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Political Ecology perspectives on planned relocation of coastal dwellers in Ghana's Volta River Delta

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learning from planned relocations*

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Analytical Anchoring: Political Ecology

Key Characteristics of Political Ecology

- Critical examination of human/nature relations in socio-ecological change
- Analysis of resource conflicts on local level embedded in complex multi-scale interrelations
- Focus on actors, knowledge, power and power relations
- Aim to unveil injustice(s)
- Frequent use of case studies



Source: Clipartstation

Conceptual Perspective

Neu, F. N., & Fünfgeld, H. (2022). Political ecologies of resettlement in river deltas. *Geography Compass*, 16(6), e12621.

Three strands of Political Ecology to critically analyze resettlement* in river deltas (based on Escobar 2010):

- Pre-constructivist/neo-Marxist Political Ecology
- Constructivist Political Ecology
- Post-constructivist Political Ecology



* also known as 'planned relocation' or 'managed/planned retreat'

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REVIEW ARTICLE

WILEY

Political ecologies of resettlement in river deltas

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Abstract
In river deltas, human interference with regional and global socio-ecological systems has led to a plethora of gradual and more abrupt environmental changes that result in inundation, coastal and river bank erosion, land loss and, ultimately, displaced people. Often apolitically framed as protective, state-led transfer of people to new housing grounds, resettlement has become a common response to such displacements. In its process, existing arrangements of land tenure and occupancy and, at times more covertly, related arrangements of capital, labor and the social fabric become dislocated and reassembled. In line with emerging critical geographies of resettlement, this paper conceptualizes resettlement in river deltas against the background of environmental change as a highly political process with far-reaching environmental, economic, social and cultural implications. For this article is based on an in-depth review of both resettlement and political ecology literature, we first elucidate the concept of resettlement before providing a structured overview of categories and recent trends in resettlement literature. We then focus on river deltas that due to multi-scale environmental change are about to become hotspots of future resettlement. Building on identified gaps in resettlement literature, the article concludes with opening up three analytical strands of political ecology as entry points to resettlement studies, understood as critical geographic research into localized manifestations

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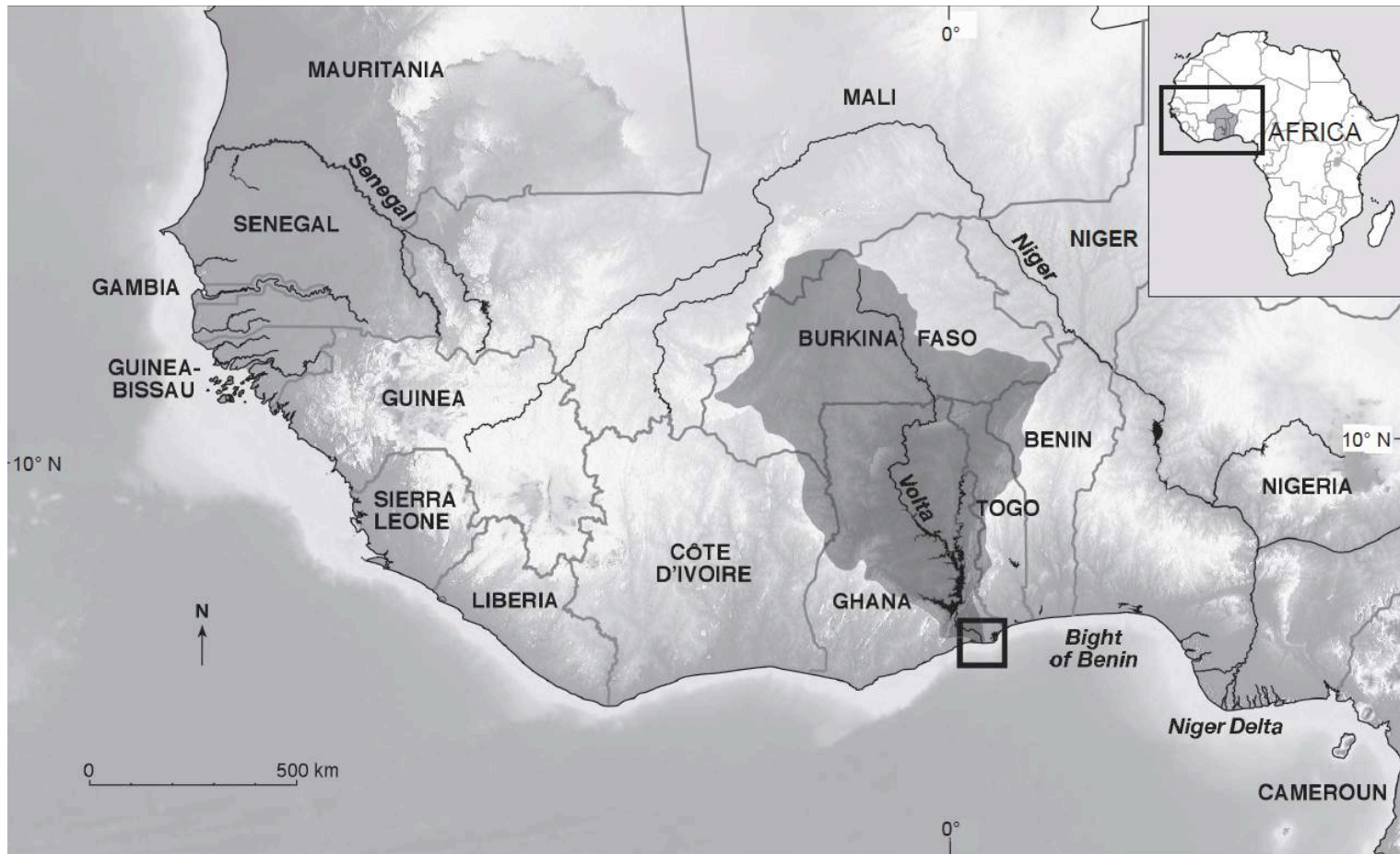
Methods of Empirical Research: Ethnographic Approaches

- Three months of intensive empirical research
 - September/October 2021 + March/April 2022 + August 2023
 - In four districts along the coast of the Volta River Delta
- Ethnographic & qualitative research methods
 - Problem-centred interviews (incl. narrative elements)
 - Walking interviews with local experts
 - Informal talks & discussions
 - (Participatory) observations
 - Photography & videos
 - Field diary

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Location of Volta River Delta in West Africa



Map of West Africa with catchment area of Volta River (dark grey) and delta (black square)

(Source: Anthony/Almar/Aagaard, 2016)

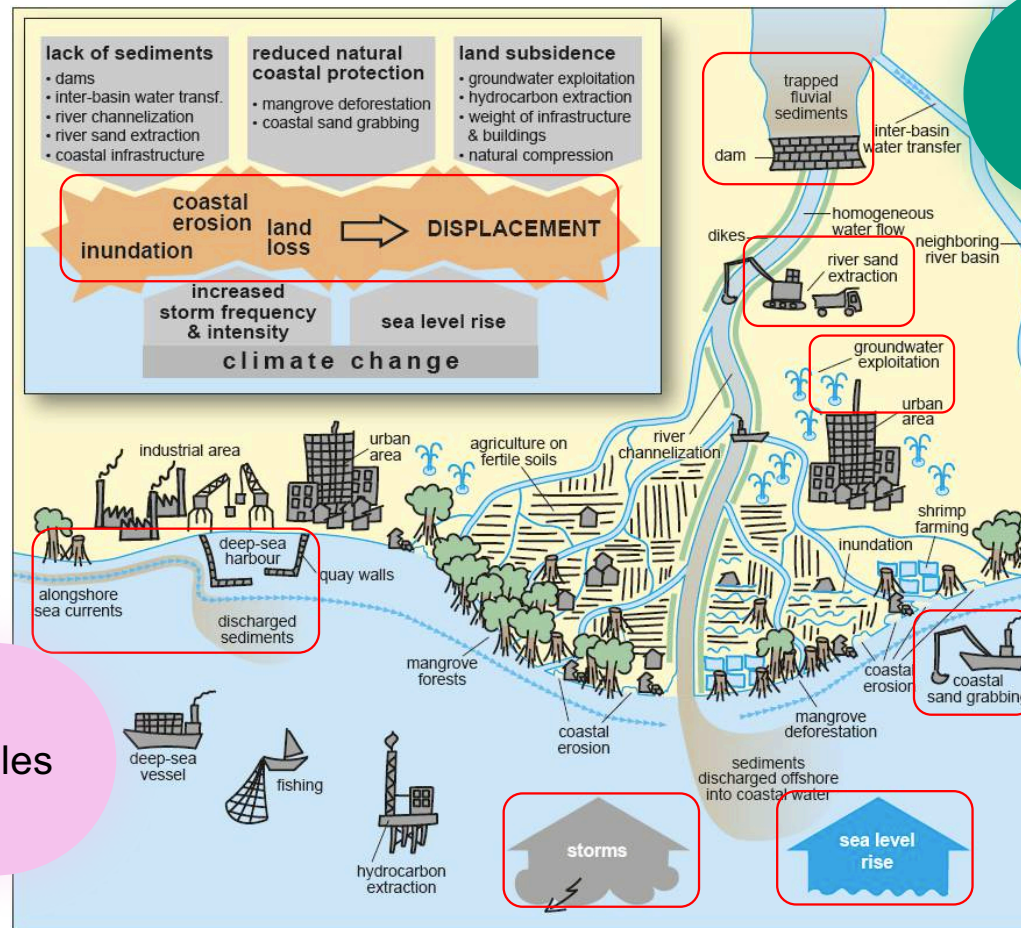
Coastal Erosion in Volta River Delta: Hotspots Keta & Fuveme



Satellite image of Volta River Delta with two case study locations (Keta & Fuveme, red boxes) and main direction of coastal current (red arrow)

(Source: Google Maps, 2022)

Complex Interplay of Factors Leading to Coastal Erosion & Displacement



Time

Scales

Schematic illustration of variety of processes in deltas, river basins and adjacent coastal areas leading to inundation, coastal erosion, land loss and ultimately displacement of people (contributors applicable to Volta River Delta with red frame)

(Source: Neu/Fünfgeld, 2022)

Coastal Erosion at the Shores of the Volta River Delta



Video showing tidal wave event causing coastal erosion and flooding near former Fuveme (Volta River Delta)

(Source: own recording, 3.4.2022)

Flooding due to Tidal Wave Events



Photo of flooded housing area of already displaced people during tidal wave event near former Fuveme (Volta River Delta)

(Source: own photo, 2.4.2022)

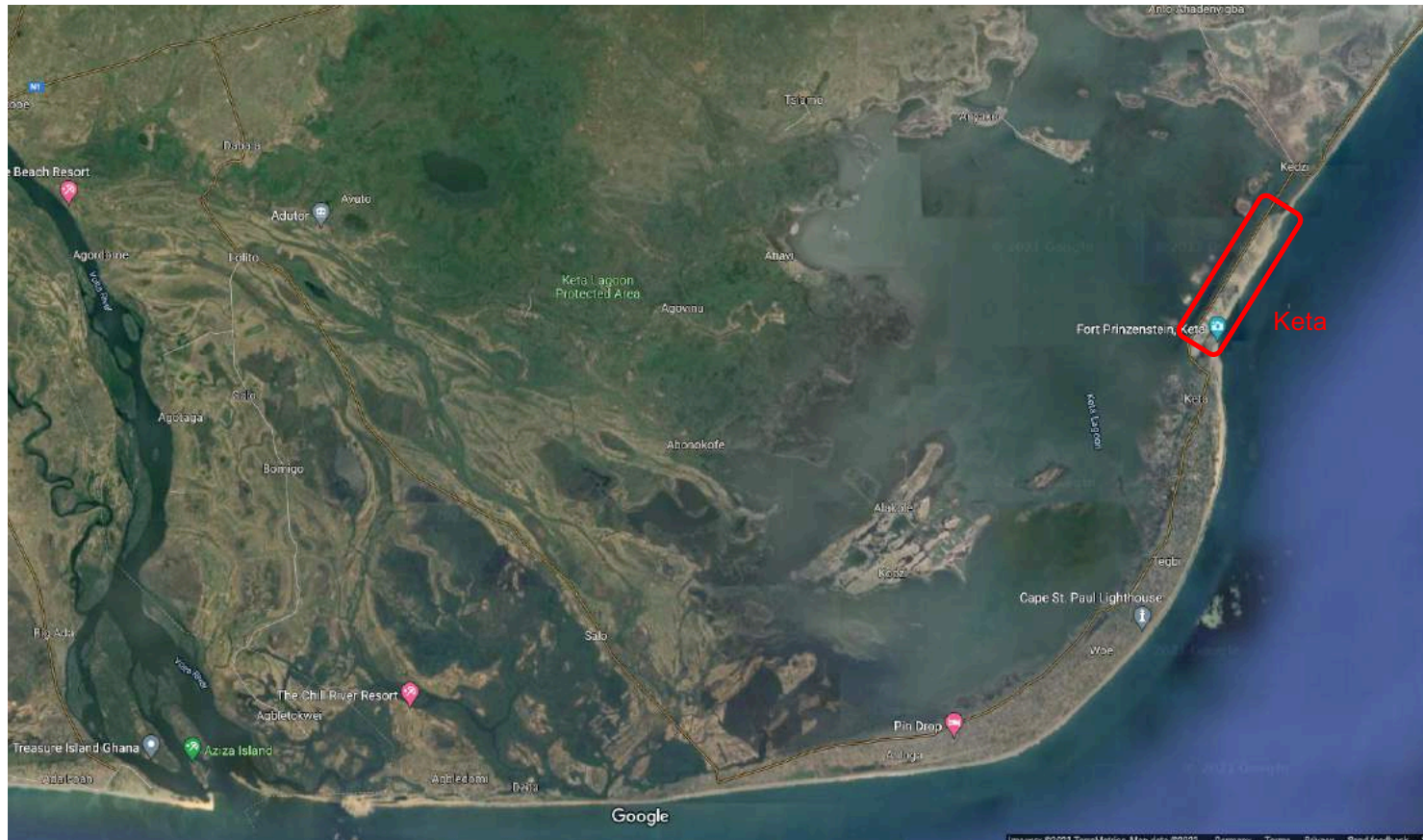
Land Loss & Destruction of Buildings



Photos of house (left) and school (right) destroyed by tidal wave action near former Fuveme (Volta River Delta)

(Source: own photos, 2./3.4.2022)

Response to Displacement by Coastal Erosion near Keta: In-Situ Resettlement in the Course of Keta Sea Defence Project (KSDP)



Satellite image of Volta River Delta with case study location Keta (marked in red) situated in the very east of the narrow sand spit that separates Keta Lagoon from the Atlantic Ocean

(Source: Google Maps, 2022)

Coastal Engineering as Response to Continuous Coastal Erosion in Keta: Initial Situation, Coastal Protection Interventions, Outcome



Satellite images of different stages of Keta Sea Defence Project (KSPD), covering the communities of Kedzi, Vodza, Adzido and Keta (from north to south) – before initiation (see 1999 image) and during implementation between 2001 and 2004; KSDP involved a) the construction of a new road at the lagoon side (at half-finished state in 2001 image), b) the construction of a revetment at Fort Prinzenstein in Keta (marked with R in 2002 image) and six groins (marked with G1 - G6 in 2002 image) for halting coastal erosion, and c) pumping of sand from Keta Lagoon (extraction area marked with rectangle in 2002 image) between and to the back of groins to reclaim land from the lagoon and ocean, and to raise the elevation of low-lying portions of already existing land (beige areas indicating both reclaimed and raised land, discernible from 2002 image onwards) and remaining uncovered original land at time of project end (dark brown areas, marked with ovals in 2004 image) (Source of satellite imagery: Google Earth Engine, 2023)

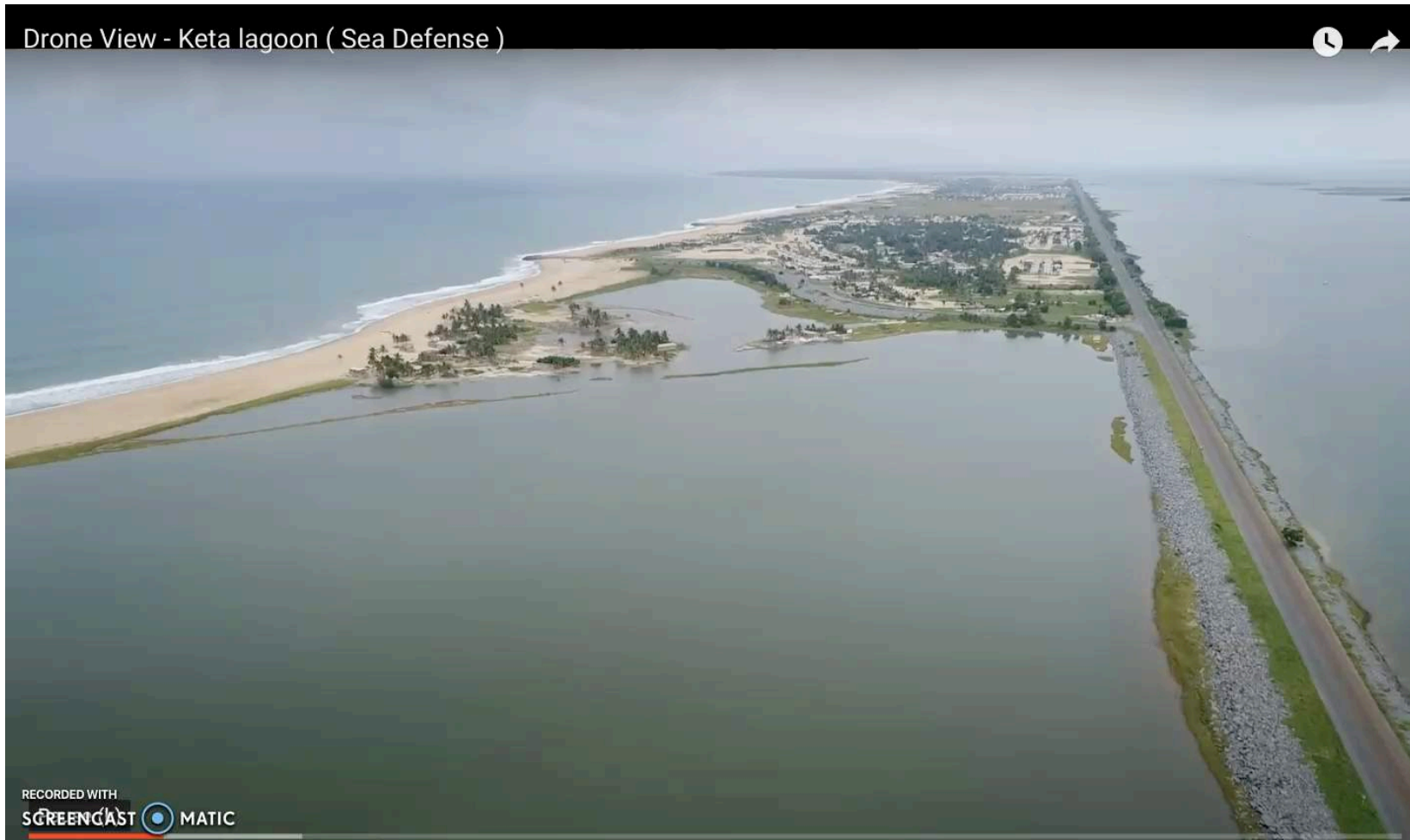
Resettlement as a Compensation for People who had their Original Homes Destroyed by Coastal Protection Measures



The Government of Ghana (with the Ministry of Works and Housing as leading governmental institution) intended to compensate those residents, whose houses needed to be destroyed in the course of implementation of the Keta Sea Defence Project, with standardized resettlement houses of four different sizes that were built on the reclaimed/raised land. The photo on the left shows the uniform look of resettlement houses of the largest category in its original shape in Kedzi. The photo on the right presents a resettlement house in Adzido adapted by a financially strong occupant through extensions of the resettlement house itself, additional buildings and the entire enclosing of the compound.

(Source: own photos, left 2023/right 2022)

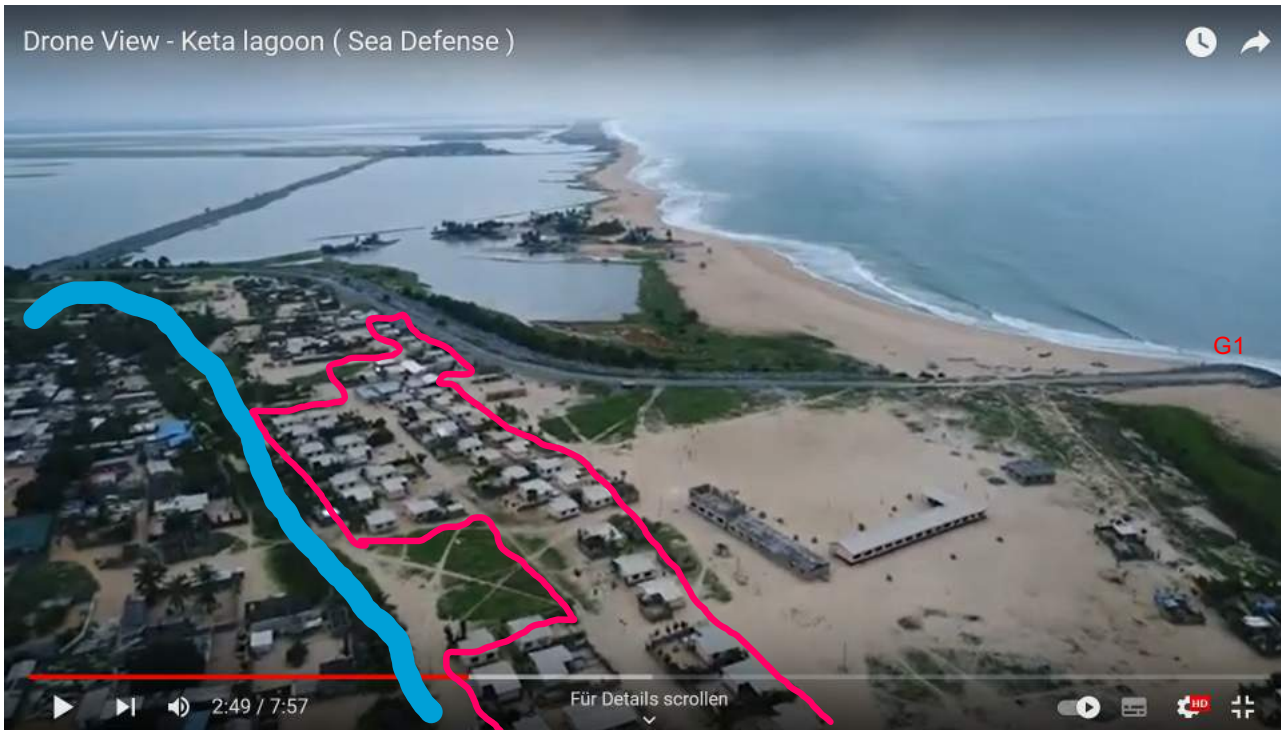
Drone View of Coastal Defence Measures and Resettlement Project



Section of 2018 video of drone view of Keta Sea Defence Project and Resettlement Project near Kedzi (approaching from northeast)

(Source: Recorded from YouTube Video of 'rkarikari', 2018, starting at 0:50 minute, <https://youtu.be/mepAWqqx2X8>)

Many Issues with Resettlement Project, but Overall Satisfaction



2018 drone view of Kedzi with i) groin (marked with G1) protecting the entire settlement against coastal erosion and flooding, ii) reclaimed/raised land (sandy area right of blue line that separates reclaimed/raised land from old land) and resettlement housing area on top of it (demarcated with red line), and iii) old land that remained untouched including its settlement Kedzi Agorta (lower left corner, left of blue line)

(Source: Screenshot of Youtube Video from 'rkarikari', 2018, <https://youtu.be/mepAWqxx2X8>)

Deficiencies

- little bottom-up involvement of affected people
- long duration of relocation process
- former neighbourhood structure and housing composition destroyed by relocation pattern
- 239 of 835 houses not built and part of built houses given out to illegitimate people
- houses and plot sizes too small (even with additional annex buildings) to accommodate entire family, leading to family quarrels
- poor quality of construction materials used
- housing orientation and room arrangement not matching local needs and customs
- no legal land titles or ownership documents
- economic activity not revived, still very low

Overall Satisfaction – Despite Everything

- in total, relocated people grateful for houses
- even without having received a house, people are confident, since coastal erosion is currently on halt due to KSDP – otherwise they would have lost even more/everything

Response to Displacement by Coastal Erosion in Fuveme: Ongoing Negotiations about Resettlement



Satellite image of Volta River Delta with case study location Fuveme (marked in red) situated just east of the estuary of the Volta River

(Source: Google Maps, 2022)

Case of Fuveme: Autonomous Ways of Dealing with Coastal Erosion – General Reluctance toward Current Resettlement Plans



Thatched house built by people themselves in refuge called 'Fuveme New Town', being located at the sea in neighbourhood of former Fuveme which was completely destroyed (Source: own photo, 14.9.2021)

Background & Status Quo

- Living with environmental changes over generations
- Extremely intense coastal erosion wiped Fuveme off the map
- Out-migration (based on fishing/artisanal/educational skills)
- Building new houses on remaining land after displacement
- Moving to relatives (strong social bonds & solidarity)

Further steps

- Residents' continuous call for coastal protection intervention
- Plans by Government of Ghana to relocate the people further inland – but mostly faced with reluctance of residents due to loss of their:
 - Livelihoods (esp. fishing in the sea)
 - Traditional/ancestral identities
 - Connections to spirits and gods (→ see citation below)

"Those gods were living here before we came. [...] The gods will never follow us. [...] We can leave, but if we leave and they are [still] here, they will put trouble on us. [...] They know that we are the ones who are giving them food." (Fuveme fisherman about implications of leaving behind some of their gods when relocating to another place, own interview, 2023)

Anlo-Ewe People of Fuveme: Very Strong Attachment to Shoreline

'Ableyi me nya aveme oo.'

(Anlo-Ewe proverb underlining people's connection to the shore)

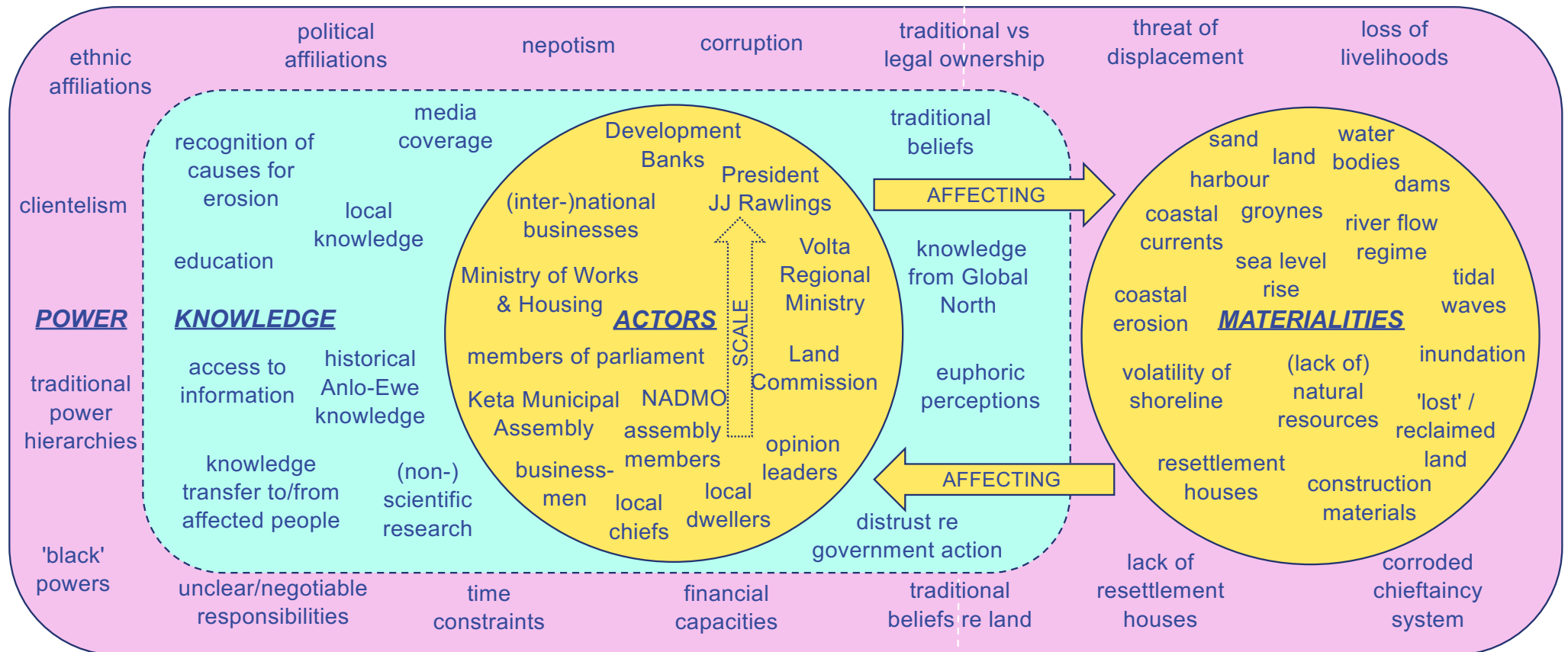
'A beach crab will never survive in a forest.'

(Same proverb translated into English)



Photo of beach crab (Source: own photo, 2016)

Political Ecology Perspectives on Planned Relocation in Ghana's Volta River Delta



(Source: own illustration, 2023)

Conclusion



(Source: own photo, 2022)



Conclusion

- Area near **Keta** hosts a **unique case of in-situ resettlement on reclaimed/raised land**, with **resettlement houses** given out as a **compensation to people** whose **houses had been demolished** during the construction of the **Keta Sea Defence Project**
- **Despite resettlement process in Keta being corrupted by powerful and knowledgeable actors**, leading to **conflictual resettlement outcome with landless 'occupants' of resettlement houses** that often need to be **reshaped** by individuals to meet **local needs**, most **people** are still relatively **happy with the outcome**
- **People of Fuveme** are more and more **open to be relocated** by state agencies, **but want their livelihoods, spiritual beliefs and ancestral/traditional identity** to be **taken into consideration**

Thank you for your attention!

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(Source: own photo, 2022)

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