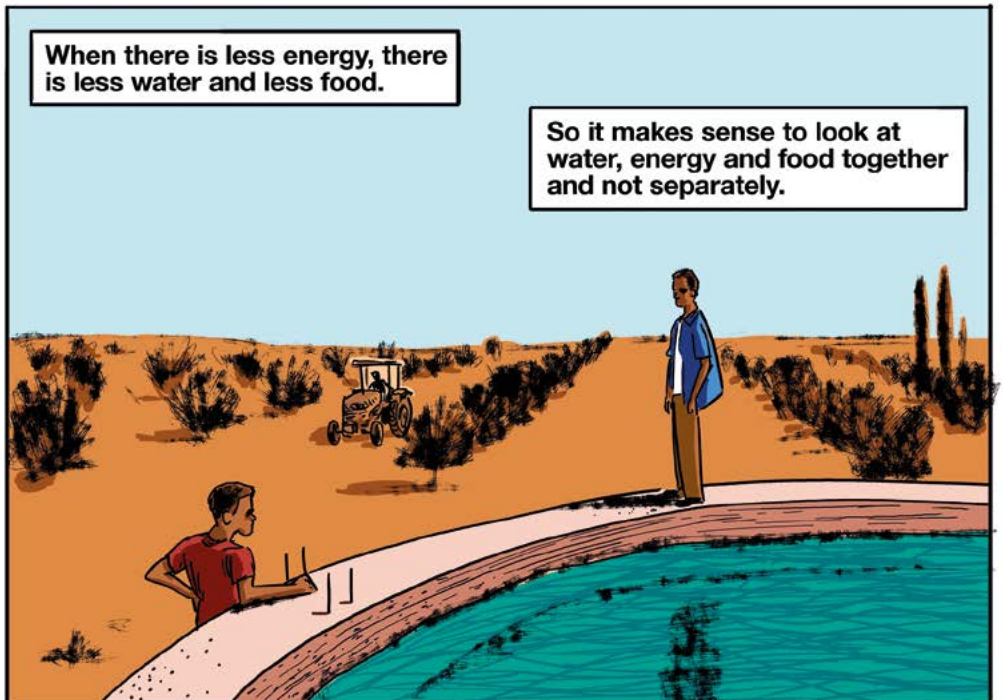


Water, energy and food are interdependent:



When water is threatened, energy and food are also affected.

When there is less energy, there is less water and less food.



So it makes sense to look at water, energy and food together and not separately.

My study examines men's and women's access to and control of land, water, energy and food.



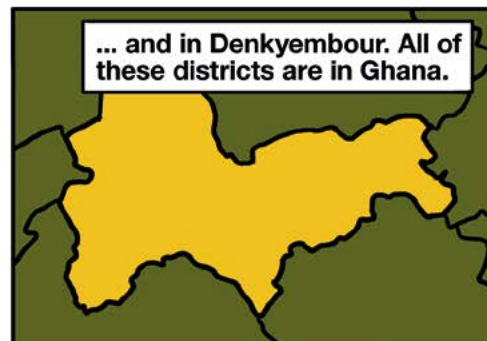
In Sene West, ...



... in Kwaebibirem ...



... and in Denkyembour. All of these districts are in Ghana.



When thinking about resources in a water-energy-food context, we shouldn't forget about women. They are often disadvantaged.



Women should have more access to and control over land.



Women also need better access to inputs such as ...



... viable seeds, ...



... credit, ...



... labor ...



... and advisory services.



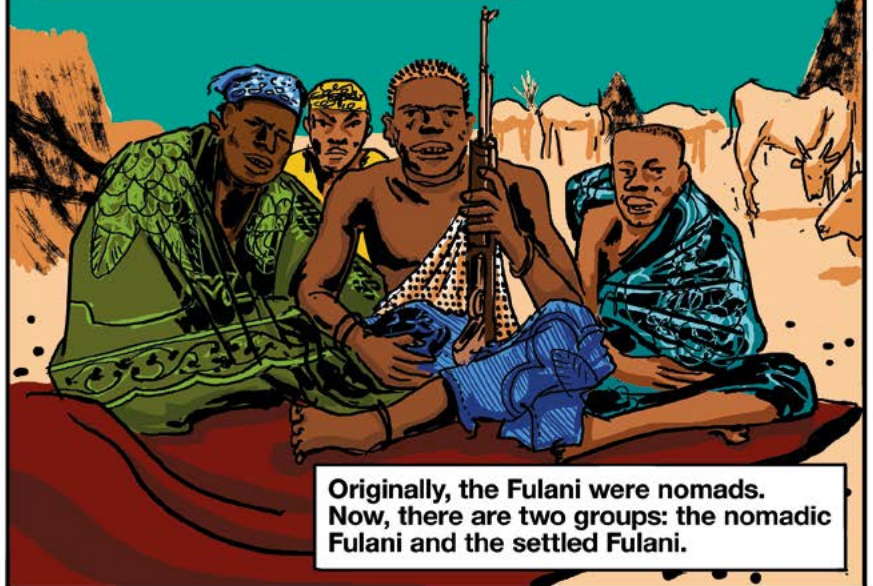
Conflicts

Conflicts between competing natural-resource users occur in many parts of the world, also in Africa.

Recent pressures have increased the frequency and scale of these conflicts.



The increasing conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and local farmers.



Originally, the Fulani were nomads. Now, there are two groups: the nomadic Fulani and the settled Fulani.

Let's look at one example in the district Gusheigu in Northern Ghana:



The nomadic Fulani move around with their cattle throughout the year. They do not stay in one place for too long.



Settled Fulani live in one place permanently. They have given up nomadic life.



Since the 1930s, some Fulani started to settle in Gusheigu. Others kept their nomadic lifestyle. The settled Fulani and the local farmers lived together peacefully.



But recently, there is more resource scarcity because of demographic pressures ...



... and climate change.

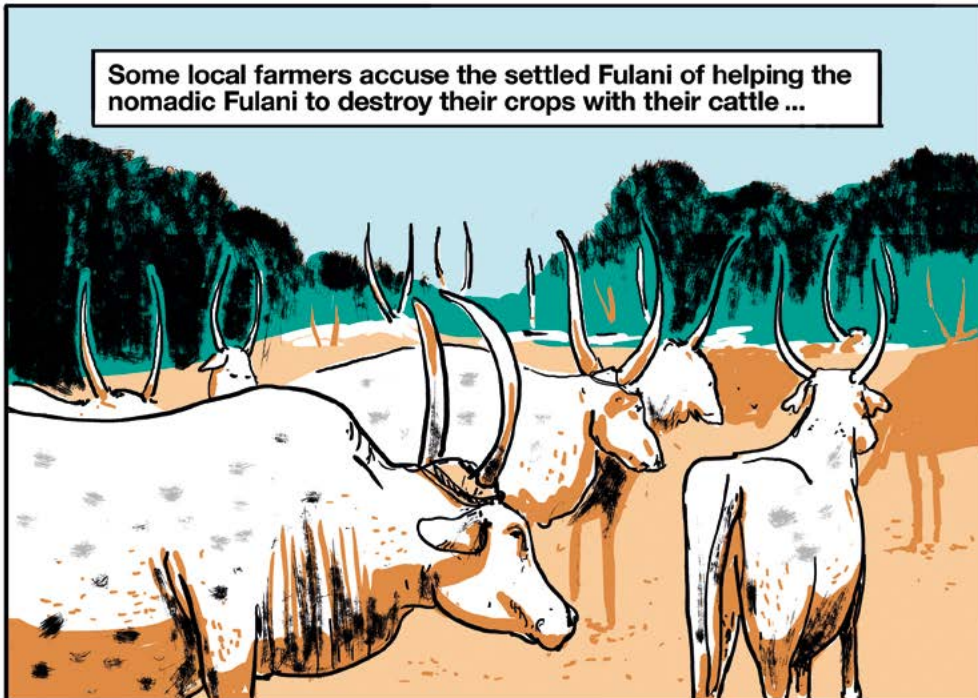


So conflicts have emerged between settled Fulani and local farmers.

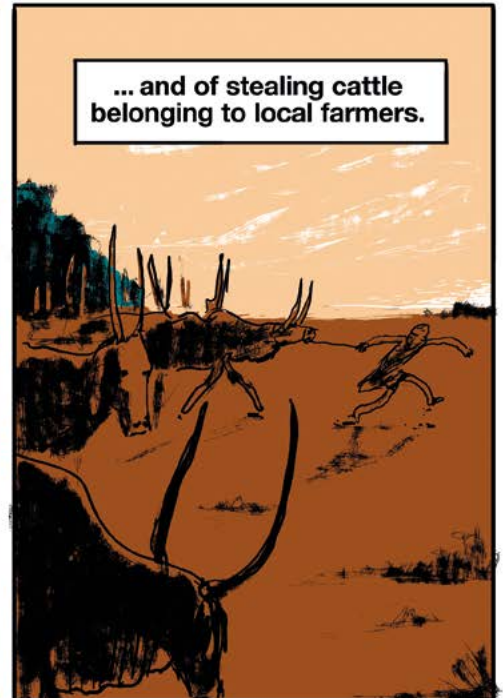


People even read about these conflicts in the capital's newspapers.

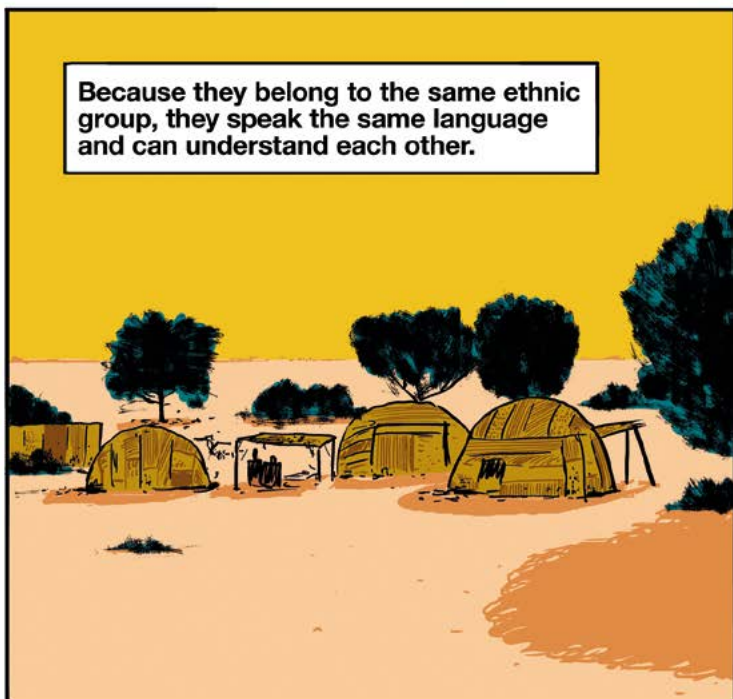
Some local farmers accuse the settled Fulani of helping the nomadic Fulani to destroy their crops with their cattle ...



... and of stealing cattle belonging to local farmers.



Because they belong to the same ethnic group, they speak the same language and can understand each other.



So the local farmers fear that they are accomplices.



The conflicts and violence bring normal life to a standstill, and people are afraid.



One way to end these conflicts is to bring people together to talk to each other in their communities.



A different example comes from Burkina Faso.



Since 2015, the country has become a new center of conflict in the Sahel. Terrorism and intercommunal violence have led to the displacement of millions of people.



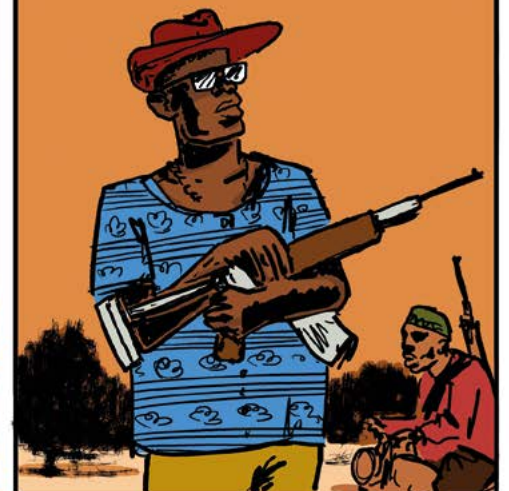
However, long before that, a rise in crime rates saw the population confronted with human insecurity. Especially theft became a big problem.



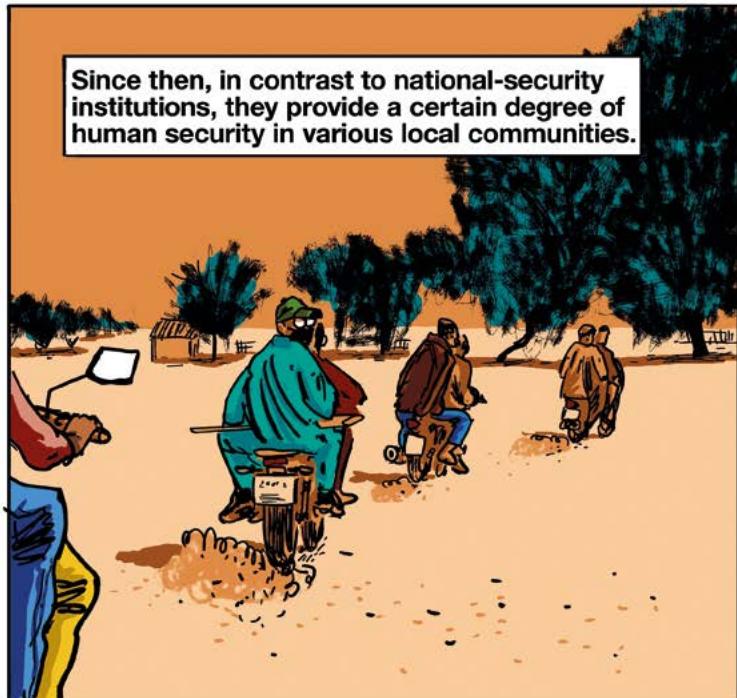
A problem that state security forces proved unable to contain.



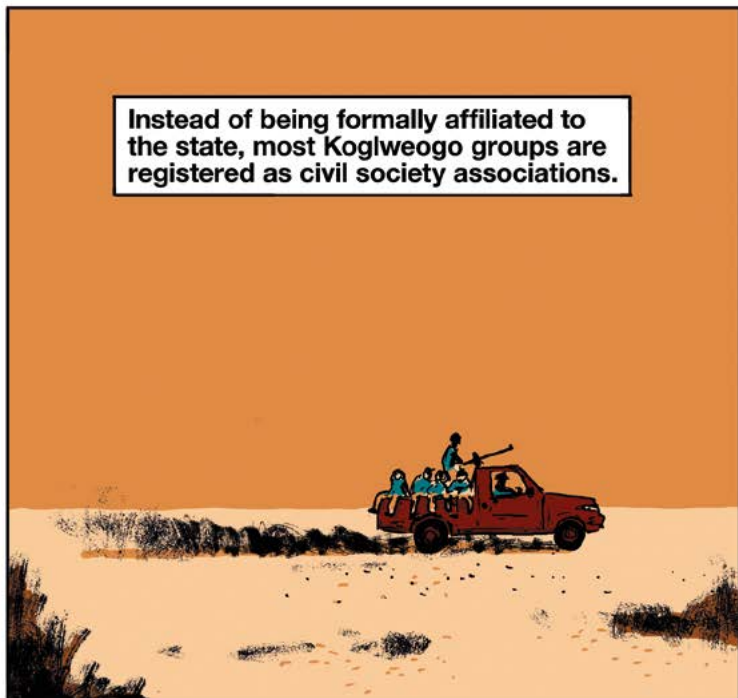
The rise of crime in Burkina Faso was the main reason why, in 2016, the Koglweogo self-defence groups mushroomed in the whole country.



Since then, in contrast to national-security institutions, they provide a certain degree of human security in various local communities.



Instead of being formally affiliated to the state, most Koglweego groups are registered as civil society associations.



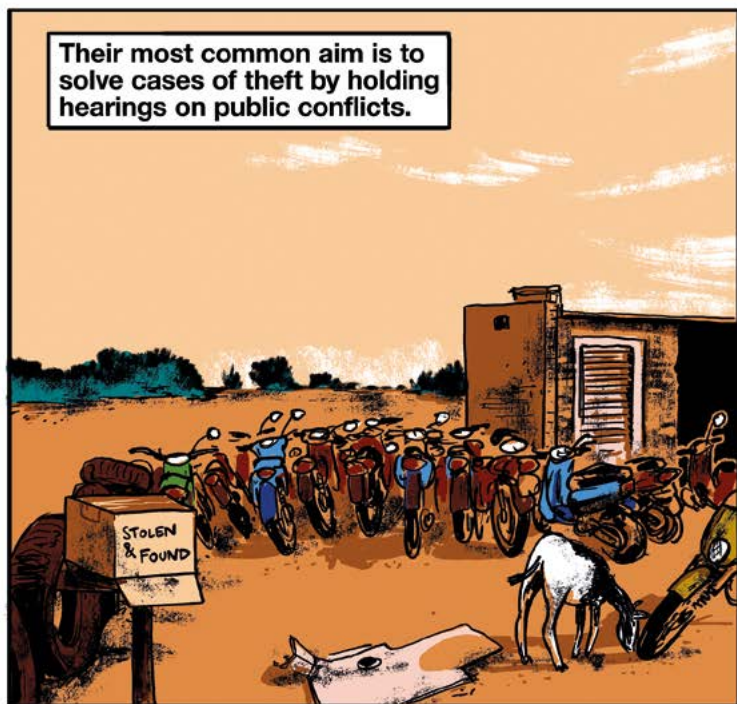
KOGL WEOGO

Mooré: "to protect" + "territory"

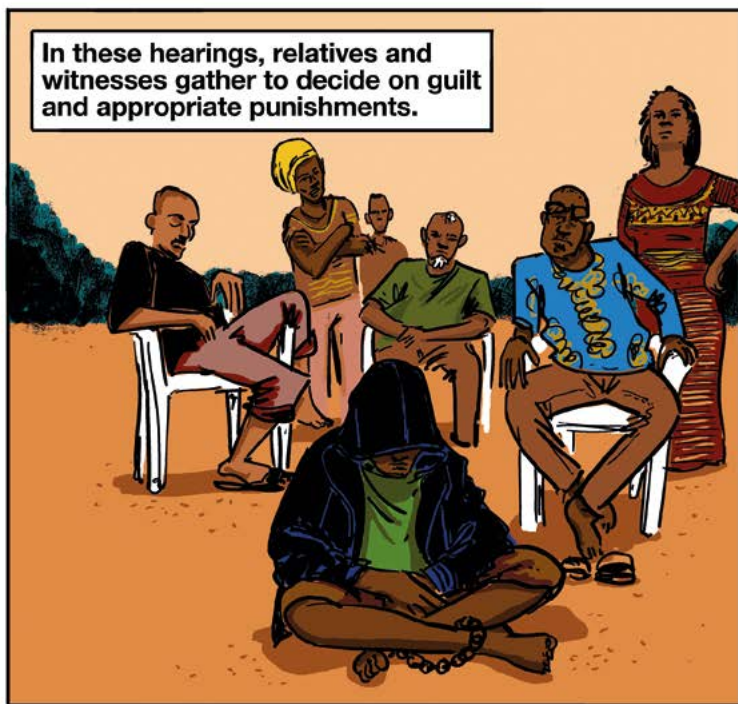
However, the Koglweego are not homogenous. Depending on the security issues in each region, they act differently.



Their most common aim is to solve cases of theft by holding hearings on public conflicts.



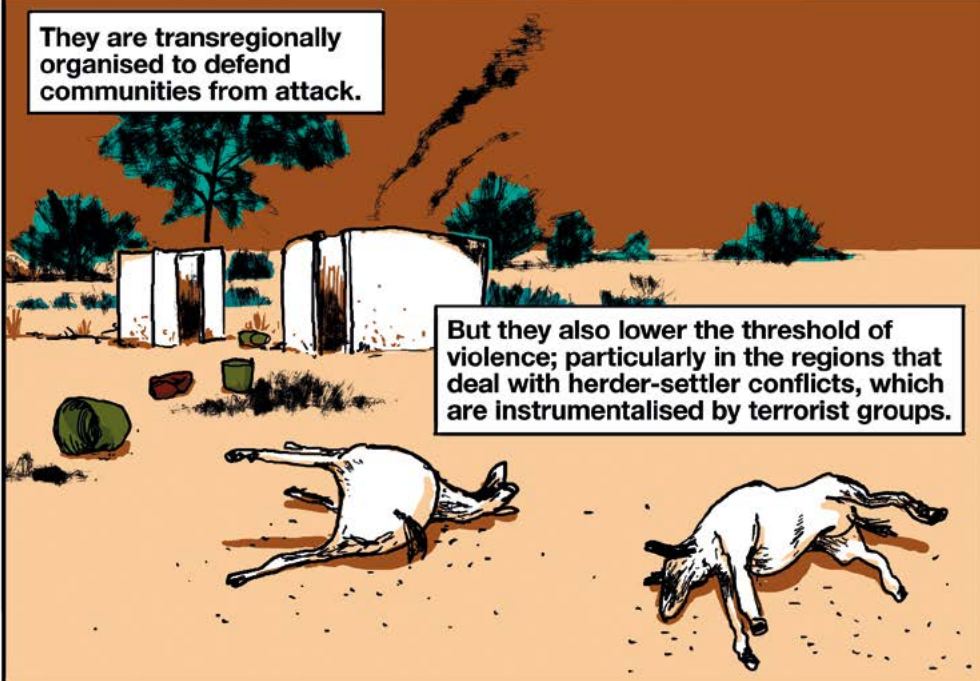
In these hearings, relatives and witnesses gather to decide on guilt and appropriate punishments.



Meanwhile, in the northern and eastern regions, the Koglweogo are increasingly playing a role in the face of terrorism.



They are transregionally organised to defend communities from attack.



But they also lower the threshold of violence; particularly in the regions that deal with herder-settler conflicts, which are instrumentalised by terrorist groups.

In my research, I deal with vigilantism as a political process. I focus primarily on the interplay of violence and trust.

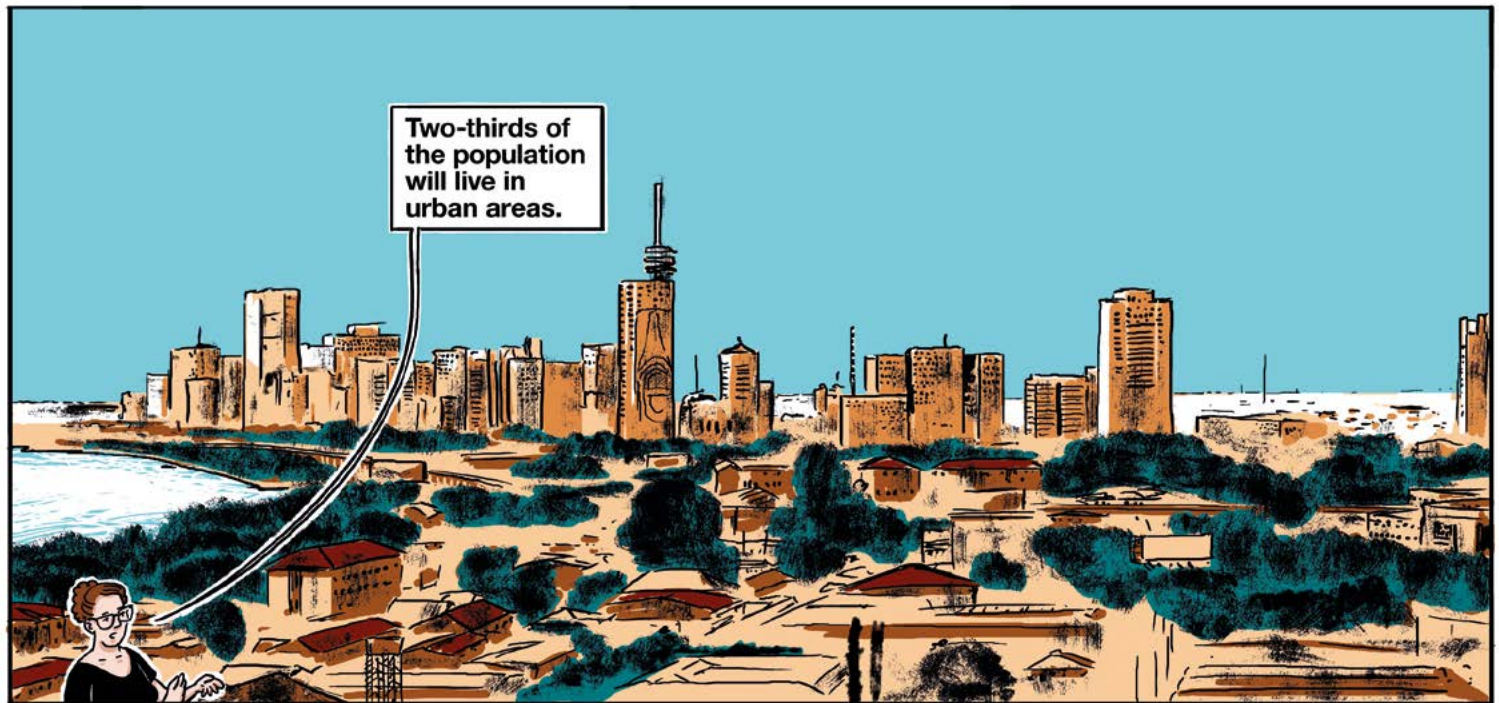
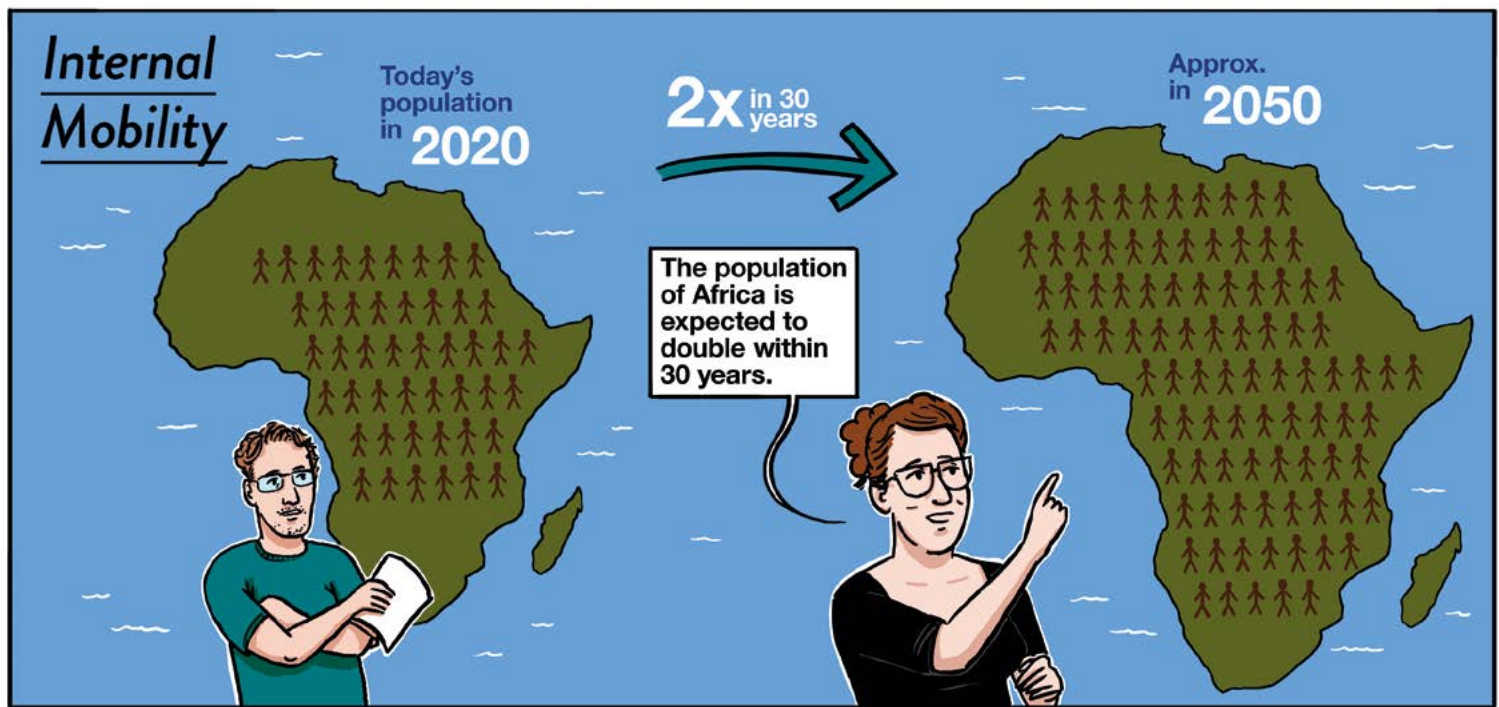


Another interest of mine is the political and moral ambivalence that exist with regard to vigilantism, human rights and the state.



This ambivalence is reflected in the words of an Ouagadougou schoolgirl: "They are frightening, but at night we can sleep more peacefully".





Understanding people's motivations for moving is key.

We can distinguish between push factors, the reasons to leave the place of origin...

Push factors:

- Lack of jobs
- Environmental degradation
- Conflict

A man with glasses and a beard, wearing a green shirt, is gesturing with his hands while speaking. A speech bubble from a hand on the left says, 'Understanding people's motivations for moving is key.' Another speech bubble from him says, 'We can distinguish between push factors, the reasons to leave the place of origin...'. A third speech bubble lists 'Push factors: • Lack of jobs • Environmental degradation • Conflict'.

Pull factors:

- Work
- Education
- Lifestyle

... and pull factors, the reasons for migrating to a new place. I look at the role of lifestyle in my study.

Let me tell you what I discovered from my interviews in Accra.

A woman with glasses and a black shirt is gesturing with her hands while speaking. A speech bubble from a hand on the right says, 'Pull factors: • Work • Education • Lifestyle'. Another speech bubble from her says, '... and pull factors, the reasons for migrating to a new place. I look at the role of lifestyle in my study.' A third speech bubble from her says, 'Let me tell you what I discovered from my interviews in Accra.'

Accra, Ghana. We are sitting in the car of an Uber driver who, despite his university degree in Marine Engineering, could not find a job.

Why did you decide to stay in Accra despite the adversities?

In Volta Region, access to higher education is limited. And there are not enough jobs.

The cake is in Accra!

Now my interviewee juggles short-term contracts in the Port of Tema and works as an Uber driver.

Welcome to Accra!

If you are broke and owe too many people, you know you are in Accra.

Moving to Accra is associated with an increase in social status. Life in Accra offers a different reality than village life, and can turn you into a big girl or a big boy.

I'm a big girl now.

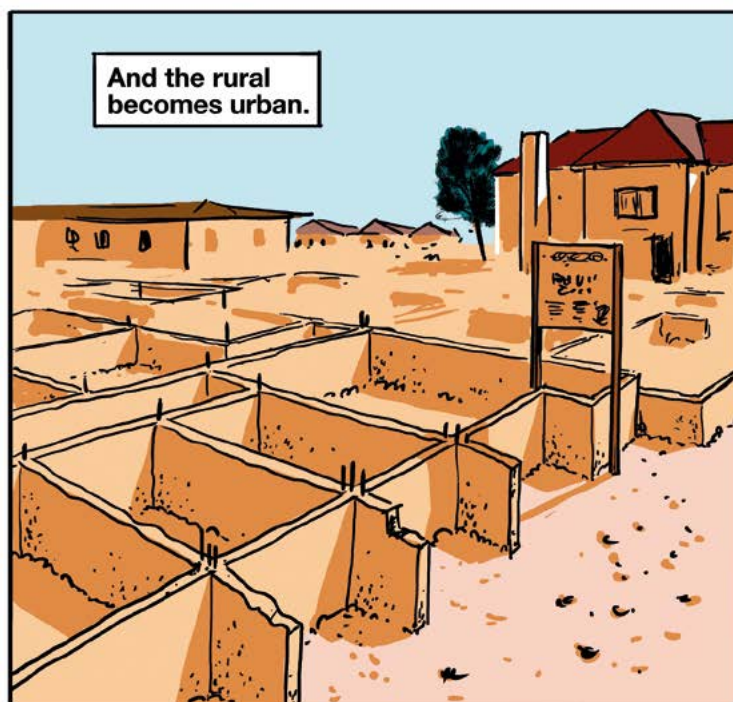
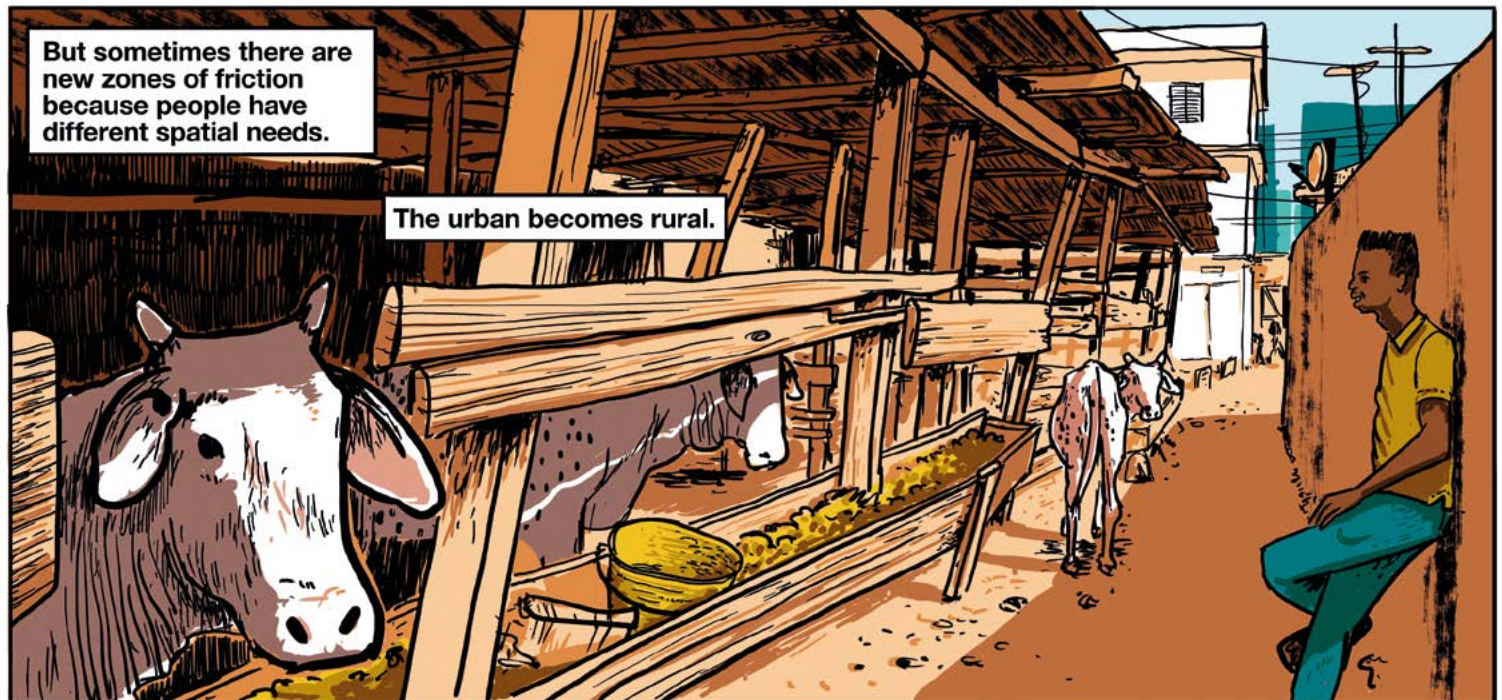
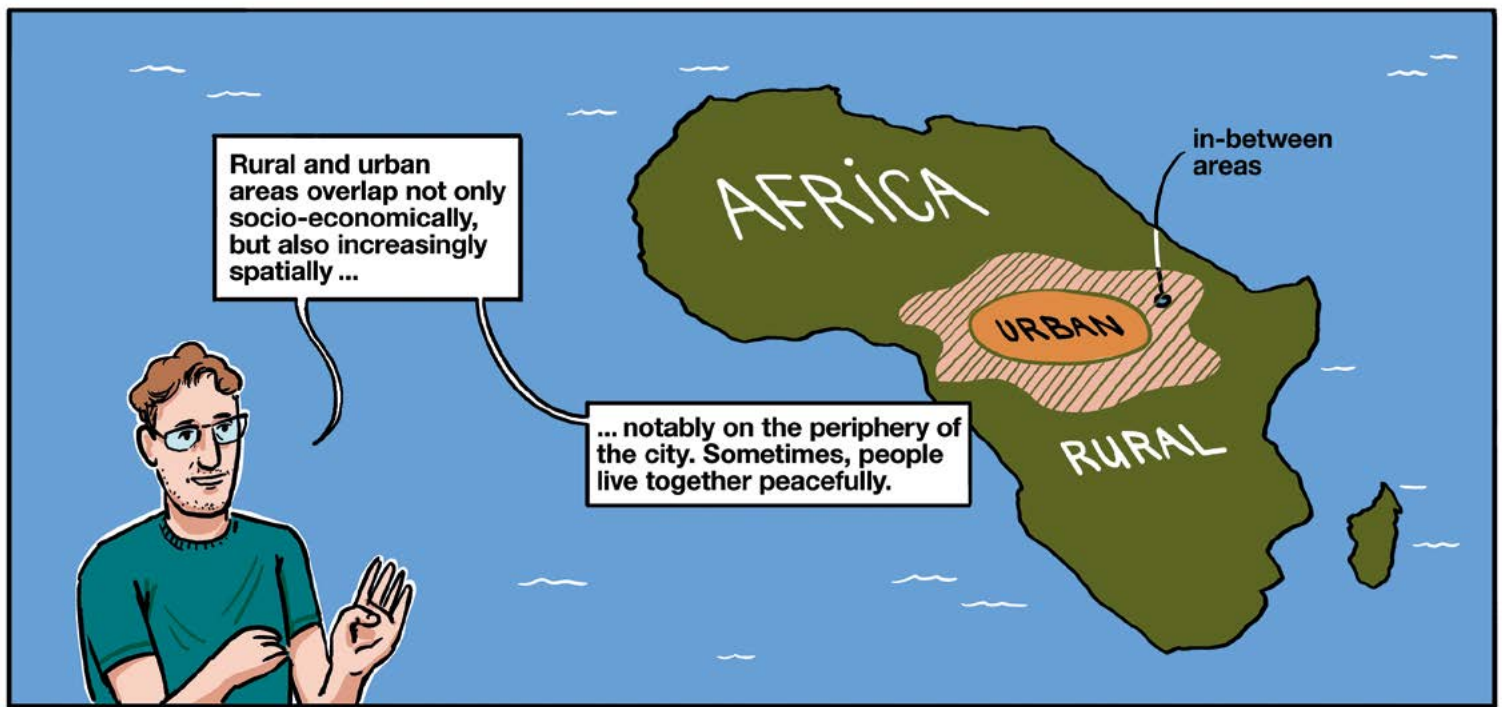
As a big boy, you can drink expensive bottled water instead of water in plastic sachets.

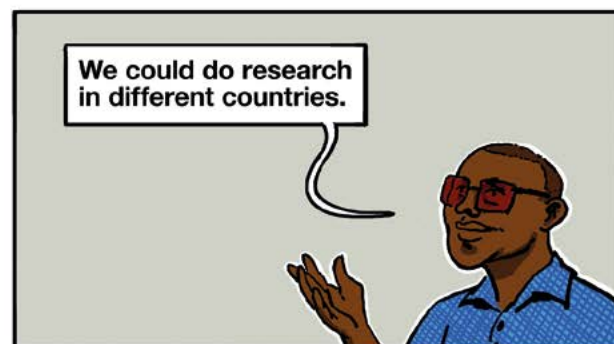
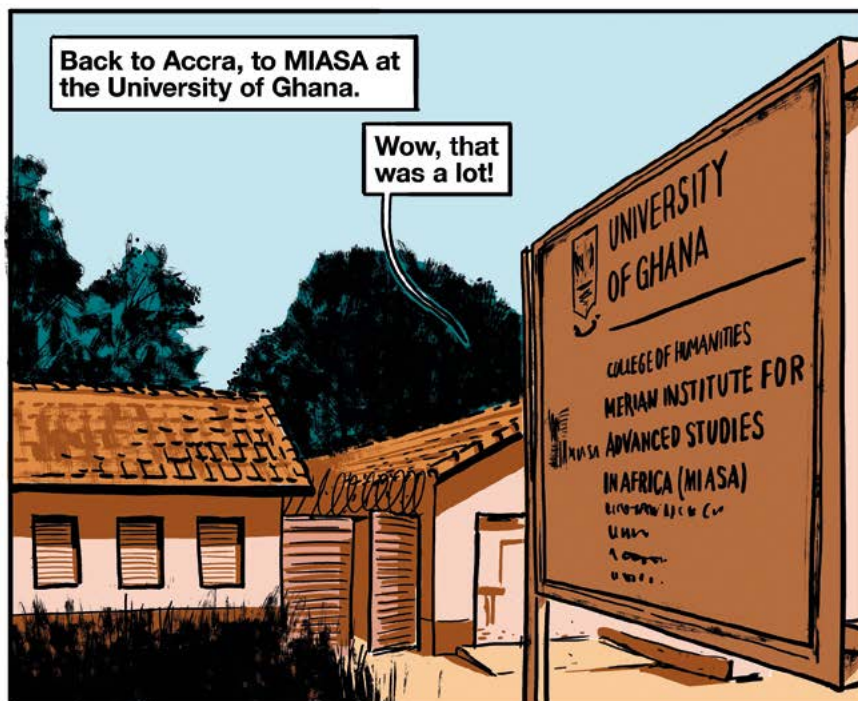
And a lot of big girls have great fashion sense, including a new hairstyle. At school, girls are often not allowed to braid their hair.

But most importantly, people who can rely on their social network are able to move. It's not the poorest who move to the richer areas, but those who have a brother, sister, auntie or good friend who helps in housing, finding a job, paying university fees and settling down.

I wanna move to Accra some day.

Soon, little sister. We will see if Auntie Grace can help you.





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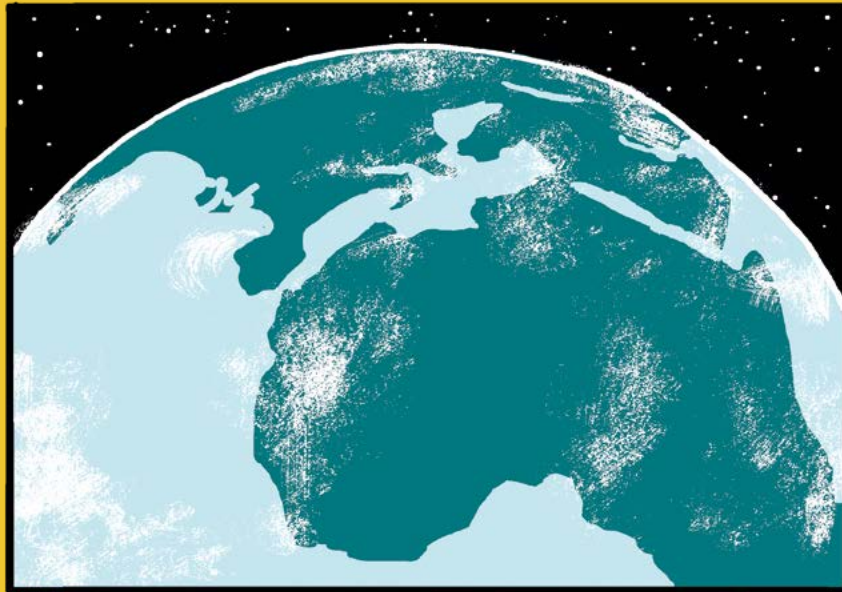
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March 2021





This comic is about rural transformations in Africa. Between February and May 2020, researchers from different countries worked together virtually and at the Maria Sibylla Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA). This comic gives you an insight into our research. We describe how land investments affect the people around them, show examples of resource-based conflicts and explain the motivations of people to move to a city.

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