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Social Representations, Normative Pluralism and Reluctance to Formalise 'Plant-Share' Contracts in Rural Côte d'Ivoire: An Analysis of Land Tenure Dynamics in Abradine 1 (Mé Region, Côte d'Ivoire)

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Abstract: This study analyzes the factors explaining the reluctance of the population to formalize sharecropping contracts in the village of Abradine 1, Mé region, Côte d'Ivoire. Despite land tenure security initiatives implemented by the Ivorian government through the Rural Land Agency (AFOR) and the PAMOFOR project, the formalization rate remains very low: only five contracts formalized out of a target of four hundred and fifty. The objective is to understand to what extent social perceptions of formalization influence acceptance or rejection of this mechanism. The study relies on a qualitative approach grounded in documentary research, direct observation, twenty-six semi-structured interviews, and four focus groups conducted with the main land stakeholders in the village, analyzed through a systems approach, critical institutionalism, and social embeddedness theory. The results reveal four distinct logics underlying perceptions of formalization. A minority of stakeholders view it as a legal security mechanism that prevents land disputes and protects intergenerational agreements. The majority favor customary mechanisms based on trust, the spoken word, and the authority of traditional chiefs. These positions are complemented by a critique of the mechanism's concrete implementation and a stance of pragmatic detachment linked to the absence of a perceived benefit. The study concludes that reluctance operates simultaneously at three levels, normative, procedural, and pragmatic, stemming from the coexistence of state and customary norms compounded by a deficit of institutional trust. The effectiveness of land policies therefore depends on their capacity to integrate local systems of legitimacy, ensure transparency of procedures, and strengthen the participation of community stakeholders.

Keywords: Land Formalization, Social Representations, Normative Pluralism, Institutional Trust, Land Tenure Security.

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INTRODUCTION

Land issues constitute one of the major challenges of rural development in sub-Saharan Africa, where access to land remains at the heart of the economic, social, and political strategies of local populations. In Côte d'Ivoire, agriculture is a key pillar of the national economy and has historically relied on significant population mobility in search of land suitable for cash crops, particularly coffee and cocoa. This migratory dynamic has fostered the emergence of various land arrangements enabling migrants to gain access to land resources held by indigenous populations. Among these arrangements, the *planter-partager* contract (plant-and-share agreement) occupies a central

place in the country's forested regions because of its ability to reconcile the interests of landowners and agricultural producers.

Traditionally based on verbal agreements, relationships of trust, and the mediation of customary authorities, the *planter-partager* arrangement has gradually established itself as a land-access mechanism suited to conditions of land scarcity and labor availability. However, changing demographic, economic, and environmental contexts have contributed to increasing the value of land and complicating land relations. This situation has encouraged a proliferation of disputes concerning use and ownership rights, particularly in the context of inheritance and generational

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transitions. In response to these challenges, the Ivorian state has undertaken several reforms aimed at strengthening rural land tenure security through the formalization of land rights and transactions, notably through the adoption of Law No. 98-750 of December 23, 1998, relating to the rural land domain.

Against this backdrop, programs such as the National Rural Land Tenure Security Program (*Programme National de Sécurisation du Foncier Rural-PNSFR*) and the Project for the Improvement and Implementation of Rural Land Policy (*Projet d'Amélioration et de Mise en Œuvre de la Politique Foncière Rurale-PAMOFOR*) have been established to promote the formalization of agricultural contracts, including *planter-partager* agreements. Despite these institutional efforts, the results remain limited. At both the national and local levels, formalization rates remain low compared with the targets that have been set. In the village of Abradine 1, located in the Yakassé-Attobrou sub-prefecture, only five *planter-partager* contracts have been formalized out of a target of 450 contracts, revealing very low levels of community uptake of the proposed system a gap that provides the empirical starting point for this study.

This situation raises the question of the factors underlying rural actors' reluctance to formalize their land contracts. While institutional explanations often emphasize administrative or organizational constraints, they remain insufficient to account for the social logics that shape actors' behavior. Indeed, decisions concerning the formalization of contracts are strongly influenced by the meanings that local populations attribute to land-tenure arrangements, state institutions, and customary mechanisms of regulation. As the analysis will demonstrate, however, this reluctance cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between state and customary norms. It also encompasses procedural logics related to the degree of trust placed in the practical implementation of the system and pragmatic logics related to actors' perceptions of the costs and benefits involved.

Research on rural land tenure security offers contrasting perspectives in this regard. From a modernization perspective, the formalization of land rights is regarded as a lever for economic development and the security of agricultural investments (Lerner, 1958; Rostow, 1960), insofar as it promotes the clarification of rights and the reduction of contractual uncertainty (Bromley, 2009). However, several authors emphasize that such mechanisms face significant limitations in the African context because of the persistence of customary norms and local systems of land governance (Chauveau, 2000; Colin, 2009; Chauveau and Colin, 2010; Colin and Ruf, 2011). From this perspective, land institutions appear as arenas of competition between state-driven and local logics (Lund, 2002). Furthermore, Granovetter (1985) demonstrates that economic behavior is deeply embedded in social

relationships, networks of trust, and forms of community recognition, thereby relativizing the primacy of formal mechanisms. Finally, Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (1995) point out that top-down development policies frequently encounter resistance when they fail to adequately take local social realities into account. Thus, formalization appears not only as a legal instrument but also as a process of social transformation capable of reshaping relationships among actors.

Building on this observation, this study examines the relationship between social representations of formalization and local populations' reluctance to formalize *planter-partager* contracts. More specifically, it seeks to understand how perceptions of formalization influence actors' acceptance or rejection of this mechanism within the local land-tenure context, and to what extent such acceptance or rejection is grounded in normative, procedural, or pragmatic considerations. The analysis draws on a qualitative approach conducted in the village of Abradine 1 among the main actors involved in land transactions.

The analytical framework combines a systems approach, critical institutionalism, and the theory of social embeddedness. The systems approach makes it possible to view rural land tenure as a system of interactions among actors, norms, and institutions. Critical institutionalism highlights the power relations that shape formalization mechanisms and influence their appropriation by local actors. Finally, Granovetter's theory of social embeddedness emphasizes that economic and land-related practices remain deeply embedded in social relationships, networks of trust, and mechanisms of community recognition.

The hypothesis advanced in this article is that reluctance to formalize *planter-partager* contracts is largely shaped by the social representations that local populations construct around this mechanism. When formalization is perceived as a land-tenure security mechanism that is compatible with local systems of legitimacy, implemented fairly, and capable of generating tangible benefits, it encourages actors' acceptance. Conversely, when it is interpreted as a threat to customary norms, as an external instrument of control whose implementation appears inequitable, or as a process whose usefulness is not immediately apparent, it generates resistance. The analysis will show that these forms of resistance are normative, procedural, or pragmatic in nature.

1. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

1.1. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of local populations' reluctance to formalize *planter-partager* contracts in the village of Abradine 1 draws on three complementary theoretical approaches: the systems approach, critical institutionalism, and the theory of social embeddedness. Combining these perspectives makes it possible to

capture the complexity of interactions among actors within the land-tenure system, the power relations that structure land institutions, and the social logics underlying the legitimacy of local land transactions.

The systems approach, developed notably by Bertalanffy (1968), views society as a set of interdependent elements engaged in continuous interaction. From this perspective, social phenomena cannot be analyzed in isolation, as they result from the relationships among the various actors, institutions, and norms that constitute a given system. Any change affecting one component of the system produces repercussions for the other elements. Applied to land issues, this approach leads to viewing rural land tenure as a complex system in which landowners, agricultural producers, customary authorities, community-based land management authorities, public administrations, and land-tenure security agencies interact. From this perspective, the formalization of *planter-partager* contracts does not depend exclusively on the individual willingness of the actors involved, but rather on the full range of interactions among customary norms, state legal rules, local institutions, and the strategies of different social groups. The low level of acceptance observed in Abradine 1 can thus be understood as the outcome of an imbalance between traditional mechanisms of land regulation and the modern formalization mechanisms promoted by the state.

This systemic perspective is further reinforced by critical institutionalism, which emphasizes the power relations and issues of legitimacy that permeate institutions. Drawing notably on the work of North (1990), Lund (2002), and Cleaver (2002), this approach considers institutions not as merely neutral mechanisms of social regulation, but as social constructions shaped by divergent interests and power relations. Formal and informal rules coexist and may compete in the regulation of resources. Actors therefore mobilize institutions strategically in order to preserve or strengthen their social and economic positions. In the context under study, the formalization of *planter-partager* contracts represents an institution promoted by the state with the aim of securing land transactions. However, this institution overlaps with pre-existing customary arrangements that continue to enjoy strong social recognition. The survey findings show that local populations often attribute greater legitimacy to traditional authorities than to the administrative structures responsible for formalization. This situation reflects competition between two systems of land regulation: one based on positive law and the other on customary norms. The observed reluctance can therefore be interpreted as an expression of actors' strategies aimed at preserving historically established forms of social and land control.

Furthermore, Granovetter's (1985) theory of social embeddedness provides additional insight into

actors' behavior. This theory is based on the idea that economic activities are never autonomous but are deeply embedded in social relationships. Individual decisions are influenced by networks of trust, kinship relations, community solidarity, and mechanisms of social recognition. In contrast to approaches that view economic behavior as being driven exclusively by rational calculations, social embeddedness emphasizes the importance of social ties in regulating exchanges. In the case of *planter-partager* contracts, the findings reveal that land agreements rely heavily on mutual trust, the credibility of one's word, reciprocal moral obligations, and the intervention of customary authorities. For many actors, the validity of a contract depends less on its administrative registration than on its recognition by the community. Formalization is therefore perceived by some as a challenge to the traditional mechanisms of social regulation that have so far ensured the stability of land relations. The persistence of this logic partly explains the resistance observed toward the formalization process.

The combined use of these three theoretical approaches makes it possible to understand that reluctance to formalize *planter-partager* contracts results neither from a simple lack of information nor from a systematic rejection of change. Rather, it is embedded in a context characterized by the interaction of multiple actors, the coexistence of competing norms, and the importance of social relationships in land regulation. The systems approach highlights the interdependencies among the components of the local land-tenure system; critical institutionalism reveals the power and legitimacy issues surrounding land reforms; and the theory of social embeddedness explains the central role played by trust-based relationships and customary institutions in land practices. Taken together, these theoretical frameworks make it possible to conceptualize the formalization of *planter-partager* contracts as a process of social transformation in which state and customary norms confront, interact, and are reshaped. They therefore provide a relevant analytical framework for understanding the social representations underlying the reluctance of the population of Abradine 1 toward land-tenure formalization.

1.2. Methodological Framework

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach aimed at analyzing the factors underlying local populations' reluctance to formalize *planter-partager* contracts in the village of Abradine 1, located in the Yakassé-Attobrou sub-prefecture (Mé Region, Côte d'Ivoire).

The choice of this study site is based on its high level of reluctance toward the formalization of land contracts, identified through an exploratory survey conducted with the Rural Land Agency (*Agence Foncière Rurale*—AFOR). The actors interviewed included landowners, agricultural producers, customary

authorities, members of land management committees, and representatives of government administrations involved in land governance.

Data were collected through documentary research, direct observation, and semi-structured interviews. The documentary research drew on scientific studies and institutional documents relating to rural land tenure and agricultural contracts. Direct observation facilitated an understanding of land-tenure practices and interactions among the various actors. Semi-structured interviews made it possible to gather the perceptions, experiences, and strategies of the different stakeholders involved.

The sampling strategy was non-probabilistic and based on purposive sampling. A total of 18 individual interviews and two focus group discussions, involving 14 participants, were conducted with the main categories of actors involved in the land formalization process.

The data collected were recorded, transcribed, and then subjected to thematic content analysis. This approach made it possible to identify the social representations, actors' logics, and institutional constraints associated with the formalization of *planter-partager* contracts.

The analysis of the findings draws on the systems approach, which conceptualizes rural land tenure as a system of interactions among multiple actors and institutions, as well as on critical institutionalism, which highlights power relations and the strategic uses of land-tenure rules within the formalization process.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In Abradine 1, the extent of reluctance toward formalization is first reflected in the figures: out of a target of 450 *planter-partager* contracts, only five have been formalized to date. This very low level of uptake constitutes the empirical starting point for the analysis that follows and calls for an examination, beyond administrative explanations, of the social representations underlying this widespread reluctance.

The data collected from landowners, agricultural producers (acquirers), customary authorities, and members of the Village Rural Land Management Committees (*Comités Villageois de Gestion Foncière Rurale*-CVGFR) reveal contrasting perceptions of formalization. These perceptions cannot be reduced to a binary opposition between acceptance and rejection. Rather, they are organized around four distinct logics, which the following subsections examine in detail: acceptance based on legal security; criticism grounded in the primacy of customary authorities; criticism concerning the practical implementation of the mechanism; and a pragmatic stance of distancing toward formalization.

2.1. A Positive Perception of Formalization as a Mechanism for Land-Tenure Security

Several respondents expressed explicit support for formalization, associating it with greater security of land rights and a reduction in the risk of conflict.

A.J., a landowner, explains: *"Before, we used to make these agreements based on a verbal understanding, but often, later on, there would be disputes. The acquirer would say one thing, and I would say something else. But with AFOR, everything is put in writing."*

This testimony highlights the perception of written documentation as a means of clarifying agreements and limiting disputes arising from divergent interpretations of verbal commitments. For these actors, formalization constitutes a form of evidence capable of reducing the uncertainty associated with exclusively verbal contracts.

Along the same lines, M.J., a landowner, emphasizes the importance of formalization in preventing potential inheritance-related conflicts: *"Paperwork is good; people can die unexpectedly, so you never know. It is better to have it done."*

For this respondent, formalization provides a guarantee of continuity and preserves agreements beyond the lifetime of the contracting parties. It therefore helps ensure the transmission of commitments across generations and limits disputes that may arise during inheritance processes.

Furthermore, several participants value the role of the Rural Land Agency (*Agence Foncière Rurale*-AFOR) in supporting rural actors.

B.K., an acquirer and member of the CVGFR, states: *"AFOR helps a lot. They explain things well and show us how to proceed."*

This statement underscores the importance attached to institutional support and legal information in the process of formalizing contracts. It also shows that acceptance of the mechanism depends partly on the quality of the awareness-raising and outreach activities carried out by public institutions.

Thus, for this category of actors, formalization represents a legal guarantee, an instrument for securing agricultural investments, and a means of preserving land agreements in the face of family and social changes. However, in light of the corpus as a whole, this position remains a minority view in Abradine 1.

2.2. A Critical Perception Based on the Primacy of Customary Authorities and Social Embeddedness

By contrast, a larger proportion of respondents expressed indifference to or opposition toward the

formalization of contracts, favoring customary mechanisms of land regulation.

L.F., an acquirer, states: *"I don't find AFOR important. If the chief knows about it, that's what matters."*

This position reflects the trust placed in the recognition of land transactions by customary authorities, who are regarded as the primary guarantors of their legitimacy. Here, the validity of an agreement rests more on social recognition than on legal recognition. This preference is also expressed by K.K., an acquirer:

"Your AFOR arrangement is fine, but dealing with the chief is better. Whatever the issue, with the chief there is a solution, whereas with AFOR, the matter often ends up with the gendarmerie, and there is no solution."

These statements highlight a positive perception of customary dispute-resolution mechanisms, which are considered closer to local realities and more oriented toward finding compromises. By contrast, administrative procedures are perceived as mechanisms that may exacerbate conflicts by directing disputes toward judicial channels.

The findings thus show that, for a large proportion of respondents, land-tenure security does not rest solely on the existence of a written document, but also on the strength of social relationships, trust between the parties, and the ability of traditional authorities to ensure compliance with commitments. This perception reflects a strong degree of social embeddedness in land-tenure practices, whereby customary mechanisms remain the primary sources of legitimacy.

2.3. Criticism of the Implementation Process Rather Than of the Principle of Formalization

Beyond the opposition between legal and customary logics, the data reveal a third, more nuanced position: several respondents do not reject formalization as such, but rather criticize the way it is implemented in practice on the ground. The issues raised include administrative delays in processing applications, insufficient information provided to local populations, the implicit costs associated with the procedures, as well as perceived influence and patronage within local land-governance structures.

This procedural criticism is clearly distinct from the customary-based rejection described in Section 2.2: it does not challenge the legitimacy of the state mechanism as such, but rather its effective accessibility and the fairness of its implementation. It suggests that local populations' acceptance of formalization depends not only on recognition of its legitimacy in principle, but equally on the quality, transparency, and perceived fairness of its practical implementation.

2.4. A Pragmatic Stance of Distancing Toward Formalization

A final category of respondents is characterized by an attitude of withdrawal rather than outright opposition. Some agricultural producers consider that existing land arrangements already provide them with sufficient stability and therefore see little benefit in committing resources time, money, and administrative effort to a process whose benefits appear uncertain.

This stance should be distinguished both from acceptance and from the normative rejection of customary mechanisms observed in Section 2.2. Rather, it reflects a pragmatic calculation whereby actors prefer to preserve the flexibility and room for negotiation offered by informal arrangements rather than engage in a procedure whose immediate usefulness is not apparent to them.

2.5. Summary: The Coexistence of Competing Logics of Land-Tenure Security

Overall, the findings reveal the coexistence, in Abradine 1, of at least four distinct logics underlying the appropriation of land-tenure formalization: acceptance based on legal security (Section 2.1), rejection based on the primacy of customary institutions (Section 2.2), criticism targeting the practical modalities of implementation (Section 2.3), and pragmatic distancing resulting from the perceived absence of immediate benefits (Section 2.4).

This plurality of positions, far from being reducible to a simple attachment to tradition, sheds light on the very low rate of formalization observed in the village five contracts out of a target of 450 as the combined product of normative pluralism, perceived shortcomings in institutional implementation, and actor strategies that are rationally adapted to their local context. This duality reinforced by the two secondary logics identified above illustrates the normative pluralism that characterizes local land governance and constitutes a major factor underlying the low level of acceptance of the formalization process.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The very low rate of formalization observed in Abradine 1 five formalized contracts out of a target of 450 cannot be explained simply by a lack of information or by purely administrative constraints. The findings presented in Section 2 show that this reluctance is rooted in the social representations that actors construct around the formalization mechanism, and that these representations take four distinct forms rather than constituting a binary opposition between acceptance and rejection. Far from being perceived uniformly, formalization is understood differently depending on actors' land-tenure status, social trajectories, experiences of land-related conflicts, and positions within the local land-management system.

A first reading of the findings (Section 2.1) reveals that some landowners, farmers, and actors relatively familiar with administrative procedures perceive formalization as an instrument of legal security. For these actors, the written contract provides protection against future disputes and a means of clarifying the rights and obligations of the parties. This perception is consistent with Bromley's (2009) analyses, according to which formalization contributes to securing land rights and promoting the stability of rural transactions. It also reflects the logic of modernization theory developed by Rostow (1960) and Lerner (1958), which regards the institutionalization of formal law as a necessary stage in social and economic development.

However, the findings show that this favorable representation remains a minority position (Section 2.1) in comparison with the dominant position identified in Section 2.2. Most respondents instead associate formalization with external intervention that may undermine customary mechanisms of land regulation. These observations corroborate the work of Kouamé (2018), who argues that state-promoted land-tenure mechanisms are often perceived as instruments of control designed more to protect the interests of landowners or public institutions than to secure the rights of agricultural producers. Similarly, Colin and Ruf (2011) show that rural populations oscillate between the hope of greater legal security and the fear of the gradual dispossession of their land rights.

This distrust is rooted in the opposition between two systems of land-tenure legitimacy. On the one hand, modern law is based on written documentation, codification, and legal evidence; on the other, customary norms rely on the spoken word, relationships of trust, and community recognition. The findings thus confirm the existence of normative pluralism already highlighted by Chauveau (2000), Chauveau and Colin (2010), and Colin (2009). From this perspective, formalization appears less as a simple administrative tool than as a profound transformation of the social relations surrounding land.

This situation can be interpreted through Granovetter's (1985) theory of social embeddedness. According to this approach, economic relations are never autonomous but are deeply embedded in social networks. *Planter-partager* contracts, traditionally regulated through mechanisms of trust, reciprocal obligations, and community mediation, derive their legitimacy from their embeddedness in these social relationships. Consequently, replacing these mechanisms with a formal legal framework is perceived by several actors as a challenge to the local social order rather than merely as an administrative innovation.

The findings nevertheless call for a more nuanced interpretation than one that would reduce local populations' reluctance to a cultural attachment to customary practices. The position identified in Section

2.3 shows that some of the criticisms directed at formalization concern less its underlying principle than the practical modalities of its implementation: administrative delays, inadequate information, implicit costs, and perceived influence within local land-governance structures. This distinction is theoretically important: it indicates that rejection of the mechanism is not solely normative (an opposition between modern law and customary law; see Section 2.2), but also procedural (a lack of confidence in the fairness and accessibility of the mechanism itself; see Section 2.3). These observations are consistent with Lund's (2002) analysis, which shows that land institutions may become arenas for local power strategies, leading certain elites to capture legal resources. They also resonate with the reflections of Bayart (1989) and Médard (2002) on African neopatrimonial logics, whereby administrative mechanisms are frequently reinterpreted through local power relations. In other words, even actors who recognize the legitimacy of formalization in principle may distance themselves from it if its practical implementation appears unfair or opaque to them. This suggests that acceptance of the mechanism depends not only on its normative legitimacy but equally on its perceived institutional credibility.

The findings also reveal, in Section 2.4, the existence of a pragmatic stance of distancing toward formalization, distinct from both normative rejection (Section 2.2) and procedural criticism (Section 2.3). Some agricultural producers consider that existing arrangements already provide sufficient stability and see little benefit in committing resources to a process whose benefits appear uncertain. This attitude relates to what Scott (1998) describes as "strategic ignorance," namely the deliberate preservation of a certain degree of institutional flexibility that enables actors to retain room for negotiation and adaptation. This third form of reluctance is particularly instructive from a theoretical perspective: it shows that non-formalization is not always the product of resistance whether normative or procedural but may also result from a rational calculation by actors for whom the informal status quo remains, in the short term, the most advantageous option.

Comparing these four logics (Sections 2.1–2.4) therefore calls into question the assumptions of classical modernization theory. While this theory regards legal formalization as a unidirectional vehicle for progress and rationalization, the findings show that acceptance of modern mechanisms simultaneously depends on three conditions that are rarely met in Abradine 1: compatibility between the mechanism and local systems of legitimacy (Section 2.2), the perceived credibility of its institutional implementation (Section 2.3), and the existence of a sufficiently compelling net benefit to justify actors' investment (Section 2.4). This three-level interpretation normative, procedural, and pragmatic echoes and extends the critiques advanced by Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (1995), according to which

technocratically designed, top-down institutional reforms often fail when they overlook the social rationalities of the populations concerned.

Thus, the reluctance observed in Abradine 1 cannot be interpreted as a simple rejection of change or progress, nor reduced to the opposition between state and customary norms alone. It reflects resistance operating at several levels normative, procedural, and pragmatic to a form of modernization perceived as insufficiently adapted to local sociocultural and institutional realities. The social representations of formalization reveal a process of normative hybridization in which state legal norms and customary norms coexist, confront one another, and are reconfigured against a backdrop of procedural distrust and pragmatic calculation. Consequently, the effectiveness of land-formalization policies depends less on their legal validity than on their ability to simultaneously generate social legitimacy based on recognition of customary institutions (addressing Section 2.2), institutional credibility based on transparent and equitable procedures (addressing Section 2.3), and tangible incentives based on benefits that are perceptible to local actors in the short term (addressing Section 2.4).

4. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to understand how social representations of formalization influence the reluctance of the population of Abradine 1 to formalize *planter-partager* contracts. With only five formalized contracts out of a target of 450, this village provides a particularly revealing case of the limitations encountered by land-tenure security policies when they come into contact with local social logics. The findings show that this reluctance is not primarily attributable to a lack of information or administrative constraints, but is embedded in a complex system of representations, norms, and legitimacy relations that structure local land-tenure practices.

The analysis reveals not two, but four distinct logics underlying the appropriation of formalization in Abradine 1. A minority of actors support formalization as an instrument of legal security, enabling them to clarify rights, prevent conflicts, and protect commitments over time (Section 2.1). A majority, by contrast, favor customary mechanisms based on the spoken word, interpersonal trust, and recognition by traditional authorities, for whom the legitimacy of transactions remains grounded more in community validation than in administrative recognition (Section 2.2). These two positions are complemented by two more nuanced logics revealed through an in-depth reading of the data: criticism directed not at the principle of formalization but at the practical modalities of its implementation delays, implicit costs, and perceived influence (Section 2.3) and a pragmatic stance of distancing, whereby some agricultural producers simply consider that existing informal arrangements are

sufficient and that there is no need to invest in a formalization process (Section 2.4).

These findings confirm the hypothesis that social representations of formalization constitute a determining factor in actors' acceptance or rejection of land-tenure security mechanisms. They also show, in light of the discussion, that this reluctance operates simultaneously at three levels: normative, when formalization competes with the legitimacy of customary institutions (Section 2.2); procedural, when confidence in the fairness and transparency of institutional implementation is lacking (Section 2.3); and pragmatic, when the net benefits of the mechanism do not appear sufficiently compelling in comparison with existing arrangements (Section 2.4). Formalization should therefore not be understood as a mere legal procedure, but rather as a process of institutional transformation capable of reshaping social relations surrounding land, provided that it simultaneously addresses these three requirements.

From a theoretical perspective, this research demonstrates the relevance of combining the systems approach, critical institutionalism, and the theory of social embeddedness to analyze land-tenure dynamics in contexts of normative pluralism. This combination provides a better understanding of the interactions among state institutions, customary norms, and actors' strategies in processes of land-rights formalization. It also makes it possible to move beyond a binary interpretation—acceptance/rejection, modern/customary in favor of a more differentiated understanding of resistance, distinguishing between principled disagreement, a lack of institutional trust, and straightforward calculations of opportunity.

From an operational perspective, the findings suggest that public authorities and land-tenure security agencies should not treat local populations' reluctance as a homogeneous phenomenon, but should develop differentiated responses according to the dominant logic identified: strengthening the recognition of customary authorities and involving them in formalization mechanisms to address the normative logic (Section 2.2); improving transparency, processing times, and the fairness of case handling to address the procedural logic (Section 2.3); and making the concrete and immediate benefits of formalization more visible to address the pragmatic logic (Section 2.4). More participatory approaches, based on consultation with rural communities, procedural transparency, strengthened awareness-raising activities, and greater recognition of customary authorities within formalization mechanisms, could thus promote stronger social ownership of land reforms and contribute to their effectiveness.

This study nevertheless has certain limitations. It focuses on a single village and relies exclusively on a qualitative approach. The findings therefore do not claim

statistical generalizability, but rather provide an in-depth understanding of the social mechanisms underlying actors' behavior. Furthermore, the absence, at this stage, of a quantified distribution of respondents by category of actor limits the possibility of precisely assessing the relative weight of each of the four identified logics.

Future research could extend the analysis to several regions of Côte d'Ivoire, employ a comparative or mixed-methods approach, and examine the influence of other variables, such as gender, intergenerational relations, migration status, or economic trajectories, on the appropriation of land-formalization mechanisms. Such an approach would contribute to a deeper understanding of the conditions required for land-tenure security that combines legal effectiveness, social legitimacy, procedural credibility, and institutional sustainability.

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