

Land Accessibility: The Burden on Socio – Economic Livelihood of Women in Akpor Clan, Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The study examined the land accessibility and its attendant burden on the socio – economic livelihood of the Women in Akpor Clan in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to identify the factors responsible for land use change towards lack of sustainable land access. Highlight the extent this unfavourable trend affect the Socio – Economic livelihood of women in the study Area. The sample population was 330 indigenous women of low economic standing, who most often, are involved in subsistent farming. A multi – stage probability sampling approach was utilized in the study. The primary data source entailed the use of structured questionnaire and the focus group discussions. The secondary data source is through reviewing of other pertinent research output on women access to land. The study found somewhat erratic nevertheless decisive decline in the income of the household. The pluralism of land rights remains in the hands of male folk and government institution. Also, the original occupational pursuit of farming has ceased to be important because the land use change has occupied the indigenous farmland which leads to socio – economic livelihood burden. Unemployment accounts for more than half of the active population. The women are compelled to join informal jobs in order to maintain household needs. The following recommendations are therefore made; the government should seek to be explicit as possible in determining the conditions under which the women can assert their rights. Purposeful and adequate participation is necessary in decision making for the women to have opportunity to dialogue on how best farmland can be accessed. The process of expropriation should be clear, and adequate compensation to those who own land should be encouraged. Credit programmes and savings, targeting women to upscale economic opportunity will curb the socio – economic burden experienced.

Keywords: land, accessibility, socio – economic, livelihood, women

1. Introduction

Land is the most important resource that women depend on for cultivation and therefore their livelihood. Its almost limitless capacity demonstrates the high degree of value place on it for competing interest vie accessibility. Lack of access to land has consequences for women as social and economic actors. According to Jommo (1995) “People of any culture suffer stress in their personal or social lives when the traditional patterns of organization begin to fall apart. For those with few resources to cushion the shock the breakdown of age – old life support is especially hard to cope with. Inheritance practices as well as land rights often Priorities ownership to Men or to kinship groups. This concentration of resources in the hands of men widens the gender gap in access to land, exacerbating the burden to sustainable access to farmland by the women.

According to Lastarria-Cornhiel and Fraiss (2009), land represents an important cultural resource, a productive factor and capital asset supporting the basic needs of humanity. Its livelihood asset and the basic building blocks support women in pursuing self-sufficiency. As a highly valued resource it does not only determine condition but also the position of men and women within a particular class and society. Similarly, Oyeshola, (1995) identifies the importance of land as dominant resource where economic activity of farming, fodder and the ingredients of much income earning strive. It is a resource that dignifies, brings food production, peace, security and justice and, promotes a culture of respectful use of natural resources and ensuring that the future generations can meet their needs. Land is fundamental importance to economic activity and development of any community. It provides the most common source of wealth, social status and a powerful economic activity especially to the women.

Accessibility can be conceived as physical proximity of two or more places or activity opportunities available in a geographical region; or it can be perceived as basically related to those things which are important to them (Moseley, 1976; Igwe & Adeyemo, 2008). According to Ayeni (1987) access to essential resources is positively related to development so that lack of access is cited as evidence of under development. Accessibility, therefore, is the relative balance between demand for land and livelihood. The burden on socio economic livelihood is so

much that the women are often displaced from access to their traditional farmland which is the most important source of their economy. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (store resources, claims and access) and activity required for a means of living. Livelihood is a concept that is generally associated with health, employment, income status, accessibility. Unequal Access of land create gap which limits the social and economic livelihood and consequently limited opportunity for women to forge quality living.

Various studies have shown that the main burden of changes in socio – economic sector of any society has fallen on women. Factors that curtail women’s equal rights to land include; discriminatory laws and regulations, especially related to property and inheritance, customary practices and traditional patriarchal relations within families and communities and overall vulnerable position of the women. Women are generally known to be suffering from gender deprivation because of customary and statutory land rights which often culminate in the loss of land rights. Women provide 70 – 80 percent of all agriculture labour and 90 percent of labour involving food production (IFAD, 1993).

Social justice recognizes the need for a right base approach to resource utilization which demand equal access to equal quality, with the needs and rights of vulnerable groups appropriately addressed (DFID, 2002; Ivbijaro & Akintola, 2012). Issues of access to land have an impact on a very significant women population who still depend on land access for their subsistence and livelihood. The acquisition of lands which does not give consideration to the direct and indirect effects on various socio-economic sectors lead to serious loss of output (a loss in food production), real risk of growing socio-economic differentiate, greater structural inequality and a steady deepening of poverty in the area (IIED 1990). Over time several efforts have been embarked, possible to correct the current trend in order to achieve sustainable development. Development that generates economic growth and distribute its benefit equitably, that generates the environment rather than destroying it, that empowers people rather than marginalizing them. Development is not a choice but a necessity if lands are to meet the livelihood of citizens. To achieve Sustainable land access, it must aim to meet the economic, environmental and social needs of current societies without harming the living conditions of future generations (WCED, 1987). Achieving sustainability requires addressing inequality between Men and Women in the distribution of resources such as land. This paper therefore, examines land accessibility and the burden it exert on the Socio – Economic livelihood of women with a brief overview of variables responsible for land use change in the study area. It goes further to highlight the unfavourable socio – economic livelihood of the women as a result of land access and finally proffers measures on sustainable approach to curb the situation.

2. Methodology Approach

Data presented in this study were obtained through primary data source (i.e. through distribution of questionnaire and focus group discussions) and secondary data source (i.e. reviewing other pertinent research output on women access to land). By applying a simple random sampling approach, 350 copies of the questionnaire was administered in each of the three Communities (Choba, Rumuolumeni and,Ozuoba) sampled.

The sample of the households was age determined - Women over the age of 40 years. This was done to obtain insight into women perceptions of their access to farmlands. The sampling ensured that each household has equal chance of representation. Of the 350 copies of questionnaire administered, 330 copies were properly filled and returned. The principal component analysis was Univariate technique to obtain summary measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) of monthly income distribution amongst sampled household and measure of dispersion (e.g. range, standarddeviation, and variance) for single variables, as well as percentages and proportions. Such measures were necessary to characterize the study population.

3. The Study Area

Akpor is an important Clan in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State of Nigeria, consisting of ten indigenous communities (Rumuolumeni, Choba, Rumuokwachi, Rumuologu, Rumuokparali, Ogbogoro, Ozuoba, Rumuosi, Rumuekeni, Alakahia,) at the northerly urban fringe of Port Harcourt.The economy is essentially agricultural; farming is the principal source of livelihood and is based on the cultivation of yam, cassava, and vegetables. More recently there has been population increase triggered by urban sprawl and the infrastructural development (the tertiary institutions – University of Port Harcourt, Choba and, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni and, two important jetties at Rumuolumeni and Choba, respectively). The population pressure exerts undue pressure on the indigenous farmland and increase in the demand for it.

3.1 Land Use Change in the Enclave

Unlike Port Harcourt municipality, Akpor is not totally planned. Urban sprawl has swamped the clan which, in many cases, the people neither inspire nor desire and, which often instead of leading to an overall enhancement, in fact in most cases cause considerable socio – economic damage to the inhabitants. For example, the enclave is losing economic viability which often times the women does not have little understanding of the changes that are taking place, and experience great difficulty in adapting to the situation. The land change has occurred to include

land Communities of Rumuolumeni, Choba, Ozouba, Alakahia, Rumuosi, Rumuekene, Ogbogoro, Rumualogu. In most cases, it is always difficult to distinguish the difference in land demarcation between Port Harcourt municipality and these communities because; urban sprawl is increasing in a great pace without corresponding public policy planning to cope with the very rapid rate of growth. The increase in competing land use as a result of in-migration; illegal spatial activities produce negative consequences. One of the consequences is the quantity of farmland available for existing use diminishes. The women, in most cases bear the burden of coping with the problem.

In the past years, the dominant land tenure system has been the customary land tenure. Land was largely under customary land tenure with traditional ownership structure, which was in the hands of lineage heads. Customary tenure was the important system through which the people determine how resources can be used and managed. The system includes the alienability of land so that although families have secure and inherited land holdings, these cannot be freely trade on the market. The traditional land ownership made it difficult to sell or buy land because it is not fully individualized. However, in recent times, nature, which used to be a friend, has become an enemy in the struggle for survival. Land value is being appreciated as a result of urban sprawl which fuelled the sale of land by the Male folk.

Even though women play a very substantial role in agriculture, land ownership and / or land tenure systems, have historically very often discriminate against women. Traditional inheritance, especially of farm land has been predominantly patrilineal, often construed as a father – to – son affair. Patriarchal culture which favours and gives preference to male heir has made it easy to sell off these lands because of the continuous systematic acquisition of the land by government establishment through the extant Land Use Act of 1978. The land use Act brought open access regime prevalent on State controlled land. The Governor of a State could exercise absolute right to own, control, use and dispose at will State land. The Act was an instrument under which government could acquire land through useful recognition of the eminent domain power to regulate and arbitrate over land. The land use Act nationalized rights in land, ostensibly to facilitate access to development purposes (Obinna et al. 2008). Recently, Rivers State Government has initiated Greater Port Harcourt Administration, charged with the acquisition of land in eight Local Government Areas (Port Harcourt, parts of Obio/Akpor, Eleme, Okrika, Oyigbo, Ogu, Etche and Ikwerre) of the State. The introduction of all these policies is alien to the people and undervalues and even ignores existing customary systems. These policies do not adequately recognize the indigenous communities that were distinct in their traditional ownership structure of land and thereby make land more exclusive, individualized and alienable with a short term benefits - the need to gain higher status and competition for everyday life among the men who hastily sell off these lands to land speculators.

3.2 Women Access to Land

The important role women play in the economy cannot be overemphasized. Women are generally responsible for providing for the household needs and their access to land for food production is critical to the welfare of the entire household. The women are predominantly distinguished by the dominant economic activity of subsistent farming, an activity that is important sector in the local economy (the backbone of the local economy) from the past generation. Land is the physical terrain upon which this activity functions. Experience has shown that land demonstrate a high degree of value in our societies. It is of prime importance in shaping the identity, integrity, solidarity and culture of any group of people (Quarcopoom, 1992).

While it is important to recognize the special value systems about land and the resilience and resourcefulness of it, in more recent times, the indigenous women are faced with the consequences of urban sprawl and population pressure which force them out of their traditional occupation of farming and undermining their role as the essential providers of food and energy. Basically, this significantly affects the indigenous farmlands where most of the women totally depend upon for survival. The traditional base farmland has increased substantially of use for other development. Land formally used for agriculture is being turned to mixed land use. This action is destroying the natural resource upon which farming activity is based. The greater risk of losing such important resource fall generally to the most vulnerable (women of low income) segments of the society.

The consequences of this is that urban sprawl create emergence of land market where there is compelling need to sell-off these lands by the male folk for mixed land use but mainly residential and commercial purpose. The Farmland conversion Report shows 8 percent rise in shift from agricultural into urban land use between 1992- 94, 54,307 to 1994 – 96, 58,442 percent respectively. Some research estimates the number of agricultural land being eating away by urbanization to be between 16,000 and 20,000 hectares yearly. Farmlands are disappearing drastically with dramatic loss of cultural identity. Too often, the disadvantaged receive no compensation and as a result suffer increased poverty. Any just compensation made is shared by the chiefs and any male son of the family. The women are totally excluded from the exercise; they receive little of the money paid in this process and only being compensated for the value of crops destroyed.

Sustainable access to land cannot be achieved under the continuing exploitation of land by the privileged in the society. It will be a ruse if it does so. It must ensure access to land to all household and provide environmentally

sound physical planning. Because of social distance, the problems of the vulnerable in the society are not fully appreciated by the policy makers. Women are rarely invited to participate in decision making process. Men strongly dominate decision-making processes and leadership in the community. Access of individuals and groups to scarce resources depends on their economic position. Makinwa & Ozo. (1987), asserted that “the relationship between social well-being of people and the inequality in accessibility to societal resources affect their access to scarce resources.”

Within customary law, the inheritance right is favourable to male heir. Women access to farmland is regulated through male relations. The traditional practices and institutional mechanism have made it difficult and do not allow women the right to own land but, they gain access to land often through their husbands or fathers or brothers, and lose such access after becoming widowed, divorced and deserted. It is only the men that have transfer rights – the rights to sell or mortgage the land. The strong patriarchal family structures influence women’s role in the local economy structure where women have limited access to this valuable asset, generally known to be suffering from gender deprivation. Women have tendency of losing their identity as a result of this social imbalance. Some researchers have not hesitated to condemn these cultural traditions which they see as placing an excessive burden on women. Others have asked how women can acquire the right consistent with their socio – economic responsibilities. On the positive side, there is a growing concern on the need to enhance livelihood opportunities, protection of the vulnerable, equal right of women and the restitution of alienated land.

The UN – Habitat on Women and Secure Tenure has recognized several articles and programmes that introduce gender sensitive legislation which ensures that women have secure and equal access to and control over productive resources such as land. The UN resolution of 1974. enshrines the right of rural women to participate on equal footing in agrarian reform. Similarly, chapter 14 of programme 21 approved by UNPED at the Rio Summit in 1992, call on government to take necessary steps to promote women’s access to land. The world conference on women (Beijing 1995), urges government to undertake legislative and administrative reforms in order to give women full and equal access to economic resources, including land ownership. Similarly, action programme of the World’s Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen 1995), calls on governments to expand and promote equal land ownership rights through appropriate measures, such as agrarian reform. Paragraph 16(a) and (b), objective 3 of the action plan of FAO’s World Food Summit (Rome 1996), urges member states to guarantee security of tenure and equal access to land for all those living in poverty, including women.

4.0 Socio – Economic Burden on Women

4.1 Income

The mean monthly income of the household was found to be ₦43, 995, while the modal monthly income was ₦30, 500. This means that half of the household in the sampled communities earned the equivalent of labour US\$5.00 per day, which is within the poverty bracket and very close to the absolute poverty line. It further revealed that most women in this area have very little opportunity to engage in income generating activities. The women bore the brunt of the economic environment, where there is somewhat erratic but nevertheless decisive decline in the income in 2008 to 2012, reflecting a median family income of ₦43, 676. This figure points relatively lower levels of prosperity of many households who bear disproportionate share of survival burden and more deprivation. Uneven income means many households cannot meet their daily needs, lack access to farmland which they rely overwhelming upon as a source of income. Many leave with little hope of improving their situations and raising sufficient income to survive is challenging. Given the low income of the households, it is not surprising that capital investment and therefore incomes of the indigenous women are low, very few have access and rights to land. The tables below show a distribution of monthly household incomes amongst sampled household and the major income – related statistics in the communities

Table 1. Monthly Income Distribution Amongst Sampled Households

S/N	INCOME CATEGORIES	₦	%
1	Less than ₦18,000	0	0
2	18,000 – 22,999	42	12.7
3	23,000 – 27,999	43	13.0
4	28,000 – 32,999	91	27.6
5	33,000 – 37,999	19	5.8
6	38,000 – 42,999	0	0
7	43,000 – 47,999	89	27.0
8	48,000 – 100,999	37	11.2
9	101,000 or more	9	2.7
	TOTAL	330	100

Source: Authors’ Field Survey, 2012.

Table 2. Income Related Statistics

S/N	STATISTICS	VALUES (₦)
1	Mean monthly household income	43,995.45
2	Standard deviation	33,700.65
3	Standard error of mean	23,04.68
4	Median monthly household income	30,500.00
5	Modal monthly household income	30,500.00

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2012.

4.2 Occupation

Of Occupational distribution amongst the employed members of the sampled communities, a little over one third 34.7 percent of the household reported to be farmers. The staple crops were cassava, yam and vegetables. The women, once self-sufficient in staple food crops, also produce for marketing to meet the basic household needs. From the survey, access to land is through relatives as compared to inheritance. The exploitation has resulted to low income of the majority of the indigenous women.

Table 3. Occupational Structure of Women in the Sampled Communities

S/N	OCCUPATION	N	%
1	Farmers	25	34.7
2	Fishing	00	00.0
3	Informal sector economy (petty trading, hair dressing and dress making)	36	50.0
4	Professionals in private practice/government	05	07.0
5	Junior workers in companies/ government	06	08.3
	TOTAL	72	100

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2012

Most of the women have shifted from the traditional occupational pursuit of farming and now engaged in informal sector economy of hairdressing, dressmaking, petty trading in food and agricultural products such as fruits, vegetables, and tubers. The obvious line of thought is that farming has ceased to be important occupation amongst the households. It is not surprising that informal sector enterprise of trading was important amongst the women, since it is conceivable that they cannot venture beyond the confines of the enclave to engage in erstwhile traditional occupation of farming. The informal sector economy has increasingly grown and the transactions are done on the street, open space.

4.3 Employment Status

Unemployment accounts for more than half of the active population. Only about 36 percent of economically working age women was actively engaged in the labour force in the last five years. Slightly more than 60 percent of such women were previously so engaged in farming activities in the last five years. There has been a shift in land use as a result of population pressure and physical development. The more rapid the rate of growth, the higher the land use demand. This demand propels land developers to build as much as possible to accommodate their needs and in the process denying the women the traditional occupational pursuit. Urban sprawl, infrastructural development and population pressure on the land lead to dramatic decline in overall agriculture productivity. Myers, David, Akrat &, Hamid, (1995), confirm that decline in overall agricultural productivity is due to a combination of factors, which include over population and urbanization. It is obvious that a relatively well paid and secured employment in public and formal sector is available only to shrinking minority of the population. Poverty is spreading amongst the working population (those between 18 and 60/65 years of age). Many women have been compelled to join informal jobs in order to maintain household spending power. As the lands become scarce, farmlands diminish in size. The terms which it is available become increasingly unfavourable and difficult.

5.0 Conclusion

The pluralism of land resource within urban land tenure remains. Land resources are concentrated in the hands of male folk and government institution who determine how resources including land can be used and managed. Women do not enjoy the same rights as the Men. The implication of this is that the quantity of farmland available for existing use diminishes every day. Loss of these farm lands creates unaccustomed forms of social stress. This widens the gap in access to land. The original occupational pursuit of farming has ceased to be important because of increase in competing land use. This land use change has occupied the indigenous farmland which leads to socio – economic livelihood burden. Most of the women are compelled to join informal jobs in order to maintain household needs. Various land policies do not adequately recognize the indigenous communities that were distinct in their traditional ownership structure of land. These have adversely affected the overall performance of and output of the women in a number of ways such as high level of living, poverty, restricted access to land. Failure to halt further burden might jeopardize the right of large segment of the women

population with serious socio – economic implications or consequences.

6.0 Recommendation

Positive solutions must be seen against the background of the acute socio – economic burden suffered by the majority of women. The government should seek to be explicit as possible in determining the conditions under which the women can assert their rights. Women right to land should be protected and strengthened, particularly for those who have no other way of earning a reasonable living. There should be an efficient land policy that consciously integrates the women into planning and management mechanism. Berner (2000) asserts that “policies are required in the provision and distribution of the ingredient: land because of its unique nature and the crucial role it plays in human life cannot be treated as ordinary asset”. Purposeful and adequate participation is necessary in decision making for the women to have opportunity to dialogue on how best farmland can be accessed in an urban growing area. Income-earning opportunities should enhance the range of income sources and not replace existing sources. The process of expropriating land should be clear and, adequate compensation to those who own land should be encouraged. Enhancing a credit programmes and savings, targeting women to upscale economic opportunity will curb the socio – economic burden experience by the vulnerable, especially the women.

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