

Gender Analysis of Land Ownership Structures and Agricultural Production in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study made a gender analysis of land ownership structures and agricultural production in Imo State, Nigeria. Multiple stage sampling technique was used in randomly selecting 324 respondents for the study. Data obtained through structured interview was analyzed with percentages while agricultural productivity was measured in Kilogram (kg). Results reveal that females with (78%) average of the three gender categories considered were more involved in agriculture than their male counterparts (57%). Further, land inheritance (75%) is the most common ownership structure among males while females (67%) purchased land used in agricultural production. 74% of males had farm size of 4 hectares and above as against (16%) of females. Agricultural productivity analysis revealed that females had higher level of production output than males. The study concluded that women are more involved in agriculture, land inheritance favoured males than females, males had more hectares of land while females had overall higher productivity in the crops considered from 2008 – 2011. The study recommended that governments should revisit the land tenure and acquisition structures in the country and matrilineal land inheritance should be encouraged by the community traditional institutions.

Key words: Gender, Land Ownership Structure, Production, Patrilineal, Matrilineal, Imo

1. Introduction

In recent times, gender related issues and topics has been an area of discuss in literatures and the academic world. The role of men and women in economic development and the sustenance of agriculture cannot be overemphasized. Gender describes the culturally upheld roles and responsibilities assigned by the society on the male and female sexes.

Gender applies to one sex or the other, and relates to the way each behaves in a given situation. While sex is biologically determined, and cannot normally be changed. Gender is a result of socialization into a male or a female role which ascribes certain behaviour according to socio-cultural norms for one's sex (Stephens, 1993). Agricultural policy makers have for decades turned a blind eye to women farmers because they think of farmers as men, thus denying women's claim to participation in farming and other activities which directly affect their lives. As a result, rural women have lagged visibly behind men by most social and economic criteria. If the bias in favour of male farmers had no negative impact on agricultural production, gender issues would probably still remain unrecognized. Until an economic imperative, such as labour shortages, declining yields, or recognition of the need for the special knowledge which women have, demands a change, most agricultural policy makers see little need to address gender issues (Stephens, 1993).

Equality in all ramifications of life in gender issues has been advocated for in many articles and journals. This is in recognition of the potentials and opportunities for both the masculine and feminine genders that if harnessed maximally will contribute meaningfully to growth and development. This advocacy isolates every area of disparity in assignment of roles, social interactions, religious considerations, public office holding, agricultural activities etc. Anele (2000) asserted that the production of knowledge about African women can be used to transform social relations in the direction of gender equity and social justice.

In Nigeria the involvement of women in agriculture has attracted greater attention in recent years (Odurukwe *et.al.*, 2006). Women in Nigeria form an active and reserve labour force but rarely own the means of productions (Rahman, 2004). This notwithstanding, the position of women in meeting challenges of agricultural development cannot be over emphasized (Onyemauwa, 2012). Women are involved in all aspects of agricultural activities;

making of ridges, yam moulds, yam staking, weeding, mulching, fertilizer application, harvesting, processing, storage and marketing. Mgbada (2002) and Rahman (2004) reported that women provide about 60-80% of agricultural labour and contribute about 80% of food production in Nigeria. These contributions could be diminished by cultural practices and policies restricting women on the use of land that is considered a basic agricultural input.

Land is a distinctive factor of production and is inclusive of all naturally occurring goods such as water, air, soil, minerals, flora and fauna that are used in the creation of products. Land ownership structure defines land tenancy. This spells out who owns what land in the community. According to Emeasoba (2012) land is the foundation of all human, social and economic activities that lie at the heart of social, political, or economic life of most nations especially African nations. Land is recognized as a primary source of wealth, social status, and power, the basis for shelter, food, and economic activities and significantly provides employment opportunities in the rural areas but is increasingly becoming a scarce resource in urban areas (Emeasoba, 2012). The ownership and possession of land as an economic resource confers security on the owner and determines the level of involvement in agriculture in an agrarian society.

2. Land Tenure System in Nigeria

The 1978 Land Use Decree in Nigerian nationalized all land in the country and by implication transferred the responsibility of land administration on committees constituted at state and local government levels. One justification given for the Decree was the rationalisation of customary land tenure systems which were held to be a constraint on agricultural development. The customary land tenure systems in Nigeria is more often than not considered an impediment to agricultural development. This is more so because of no secured and clearly defined rights which leads to a disincentive or an inability to invest in agriculture, while the inflexibility of traditional systems prevent the transfer of rights between groups, gender and individuals and thus inhibit the mobility of factors of production.

Nigeria is a Federation comprising 36 States and a Federal Capital Territory with each State divided into administrative local government areas giving raise to various tiers of government that exact influence to certain levels on transactions in land. The 1978 land Decree at the state level therefore vested land authorities on State Governors who may grant rights of occupancy to any person for all purposes. A prospective land investor may therefore apply to the governor of the State where the target property is located for the grant of a right of occupancy. Fabiyi (1990) criticized the Act as an urban legislation which only superficially touches the tenure problems in the rural areas in the country. This he reported attests to the prevalence of customary landholding systems as against state/statutory system in the country.

At the traditional level recognizing the power vested on the Governors, the traditional rulers and the local councils to some degree implement and observe traditional values and norms of the community on land ownerships. These traditional norms spell out the right of ownership and the criteria for land holding. These norms most often affect women. Women's land rights are fragile and transient, being dependent upon age and marital status (including type of marriage and the success of that marriage), whether they had children (including the number and sex of those children) and their sexual conduct (Aluko and Amidu, 2006). Against the above, (Gopal and Salim,; World Bank, 2000; Yngstrom, 2002) have in various reports advocated that women should receive their own land titles to end the subjection of women's rights as secondary to men's .

3. Customary Land inheritance in Nigeria

The practice of inheritance from the cultural perspective has no unified law in Nigeria. In Nigeria three systems of inheritance are practiced (Lineage inheritance, marriage inheritance and widowhood inheritance) but two of these will be discussed in this article. These inheritance practices are also influenced by the ethnic orientations and religious beliefs. Inheritance practices were also influenced by the advent of colonialism. The colonial era met African men as their main source of labour which ascribed on them the breadwinners of their families. And so, with the privatization and exchange of land between the colonialists and the men, men's dominance in social, political and economic arena became prominent and further declined the women's status in the social hierarchy. Pearce (2001) reported that the colonial government and the private corporations because of their interest in the acquisition of land ensured that women generally were allotted smaller or less fertile land or land sold without their knowledge. Differences exist between men and women in the Patrilineal and Matrilineal considerations and within the context of marriage and spinsterhood.

3.1 Lineage Inheritance Practice

This practice confers on an individual the right to own land and other property by belong to the lineage that has ownership o land. In the Yoruba customary law, women could own property within her Patrilineage as a spinster. Upon marriage, she most likely loses her claim of ownership as a result of the males or her brothers questioning her right of ownership in her new status. This is so because a woman is seen as a "source of further people for men's household" and not as "a magnet attracting people into household of their own." (Barber, 1995). The Hausa customary law allows women to own property. A woman can inherit from either of her parents though they seldom do. The female is entitled to half of the share of the male sons. In practice where the only surviving child is a female, her uncle occupies the land as of right, but the female child is entitled to the proceeds of the farmland. (Holmes and Holmes, 1995) However, with the increasing pressure on land, females tend to receive movable and

more liquid assets as inheritance while land remains close in the hands of men. (Palmer, 1991) Under the Maliki or Islamic Law, there are fixed shares of inheritance which are gender based.

The Igbo, Edo and Ishan customary laws are different. In these laws, women cannot inherit land in their Patrilineage. The right of ownership of land is vested on the men. The customary law practice under the Edo and Ishan culture is that the first son inherits all disposable property to the exclusion of all other brothers and sisters. He has discretion to distribute to the other brothers, but not to the sisters. A woman's estate consisted of her clothes, bodily ornaments, cooking utensils, few domestic animals and one or two fruit trees. In Igbo customary law, all areas of land holding, women are excluded as land passes from the father to the male children. An unmarried daughter has a right to live in her father's house, but she is not allowed to cultivate the land as her own. According to Korieh (2001) "Why should a woman be allotted land? She married away from this village and can only have access to land where she marries. Her access to land will be through her husband and children."

3.2 Marriage Inheritance Practice in Igbo Land

The statutory Law of marriage provides that a woman can inherit part of her husband's property and estate including land as stipulated by the Marriage Act (1990; section 26). The property of the deceased is administered in accordance with the wishes of the deceased if he had a will. However, this is a theoretical aspect of the law. The reality is a different thing. The multiplicity of the laws on inheritance leaves a gap that permits the courts and self styled traditionalists who include the unscrupulous relatives to choose the laws that are beneficial to their self interest and to the disadvantage of the woman. In Imo state (which is part of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria), the customary law provides that woman cannot inherit land from her husband's estate. The relatives of the deceased usually regard such property as family property and a birth right. Acquisitions of property with a spouse are not recognized under the custom to give the woman any right to any part of the property even when it is proven. A woman in this practice only have right to estate or land through her male child, if only the male child consent to giving some of the estate to her. This means that a childless woman under this practice is a loser and cannot inherit anything.

Closely linked with inheritance is the customary practice of levirate. This practice allows a family member to inherit a married woman whose husband is dead. This customary practice is found in the three ethnic groups and is still practiced in rural communities. The practice is degrading and harmful. The woman is deemed to be a chattel that should be inherited with other properties since a bride price was paid on her. In the Yoruba and Igbo cultures, a brother or son of the deceased, where the man has many wives, but not the son of the woman, was allowed to inherit the woman as a wife. Young widows continue with child bearing with the new husband. The influence of education, urbanization and modernization has reduced the practice of this culture.

By these practices, women a deprived the right of holding land; a resource which could increase agricultural production. The role of women in production process, family upbringing, society harmony and cohesion, community development and sanity cannot be overemphasized. Despite these roles of women in agriculture and the society and the indispensability of land in production, women are often discriminated in land ownership especially in the case of inheritance. In the rural communities in the study area, inheritance which is seen as the prerogative of the masculine gender constitutes a great factor and determinant in land ownership. This is as a result of culturally embedded discriminatory beliefs and practices both in the customary and formal land tenure systems (Eneasoba, 2012). This work therefore made gender analysis of land ownership structure and agricultural production in the study area with the view to determine the gender level of involvement in agriculture, identify the different land ownership structures, determine the level of gender land ownership in hectares, and determine gender level of agricultural production from 2008 – 2011 in the study area.

4. Materials and Methods

Imo State was created in 1976 from the old East-Central State of Nigeria. The state was named after the Imo River and has its capital in Owerri. The local language of the people is Igbo and Christianity is the predominant religion. The State lies within latitudes 4°45'N and 7°15'N, and longitude 6°50'E and 7°25'E with an area of about 5,100 sq km. It is bordered by Abia State on the East, the River Niger and Delta State on the west, Anambra State to the north and Rivers State to the south. It is rich in natural resources including crude oil, natural gas, lead, zinc and economically exploitable flora like the Iroko, Mahogany, Obeche, Bamboo, Rubber tree and Oil Palm. However with a high population density and over farming the soil has been degraded and much of the native vegetation has disappeared. Imo state experiences two season; the rainy season begins in April and lasts until October with annual rainfall varying from 1,500mm to 2,200mm (60 to 80 inches) and dry season from November to March. The state experience average annual temperature of above 20 °C (68.0 °F) creating an annual relative humidity of 75%. The hottest months are between January and March. The state has twenty seven (27) local government areas (LGAs) and three senatorial zones with a population of 3,934,899 people (NPC, 2006). Major crops grown in the state are cassava, yam, maize, oil palm, pineapple, melon,

cocoyam and vegetable.

The multiple stage sampling technique was used in selecting 324 respondents. In the first stage, 6 local governments were randomly selected from the three agricultural zones. At the second stage, three communities (18) were selected from the local government areas. At the last stage, 6 respondents were randomly selected from the three sampling groups (married adults, unmarried adults and the youths; three each for male and female) giving 18 respondent from each community. A total of 324 respondents (108 married adults, 108 unmarried adults, and 108 youths) were selected for the study. The reason for the grouping is to ascertain which group participates more in agriculture in the study area.

Primary data was collected with structured personal interview. Secondary information was obtained through literature review and the internet. Data generated was analyzed using percentage. The percentages were determined by subjecting the decimal fraction of the frequency of each response and the total number of respondents to multiplication by 100. The result is interpreted as; greater percentage means greater possibilities while lower percentage means lower possibilities for each distribution as indicated in the tables below. The level of productivity of agricultural products was obtained by multiplying the average gender production level per session by the equivalent kilogram (kg) stipulated for each crop.

4.1 Measurement of agricultural productivity

Yam	=	A matured tuber of measured as equivalent of 2kg
Cassava	=	A bag of processed cassava to garri measured as equivalent of 50kg
Maize	=	A bag of dried maize grain measured as equivalent of 50kg
Melon	=	A bag of dried Melon seed measured as equivalent of 50kg
Pineapple	=	A matured pineapple bulb measured as equivalent of 2kg
Oil Palm	=	A matured oil palm bunch measured as equivalent of 2kg
Vegetable	=	A matured vegetable pod measured as equivalent of 5kg

5. Results and Discussions

Table 1 reveals that generally women engage in agriculture more than their men. The analysis shows that married adult females (85%), unmarried adult females (72%) and female youths (78%) are more actively involved in agriculture compared to their male counterparts in the study area. This confirms the assertion by Onyenechere (2009) that there are a large number of women in rural farming and processing. Kuponiyi and Awe (2000) opined that women who are in the age bracket of 19 to 48 years work hard to contribute to enhanced standard of living of their households. Similar findings by Adebayo and Amao (2000) indicated that women are involved in the production of maize, cassava, melon, yam, cocoyam, cowpea, soyabean, vegetables, tomatoes and pepper.

Table 2 shows that inheritance with 43% average constitutes the highest form of land ownership structure. The table further revealed that 75% of males inherited land as against 12% for female while 67% of females purchased land as against 13% of males. This will affect the profit margin of female farmers as they will spend more money in the purchase of land. Emeasoba (2012) asserted that despite the contribution of women in agriculture and food production, they face discrimination in land inheritance under both customary and formal systems of land tenure. In the South Eastern part of Nigeria, the patrilineal land inheritance system is given more attention as against the matrilineal inheritance system. In the patrilineal system, land inheritance is traced through paternal lineage down to the descendants. The recognition of land as an economic asset and a means of maintaining the family's lineage among Igbos vested the right of inheritance to males against females who are expected by tradition to marry and by this virtue loose the right to land inheritance. This disparity will negatively affect agricultural productivity. Table 1 revealed that more women are involved in agriculture than men. This indicates that some portion of the land inherited by males will not be cultivated while the females will not employ in full capability their potentials because of limited land to cultivate. About 12% of females inherited land as the table revealed. These could be accounted for by the number of widows among the sampled females who were allowed to inherit their late husband's land on behalf of their male children.

Table 3 presents the hectares of land owned by the gender for agricultural production. The table reveals that 74% of males own land size between 4 – 10 hectares and above against the females (16%). This implies that females do not have much access to large hectares of land for agricultural production in the study area. According to Azeez and Madukwe (2010) in their study, majority of farmers (95.0%) cultivate less than 2 ha, while only 5.0% cultivate more than 2 ha. This they asserted probably is as a result of more female farmers, who are often denied access to own land in the study area. Acquisition of large hectare of land gives an economic advantage to the farmer for increased productivity. Bamire and Manyong (2003) opined that farm size is an indication of the level of economic resource available to farmers for intensive agriculture. This they reported will enhance the probability of adopting improved technologies.

Table 4 presents gender levels of productivity of various food crops in the study area. The table shows that females have overall higher productivity across the 4 years considered. Prominent among the crops females had

higher productivity over the males are cassava, maize, melon and vegetable. This is consistent with Nweke (1981) findings that women are more concerned with food crops such as cassava, maize and vegetables. The table revealed that males had more access to land both by inheritance and the level of hectare holding, but had less productivity in agricultural production. This could be explained by the traditional conception in the study area that women from birth are expected to be hard working; an attribute that projects them as assets for marriage and the ability to be resourceful in taking care of the family. Given equal opportunity in land ownership and acquisition, females will contribute immensely to increasing the level of agricultural productivity in the study area and this will improve the level food insecurity in the state.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that women are more involved in agriculture in the considered gender categories. The most common land ownership structure among males is inheritance while females purchase most of the land they use in agricultural production. Land holding in hectares favours males than females in the study area and females had overall high productivity in crops considered from 2008 – 2011. Also land holding by inheritance affected the level of agricultural production in the study area. The study found out that women are more involved in agriculture and yet had less land to farm on. Given the hectare of land inherited by males, females would have increased the level of productivity above the recorded average productivity from 2008 to 2011 in the study area.

The study recommended that governments at the federal, state, local government levels should revisit the land tenure and acquisition structures in the country to reduce the level of disparity in gender land ownership. The state government, local government and community traditional authorities should reconsider the inheritance of land through patrilineal system. Further, gender equality should be encouraged in all aspects of human endeavour to harness the potentials of both the masculine and feminine gender for economic, social, agricultural growth and national development. Further, government should enact laws that will abrogate all inheritance practices that disadvantage women in the ownership of estates and landed properties. This will ensure equity and justice and enhance the level of agricultural production to cushion the effects of food insecurity in the country.

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Table 1: Distribution of respondents to their level of involvement in Agriculture in the study area

Gender Categories	Frequency (N= 324)			Percentage	
Married Adults	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No
Male		33	21	61	39
Female	54			85	15
Total		46	8		
	54				
		79	29		
	108				
Unmarried Adults	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No
Male		28	26	52	49
Female	54			72	28
Total		39	15		
	54				
		67	41		
	108				
Youths	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No
Male		31	23	57	43
Female	54			78	22
Total		42	12		
	54				
		73	35		
	108				

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 2: Distribution of respondents to different land ownership structures in the study area

Land Ownership Structures	Gender			
	Male (N = 162)		Female (N = 162)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Inheritance	122	75	19	12
Purchase	21	13	108	67
Lease	10	6	22	13
Gift	9	6	13	8

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 3: Distribution of respondents to level of land ownership in hectares in the study area

Ownership structures in hectare	Gender			
	Male (N = 162)		Female (N = 162)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1 - 3	42	26	136	84
4 - 6	97	60	26	16
7 - 9	15	9	-	-
Above 10	8	5	-	-

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 4: Distribution of respondents' according to average level of agricultural production in the study area (2008 – 2011) in Kilogram (kg)

Crops	Gender							
	Male				Female			
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2008	2009	2010	2011
Yam	150	165	190	185	75	95	105	90
Cassava	250	375	350	370	425	575	750	825
Maize	375	425	500	635	525	650	625	775
Melon	75	100	50	75	125	250	225	225
Pineapple	120	133	145	135	80	50	65	75
Oil Palm	155	175	145	160	50	25	45	55
Vegetable	60	50	70	100	110	130	170	150
Total		1110		1423	1390		1775	1985
1450		1660					2195	

Source: Field Survey, 2012

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