Chapter 14
Political Economy of Land Policy Reform and Governance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Land is the most important asset of farmers that plays an indispensable role in agricultural production. Nigerian land system has strong social and cultural attraction making it difficult to separate from political, social, cultural, and economic effects. Politics and the process of politicking influence the course and outcome of government decision on land policy. This study examines the political economy of agricultural land policy reforms and governance in Nigeria. The study used a combination of methods, such as expository, comparative, and case analysis. Findings showed that land issues are delicate, demanding careful attention to avoid social or political conflicts. Politicization of land is a major cause of land dispute but with good land governance, land policy reform become easier to implement. Political will of government is crucial for land policy to succeed. Transparent, fair, and equitable land policy is necessary to continue on the path of peace, stability, and increase agricultural productivity.

INTRODUCTION

Land is one of the most valuable and disputed single natural resource that affects every facet of live (Ostrom, and Schlager, 1992) and cannot be isolated from agricultural production. Major development is creating pressure over land and this has resulted to an increase in competition for land between different

groups, such as multiple land users (farmers, herders), urban elites and foreign investors (Wells-Dang, 2016, Cotula *et al.,* 2004). Agricultural land (the share of land area that is arable, under permanent crops, and under permanent pastures) in Nigeria is reported to be 77.74% of the total land area as at 2016 (World Bank, 2016) and the main natural asset of farmers (Nzeh *et al.,* 2017). This resource, is a vehicle for human and rural development (Obayelu *et al.,* 2017) and source of political power that need to be reformed whenever there is a conflict on it as in the case of Nigeria. Ownership of land and the way it is managed affect agricultural development of a nation (Subedi, 2016, Nzeh *et al.,* 2017). Land ownership affects land use, farming systems, level of production and the volume of agricultural credit especially where the existing credit systems place undue emphasis on land as a form of collateral (Michie and Loboa, 2012).

Land policy is 'a set of agreed principles to govern ownership, use and management of land resources, and usually contains a statement of vision and objectives for the country' (AUC-ECA-AfDB Consortium, 2011). It is a significant tool in the transmission of wealth in addition to ensuring food security (Adeleye *et al.,* 2020). Land policy determines who has legal rights of access or ownership to land resources, how these rights are managed and the ways land is distributed among diverse stakeholders (French Development Cooperation, 2009). Land policy articulates political choices of power distribution between the state, the local systems of authority and its citizens (Lund, 2011a, 2011b). The multidimensional nature of land requires a careful and well implemented approach that looks at land within the broader historical, political economic and social context (EU Taskforce, 2004).

Land governance on the other hand is about power and the political economy of land. While the power structure of the society is revealed in the rules of land tenure, the quality of governance upsets the distribution of power in society (Palmer, Fricska and Wehrmann, 2009). Land governance has to do with decisions that are made about access to land and its use, the manner in which the decisions are implemented and the way competing interests are managed (Ukaejiofo, 2010).

Political economy of land policy reform and governance as used in this study entails how complex political nature in terms of power and authority influences decision making on access to land and its use, formulation of new land policy and amendments of the existing land reform in Nigeria going by the existing level of development.

Research Problem Statement

Many of the present challenges facing Nigeria have a clear land dimension: unequal access to land; insecurity of tenure; unsustainable land use; weak institutions for land administration, dispute and conflict resolution, et cetera and responses to these challenges are difficult when the governance of land is weak and have political undertone. Management of land is perceived as one of the most corrupt government activities (Wren-Lewis, 2013), and corrupt land systems/administration have a negative impact on both rural and urban agricultural production (Nzeh *et al.,* 2017). Successful land policy and good land governance is usually of a technical, procedural and political nature (Massay 2020; Kironde, 2009; Moyo and Yeros 2005). To this end, land management reforms are necessary to change the institutional structure governing man's relationship with the land, involving intervention in the prevailing pattern of land ownership, control and usage in order to change the structure of holdings, improve land productivity and broaden the distribution of benefits (World Bank, 1996). Land reform requires getting policies right or removal of policies that create market distortions and imperfections (de Janvry *et al.,* 2001; World Bank 2003). Modification or replacement of existing institutional arrangement governing possession,

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