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LAND-RIGHTS, WOMEN AND FOOD-CROP PRODUCTION IN CROSS RIVER STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL FOOD SUPPLY AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of the paper is to examine land-rights, women, and food-crop production in Cross River State: implications for rural food supply and natural resources management. The specific objectives of the study is to identify the sources and sizes of farmlands by gender, identify the rights and land use pattern of women with differential access to land and determine the effects of women's rights to land on rural food supply and natural resources management. Household questionnaires were the primary source of data for the study. A multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure was adopted in selecting samples for the study. Descriptive and inferential analytical tools were used for the data analysis. Descriptive procedure used was the proportionate distribution of counts. The influence of gender rights to land on food supply and natural resources management was analyzed by the Chi square (x^2) statistical method. The results were tested at 0.5 and 0.1 level of significance. Findings indicate that there is a significant difference in food availability and natural resources strategies employed by men and women. Therefore, to ensure rural food availability and the maintenance of the natural resource base, rural women's rights to resources (land) need to become a legal possibility and a political priority in Nigeria*.

KEYWORDS: Land-rights, Women, Food supply, Natural resources, Cross River State

BACKGROUND

Land assets including soils, home sites, crop, grazing and forestland are important everywhere. But in countries where agriculture dominates, ownership of land is particularly significant and directly associated with power. Command over property especially land, is arguably the most severe forms of inequality between men and women today. But in-spite of its prevalence, gender differences in rights to land is among one of the most poorly documented dimension of gender inequality and feature in very few statistical systems. Poverty is inversely correlated with household land ownership in rural agrarian economy. The landless are more vulnerable in times of famines and have higher infant mortality rates. Thus, women suffer disproportionately from shocks when their rights to household productive resources (e.g. land) are mediated through men. Direct access to land minimizes the women's risks to impoverishment and improves the physical well-being and prospect for her children.

According to Crowley (2001) land rights increase women's powers in social, economic and political relationships. Rural women claim that a secured land right increases their social and political status and improves their sense of self-esteem, confidence, security and dignity. However, in the context of Nigeria's rapid population growth and the need for increased productivity of land, a debate is raging on whether customary tenure systems that are locally enforceable and have adapted over time or formal statutory systems that are morally and legally bound by universal conventions can provide women with greater and more secure

access to land. Some researchers view customary tenure systems as an economically inferior arrangement acting as a static constraint on agricultural development and providing insufficient tenure security to induce farmers to make necessary investments on land (World Bank 1994). Others have countered that the indigenous tenure arrangements are dynamic in nature and evolve in response to changes in factor prices (Boserup, 1965: Feder and Noronha 1987 and Bruce 1993). Land rights in both customary and statutory tenure systems fall along a spectrum that roughly corresponds to the degree of power, this spectrum accommodates diverse and fluctuating interest and provides people different bundles of rights.

From the foregoing, it is clear that they have been concerted efforts aimed at enhancing and securing the rights of women to land in Africa. This paper therefore, examines gender and land rights in Cross River State, Nigeria and its implications on rural food supply and natural resources management.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Determine the sources of farmland by gender in CRS.
2. Examine the trends in farmland sizes by gender 2002-2012.
3. Identify the rights and land use pattern of women with differential access to land in CRS.
4. Determine the effects of women's rights to land on rural food supply and natural resources management.

LITERATURE

Women, wives and land rights in Africa: Domestic units in Africa take multiple and historically specific forms (Guyer, 1981; Guyers and Peters 1987; Vaughan 1983). The terms of institutional arrangement regarding rights and responsibilities in land and production, the conjugal units need to be understood in the context of wide sets of relationships among groups organized on the basis of descent and gender ideologies implied therein. As landholding systems have been integrated into wider economic systems, women and men have worked both within and around the constraints of these institutions in order to exercise claims both on land and on each other for the means to work it. In the process these institutions have been transformed, as have the rights and claims that individuals and groups can exercise through them for access to productive resources. Because gender is a critical factor in explaining rights and responsibilities in land and production, it is also critical in explaining the transformations that these systems undergo with greater market integration. His historically informed gender analysis goes to show how women not only as wives but also as widows, sisters and daughters and as divorced or separated women differentially experience tenure insecurity.

Evolutionary theories of land rights assumed that private claims on land will eventually replace those made on the basis of kinship. But in many parts of Africa, including Nigeria, this does not appear to be occurring. Although increased commercialization and land scarcity may have provoked private claims on land, evidence show that these processes simultaneously provoke a proliferation of customary 'claims and counter claims' over land and struggles over how custom is defined. Thus, even in the areas of commercialization of agriculture where there is evidence of land markets, landholding systems remain tightly bound up with kinship institutions (Berry, 1993; 1997; Carney and Watts, 1990; Mackenzie, 1990; 1993; 1998; and Yngstrom, 1999; 2002). This provides an explanation why the

inequalities in land holding that are expected to occur under these conditions are frequently not evident.

Gender as an explanatory factor is absent in evolutionary land models. It is the household as the smallest decision making unit that is central to the explanation of changing tenure systems. In evolutionary theories of land holding, the male land holder as the household head is assumed to be the primary decision- maker in matters regarding land use and land transfer. Women's decision and actions and their relations to men are considered secondary or un-important to such decision. This is evident in the 1994 World Bank series of studies investigating the relationships between customary tenure systems, security of tenure and agricultural productivity (Bruce and Migot-Adholla 1994). The assumption that the rights of the male household head is superior to other rights has led to the characterization of of women's rights as wives, sisters , daughters or mothers as 'secondary' to and dependent on those of men (Toulmin and Quan 2000; Hilhorst 2000; Platteau, 1998; Lastarria-Cornhiel 1997). Mackenzie (1998) argues that there is a strong case against vesting particular individual or groups with super ordinate power in land allocation. Both male rights to allocate land and female rights of access had legal visibility under customary land law. The male right to allocate was subject to the economic function of the female right to cultivate it. This ensures that women's proprietary position in an economy that relies so heavily on their labour was a strong one.

Due to the foregoing African women gain access to land and the means to work it through marriage (Moore, 1988). As wives they both acquire both right and obligation to cultivate it. They may also be expected to fulfil certain labour obligations, commonly existing in provisioning food. In this context, Kevane and Gray (1999) note that certain groups of married women in Burkina Faso can demand land from their husband's lineage should the husbands be unwilling to provide it. Elsewhere, married women may provide labour on their husband's farm for an expected token including land for their own cultivation (Moore and Vaughan 1993). In a context where labour is a key limiting factor of production, and where women can and do provide significant share of this especially in terms of household food provisioning, the obligation by men to acknowledge their wives' contribution and to provide land for food is critical to the farming household enterprise. Women May be as, if not more vulnerable to greater claims on their labour as they are to loss of land in the context of increased commercialization (Moore 1988; Whitehead 1991).

The analysis presented here does not view the conjugal unit or household as either 'bounded' or 'consensual' (Berry, 1997). In order to understand how rights and interest in land and labour are exercised within the conjugal unit in different historical context, the organization of production within the conjugal contract need to be seen as an integral part of wider structures and processes of production in order to achieve efficient productivity in the agricultural sector and maintain the natural resource base.

METHODOLOGY

A multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure was adopted in selecting samples for the study. First, five communities were selected from each geographical block. Secondly, two villages were selected in each of the communities making a total of ten villages. The villages were then stratified on the basis of gender (male and female) using community based men and women association. At the final stage, questionnaires were administered to six

respondents selected from each of the broad groups (male and female associations) in each village using membership list provided by leaders of the groups. Thus a total of 12 questionnaires were administered in each village, making a total of 120 questionnaires. However, 20 questionnaires were found to be inconsistent with the objectives of the study, therefore, 100 questionnaires were retained for the analysis.

ANALYSIS

Descriptive analytical tools such as means, percentages and frequency counts were used to characterize the rights and land use pattern of women in the study area. It was also used to identify the rural food strategies of women in the area. This descriptive statistic utilized for the analysis is called proportionate distribution of counts and it gives the level of attainment of each characteristic index by women in the area. It is expressed algebraically as:

$$Ax_i = \frac{\sum fx \,.\, 100}{\sum f\,(N)}$$

Where;

$A_{x=}$ Percentage level of attainment x

f = Frequency of yes response

x = Variable index under consideration (e.g. land rights, use pattern, rural food strategy)

i = Elements or items in category x (1 = access to land; 0 = no access to land)

To determine the effect of gender rights to land on food availability and natural resource (land) management the chi-square (χ^2) statistics was employed (William et al 1995). This is expressed as follows:

$$\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(o-e)^2}{e}$$

Where

χ^2 = Calculated chi-square value

o = Observed frequency of the variable

e = Expected frequency

The chi-square statistics was tested at 1% level of significance.

The study was conducted in Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State. Abi Local Government Area is located on longitude 8^o 0'0" - 8^o 0'0" East and latitude 6^o 0'0" N - 5^o 45' North of the Equator. It lies within the Central Senatorial District of Cross River State. The LGA has a landmass of 334.5316 square kilometres and a population of 148,802 as at 2006 census. The major settlements include the Itigidi (administrativeHeadquarters), Ekureku 1 and II, Adadama, Ediba, /Anong, Usumutong/Abeugo, Afafanyi/Igonigoni, Ebom/Ebijakara, Imabana 1, and II which incidentally are the ten political council wards. The ten council wards are distributed across the three geo-dialectical blocks of Agbo, Bahumono and Igbo – Imabana. Thus the study was carried out at Ebom/Ebijakara, Imabana and Itigidi communities. The study area lies within the Derived savannah zone in Cross River State with a favourable climate well marked by wet and dry seasons (known as the rainy and harmattan season). Farming is the major economic activity in Abi LGA. Basically, Abi LGA is blessed with a rich variety of arable land. Abi is the largest producer of *Oriza sativa* in the State – a position that enables her to export rice to other states in the country.

FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

Gender and marital status

From the analyzed data, 55 per cent of the sampled farmers were females and 45 per cent were males Table 1. This finding implies that the distribution, rights and ownership of productive assets should follow the numerical structure of the study area to guarantee effective production of food and ensure the sustainable maintenance of the natural resource base. The marital status of the farmers was also quite revealing as 60 per cent of the males and 67 per cent of the females were married, 5.5 per cent of the females as against 15 per cent of the males were single, 18 percent of the females were widowed and 9.1 per cent were divorced. The high percentage of married women (67.2%) engaged in farming is not unconnected to the fact that women have greater access to farmland through their husband (by cultivating on their husband's land than the unmarried) as depicted on Fig 1.

Table 1: Gender and marital status of farmers in Cross River State, Nigeria

Marital status	Gender			
	Men		women	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Married	27	60.0	37	67.2
Single	7	15.6	3	5.5
Divorced	6	13.3	5	9.1
Widowed	5	11.1	10	18.2
Total	45	100	55	100.0

Sources of farmland by gender

Result of the farmland sources by gender show that 78.78 per cent of the male farmers in acquire their farmland through their families (male inheritance) while the main sources of farmland for the women is through their husband (76.36 per cent). The sources of farmland by gender depicted in Fig 1. Women also obtain their farmland through their sons (12.72 per cent). This is mainly farmland held in trust for their sons at the death of their father. It could also be for a son who is not residing in the village and does not have immediate use of the farmland.

Only men acquire farmland communally (through the village head). Some men acquire their farmland through their wives (through female inheritance). This is obtainable in a situation where a woman marries into a landless family. Her family may decide to make a gift of a parcel of land on her behalf to her husband with the understanding that she inherits the parcel of land at his demise. The above situation is due to the patrilineal inheritance practiced in the locality. Women in Abi LGA are temporary custodians of land passing from father to male heirs. As shown in Fig.1, the main source of farmland for the men is through their families. A woman can lose the right to farmland at the death of her husband. This is usually the case for a childless woman or one without a male child. The implication of this practice on agricultural productivity lies in the fact that, with no land title, women have no collateral that can be used to access productivity enhancing subsidies and grants such as agri- loans or fertilizer subsidies of government and other donor agencies, hence, the low food productivity of the state.

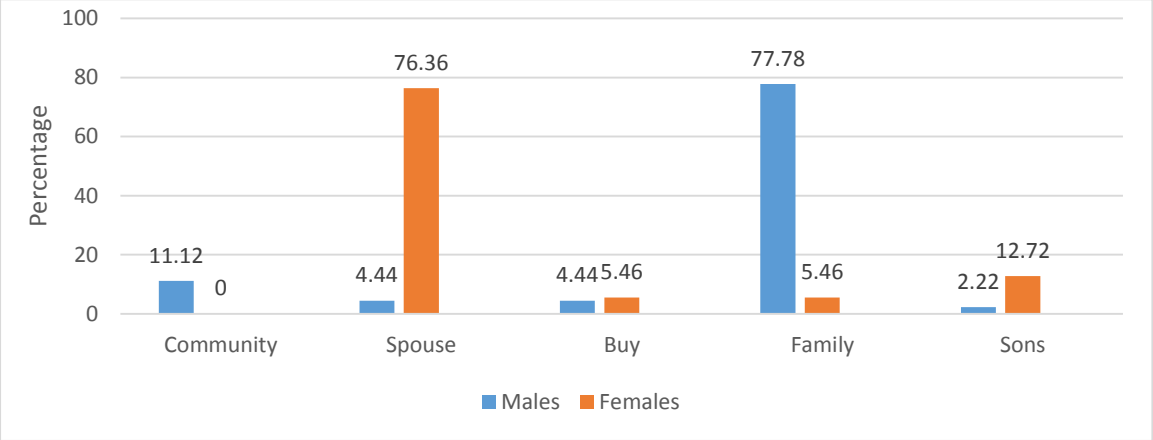

Fig. 1 Sources of farmland by gender

Trends in average farm size by gender 2002-2012

Analysis of the trend in farm size or area cultivated shows a decline in the average area cultivated by women over the years. This could be attributed to the annual increase in average farm size, of men in the area. Implicitly, an increase in the area cultivated by men tends to decrease women access to land and consequently, lead to a reduction in farm size. The decreases in farm sizes (Fig 2) are due to many factors, these include, the derivative nature of the source of farmland, population increase and development project. Presently, the LGA is the foremost producer of rice (Oryza sativa) mostly cultivated by men. Therefore, farmlands that were formally cultivated by women have been released to their husbands to increase their rice production.

Development project such as schools, access roads, markets and health centres have also affected the sizes of women's farmland over the years. When a need arises for such developments in a community, part of the arable land released for development by the community or family are those owned by the women. Increase in household number usually impact negatively on women access to land. This is because the size of a family farm holding is static. Additional numbers in the family will increase the demand for farmland and a need to re-apportion the farmland to accommodate each family member. A woman may lose her right to farmland in such a situation.

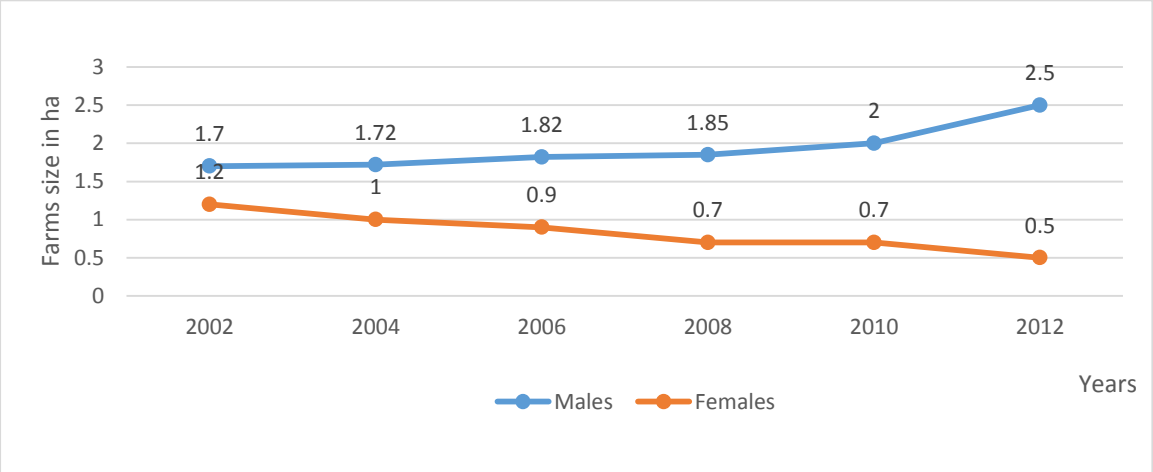

Fig. 2 Trends in average farm size by gender 2002-2012

Rights and land use pattern of women

Ownership (at least nominal ownership of land and other natural resources is vested in the community) most resources such as forest, water and grazing land are used and managed collectively by the community. The great exception is agricultural land, which is allocated to individual households. Authority over the communal land is vested on the chiefs. Access to farmland is obtained through membership of a particular community. All households that are recognized by the community have access to arable land. All the sampled household have access to arable land for cultivation, if the land a household possesses is not sufficient it is normally allocated additional land. However, land allocation and transfers among households in the various communities are based on the customary inheritance practice and the law guiding land transfers in Nigeria.

Findings reveal that the rights to land ownership are permanent except the rights to fell trees, loan out, bequeath and hire out one's land in which case some females have to get the approval of the village head or family or husband Table 2. In spite of the tremendous contribution of women in provisioning food in the rural agrarian economy through their agricultural activities their ability to gain direct access to land is often restricted by the inheritance laws. 69 percent of women farmers believe that because their customary laws recognize only male ownership of land their access is regulated and restricted through their male relationship such as through marriage, brothers and uncles and sons as such they cannot carry out long term investment (such as cultivating long term maturation crops) on their land as they could lose their right the very next farming season. Table 2 also show that women only have cultivation rights. Men take farming decision in terms of crops cultivated and duration of cultivation.

Table 2: Land ownership, rights and privileges of women

	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Right to own land through husband	50	91.90	5	9.09
Right to bequeath one's land				
Right to give out land	0	0.11	55	100.0
Right to loan out land	0	0.11	55	100.0
Right to fell trees	0	0.11	55	100.0
Right to gather wild fruits	2	3.63	43	66.60
Right to develop land	55	100.0	0	0.11
Right to gather fuel wood	1	1.81	44	80.0
	55	100.0	0	0.11
Rights to choose crops to cultivate				
Right to choose farming type	5	9.09	50	91.9
Right to cultivate any crop				
Cultivating cash crop only	25	45.45	30	36.36
Cultivating food crops only	40	72.72	15	27.27
Cultivate both food & cash crops	0	0.11	55	100.0
Right to cultivate separate crops	40	72.72	15	27.27
Right to cultivate as many crops for unlimited time	10	18.18	45	81.81
Right and duration regulated by husband	45	81.18	10	18.18
Right to leave the land fallow				
	40	72.72	15	27.27
	50	90.90	5	9.09
	2	3.36	43	66.60

This finding implies that women's potential in food crop production is not fully harnessed in the state. Due to the derivative nature of access to prime productive resources women face in food crop production; they turn to the forest resources to augment their agricultural production in order to sustain their family livelihood. Thus, the assault on the environment from the women is on two front: through their unsustainable farming practices of shifting cultivation that clears the forest and their dependence on forest produce through harvesting of Non Timber Forest Produce NTFP and harvesting of timber produce as indicated on Table 2 which show that 100 percent of the women are involve in harvesting of NTFP and fuel-wood gathering. Fuel-wood gathering and shifting cultivation has significantly contributed to the destruction and degradation of vegetation in the study area.

The lack of direct access to land in the area by the women has significantly affected the productivity of agriculture in the area. Most of the female farmers sampled asserted that their crop yield has been on the decline over the years and they attributed the decline in crop yield to the constant decrease in farm holding, Fig 1, lack of regenerative resource such as fertilizer and the lack of right to leave the land fallow. The implication of this trend is the inability of the state to feed itself since the 1980s. This findings corroborates the assertion of Ebong, (1991) that the food shortages encountered by the state is because the 'real food producers' (the rural women farmers) are neglected

Effects of gender differential on food availability and natural resources management

As show in Table 3, 100.0 percent and 60.0 percent of women and men respectively integrate legumes in their farming systems to conserve the soil fertility. While 74.6 percent of women apply manure on their crops; only 17.8 percent of the men do so. Mono-cropping which degrades soil nutrients at a very fast rate is practiced by men (61.1per cent) than women (3.6 per cent). Thus, women with limited access to land, use land-enhancing practices than men. In terms of food availability, 100.0 per cent and 95.6 per cent of women are engaged in food processing and home gardening respectively, while only 2.2 per cent of the men engage in food processing. 52.7 percent of the women are involved in trading as against 13.3 per cent for the men. These practices enhance food supply and help renew soil fertility thus maintaining and enhancing crop yield.

Table 3: Gender differential and household food availability and natural resources management

Food availability and natural resources strategies	Men		Women	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Legume intercrop	27	60.0	55	100.0
Annual manure	8	17.8	41	74.6
Monocropping	23	51.1	2	3.6
Food processing	1	2.2	55	100.0
Home gardening	0	-	52	95.7

Implicitly, an increase in women's access to land would improve household food supply and sustainable management of natural resources. Due to the derivative nature of women's access to land, their farm size is smaller than that of the men. The women are strongly disadvantaged as shown in Fig 2. This implies that the household food supply will be strongly impeded and more pressure exerted on the forest resources because more women will turn to the forest for sustenance (Table 2) as they have full rights to forest resources use. The chi- square analysis corroborates this finding by indicating that significant difference in food availability and natural resource management methods exist between men and women in the area Table 4. This difference could be attributed to the fact that women practice mixed cropping with a good mixture of legumes and tubers that increase soil fertility and maintain soil stability. The chi-square x^2 statistic result demonstrates that gender differential in access to land significantly influence household food supply and natural resources management at 0.1 level of significance.

Table 4 Gender differentials in food availability and natural resources management

Degree of freedom	X^2 calculated	Probability level of asymmetric significance	Remarks
14	31.533*	0.001	Significant

CONCLUSION

Women as shown in the study suffer from a variety of tenure insecurity which has culminated in inefficiency in rural food availability and the depletion of the natural resource base as they constitute the backbone of rural livelihood through their primary activities. As such to ensure sustainable availability of food supply in the rural areas and the maintenance of the natural environment of Cross River State in particular and Nigeria in general, women's land rights to be enhanced. Therefore, women's land rights need to become a legal possibility and a political priority in Nigeria

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