

Chapter 59

Women Land Rights and Food Security Status of Farming Households in Oyo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The dominance of men in decision-making processes and leadership positions within the communities has made land allocation, land use, and control skewed in favour of men. This study examined the effects of women's land rights on households' food security status using a sample of 300 representative farmers. Descriptive statistics, household food expenditure, logistic regression, and ordered logit models were the analytical tools used. Results revealed that about 35% of the rural women farmers had land use rights while the remaining 65% had land ownership rights. Women with ownership rights were more food secure, with the majority of the women having residual rights, while only a few had sell rights. Secure women land rights are germane to achieving and sustaining household and national food security. Strategies and instruments for protecting women rights should be developed and implemented, while efforts geared towards designing strategies, assessing multiple dimensions of women empowerment for improved food security status, and welfare of the households should be intensified.

INTRODUCTION

Women play a critical role in agricultural production in developing countries where they usually make up most of the agricultural workforce (World Bank et al., 2009). While their participation in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa accounts for close to 70-80% of labour and 90% food processing and storage,

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they own less than 20% of the land (Murisa, 2008). Land rights is defined as the indisputable ability of individuals and group of individuals to obtain, possess and utilize land at their discretion as long as their activities on the land do not impede on other individuals' rights (Adi, 2009). Under the customary land tenure system, which is still very much prevalent, the distribution of rights is based on socio-political system (the political history of the village and region from which the alliances and hierarchical relationships between lineages are derived) and on family relationships (access to land and resources depending on one's social status within the family). It is also worth noting that in most of these customary landholding systems, community level decisions about land are taken by chiefs or headmen on behalf of and in trust for the clan or family (Umezulike, 2004).

In Nigeria, the Land Use Act, enacted in 1978, was meant to standardise land administration systems across the country. It vested all urban land within a state in the state governor, and all non-urban land in the local governments in which they are found. The state governor and local government authorities are empowered by the Act to grant "statutory rights of occupancy". While both urban and rural land is secured in Nigeria through certificates of occupancy (instruments of title issued as evidence that the state has conferred on the holder of the certificate the statutory right to occupy the land for a defined period of time and deeds of assignment (agreement between the person with the rights to a piece of land and the person to whom the rights are being transferred), rules for transfer and succession depend on whether the person died with or without a will recognised by the courts and mainly by inheritance rights, which are primarily guided by native and customary laws (with variations across ethnic groups) and religious laws (sharia law, based on the Koran). For example, sharia laws, applicable across the 19 northern states, stipulate that female children get half of what males get and that children who are non-Muslims lose their inheritance rights (Africa Check, 2015).

However, secure access to productive land is critical to the millions of poor people living in rural areas, who depend on agriculture, livestock or forests for their livelihood. This is because it reduces their vulnerability to hunger and poverty; influences their capacity to invest in their productive activities and in the sustainable management of their resources; enhances their prospects for better livelihoods, and helps them develop more equitable relations with the rest of their society, thus contributing to justice, peace and sustainable development (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2010). Throughout Africa, most poor women (most of whom depend on land for their livelihood) are either landless or have limited and insecure rights to land. This reality has important consequences for sustainable socio-economic development of the continent as well as their food security status since they play a major role in agriculture (Odeny, 2013). In other words, when deprived of access to, ownership and use of land, women are left without the means to create stable and sustainable livelihoods and are food insecure.

However, food security, defined as a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life, has been linked to having secured land rights. This is particularly pertinent for women in ensuring equality of basic rights, reducing poverty and ensuring household food security (Jonckheere *et al.*, 2013). For instance, it had been shown that if women had the same access and ownership to productive resources as men, they would increase yields on their farms by 20-30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 – 4.0%, which is enough to pull 100-150 million people out of hunger (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2010). Yet, women's land rights have been largely ignored mainly because of the highly patriarchal nature of most societies in the developing world.

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