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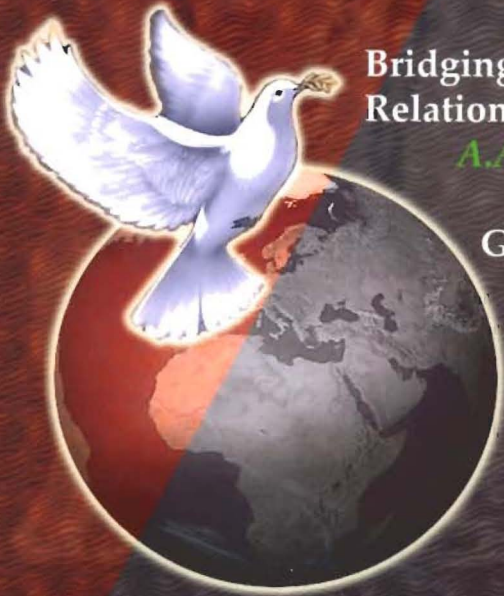
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Gender Equity and Food Security

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**Gender Equity and Food Security: Lessons From Ozalla
Community, Edo State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

There has been an increasing need to consider gender equity as a key element of development, especially in terms of the status of men and women. It has also become imperative to recognize women's needs and contributions to society, most importantly in the sphere of agricultural and food security. Women's role in food security cannot be over emphasized because about 80% of women in rural Nigeria are engaged in food crops production. This discrimination especially in terms of access to and ownership of land for agricultural purposes has generated ceaseless cases of quarrels, violence and enmity between siblings and family relations. In spite of the enormous availability of land for agricultural purposes, food security still remains a challenge. Due to its patriarchal nature anchored on gerontocratic rule, statutory law in Ozalla community and across most rural communities in Nigeria is subservient to customary law which reinforces the discrimination and perpetual subjugation suffered by the women. This paper therefore examines the challenges faced by women in their quest to guarantee food security. A combination of methods both quantitative and qualitative was employed in the study. This involved data generated from 789 respondents for the survey research, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

KEY Words: Agricultural Production, Food Security, Gender Equity, Land Ownership, Patrilineal Community.

Introduction

As with culture, gender relation varies among societies and the general trend is for women to have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal and limited influence over the decision making processes that shape their societies and their own lives. Gender, like race or ethnicity, functions as an organizing principle for society because of

the cultural meanings assigned to being male or female (Tuyizere, 2007). Recognizing the challenge of gender equity and food security is paramount in understanding at different levels, the situation of women in agriculture, their contribution to rural agricultural development, and the constraints they face in the drive towards food security.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. In other words, food security depends on the availability, accessibility, adequacy and acceptability of food. In each of these areas women worldwide play crucial roles: as food producers, as income earners responsible for the provision of food for their households, and as those who process and prepare the food to keep the members of their families healthy and active (Prakash, 2003).

In many places of the world, women are mostly responsible for food crop production, though at the subsistence level and are nearly universally responsible for food preparation for their families. All this they do in the face of cultural constraints and attitudes that conspire to undervalue their work and responsibilities, reduce their productivity, place upon them a disproportionate work burden, discriminate against them and hinder their participation in decision and policy making (Iruonagbe, 2010a).

On the situation of women across the world, they own only about one percent of the world's land. Communities in sub-Sahara Africa are patriarchal and confer on women an inferior social-status even in the agricultural sector where they produce three quarters of the food. Over 85% of Uganda's population live in rural areas where agriculture is the major contributor to their livelihoods. Most agricultural production comes from smallholders, majority of who are women; using traditional methods of farming and family labour, but still produce over 94% of total agricultural output and supply, which is virtually all of Uganda's food requirements (Tuhaise, 2000; Tuyizere, 2007).

There is a clear understanding that with increased agricultural production, there will be an expansion in farm income which invariably will stimulate the demand for non-farm products. There are however special constraints facing women's agricultural life leading to a reduction in economic growth (Iruonagbe, 2010a). According to the World Bank 1989; Cleaver and Schreiber 1994, most working women are employed in agriculture and many of the constraints facing them exist in the rural economy. These include legal and customary constraints on land ownership and access to credit; work burdens on women in addition to

farming, including household management, water and fuel wood collection, and cultural constraints on women's use of land for agricultural purposes.

The challenge facing women in Nigeria therefore, involves the interplay between access to land and ownership of land and how this has affected the challenge to agricultural production and food security. Coupled with this is the patriarchal structure across societies in the country which has accorded women low status and also created severe cultural inhibitions against the women (Iruonagbe, 2010b). A critical issue affecting women's food production capacity is the subservient role of the statutory law to the customary law of land tenure. Ownership of land under the customary laws is very discriminatory against female children, especially when parents do not usually document all their assets in a 'will' that would have been used as occasion demands. In addition, with the poor level of education, enlightenment and social learning, the women have become passive and voiceless and have not been able to develop capacity to challenge existing cultural practices which have hindered their access to land (Iruonagbe, 2010b).

Africa is threatened with intense environmental degradation and, therefore, food insecurity. Statistics from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2002) indicate that sub-Saharan Africa is already experiencing a food crisis. For instance, between 1985 and 2000 agricultural production and population grew at annual rates of approximately 3.3 percent, yet per capita food production increasingly declined. Rural women in Nigeria who are the traditional subsistence farmers as well as the custodians of food security are increasingly abandoning farming and joining more lucrative and less labor intensive income generating activities. This has led to food insecurity and a subsequent poor nutritional status particularly among the urban and rural poor (Iruonagbe, 2010a).

Table 1: Percentage of ownership of cultivated land by women farmers in

Thailand, Trinidad, Nigeria and Syria

Land Ownership	Thailand %	Trinidad%	Nigeria %	Syria %
Personally Owned	22	9	4	-
Husband Owned	39	30	23	41
Gift from	-	-	30	-

husband				
Family Land	10	9	12	36
Government Land	-	25	-	-
Communal Land	-	-	20	-
Squatted Land	-	9	-	-
Rented Land	29	19	11	21

Source: Improving the Relevance and Effectiveness of Agricultural Extension Activities for Women Farmers, FAO, 1995, P 35.

Security of tenure is often the key to having control over major decisions such as what crop to grow, what techniques to use and the decision as to what to consume and what to sell. Given women's tendency to grow food as opposed to cash crops and spend income on family food, security of tenure for women must be viewed as a key link in the chain from household food production to national food security (FAO, 1995).

Access to resources is essential to improving food security for both men and women. Women farmers in Ozalla community play crucial roles in agricultural production. Unfortunately, they do not have a secure title to land, which is usually required as collateral for loans and other credit facilities. This is a serious obstacle to improving women's agricultural productivity, since without credit, women farmers are unable to buy inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and improved technologies, or to hire labour.

In some cultural settings, lack of land title restricts the type of crops that may be grown. For instance in Nigeria, Ghana, and most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, only land owners are allowed to cultivate tree crops, such as Cocoa, which can be important source of cash income. This is the situation in Ozalla community where women's lack of ownership to land has invariably affected their living conditions and family upkeep especially for those who are heads of households as they are often limited to only food crop production. Even though statutory laws and other forms of legislation guarantees gender equity, women still have less access to land and family property due to unfavourable customary practices. The resultant effect of this has been the occurrence of quarrels, hatred and enmity within and between families.

ICRW (2008) observed that, women own less than 15 percent of land worldwide. Without official title to land and property, women have

fewer economic options and virtually no collateral for obtaining loans and credit. As in most other patriarchal societies of the world, a Nigerian woman is socialized into a culture of female subordination. She is not only subordinate to her husband and the men in her own family of birth; she is also subordinate to the members of her husband's family (male and female) (Ola-Aluko & Edewor, 2002). Indeed the by-product of polygyny is simply the exploitation of females.

With regards to Nigeria, women constitute about 50 percent of the population and over 70 percent of them can be described as rural. Otite and Ogionwo (2006) in their contribution espoused that, the majority of women in Nigeria, are still constantly faced with gender inequalities and disabilities.

Also writing in the affirmative, Aina (1998) observed that women dominate in the rural agricultural economy and the informal sector where they account for about 60 percent of the labour force, and generate 90 percent of the domestic food needed in households. Land problems therefore include African women being denied their own farms. Before marriage, women are free to cultivate farmlands belonging to their families especially their fathers, brothers and other relations. And after marriage they cultivate farmlands belonging to their husbands. Consequently, the women cannot plant cash crops which are high income yielding due to lack of ownership to land.

Boserup (1990) notes that women, particularly the female heads of households without male support, and who account for a large share of the agricultural population, are discriminated against in terms of access to land, agricultural inputs and credit facilities, leaving them with few resources to produce sufficient food. Through land ownership women are guaranteed higher incomes, high social status within the household and community which will help attain gender equality and empowerment (ICRW, 2008).

Despite variations in customary law across regions and nations, there are some commonalities. Most customary law is not codified but emerges from unwritten social rules that ostensibly are derived from shared community values and traditions but which often reflect patriarchal relations between women and men. Many developing countries have, in the past several decades, adopted legislations that give women some rights to land. Often, however, this legislation has not been successful in achieving its stated goals. Indeed, understanding the effects of laws - both written and customary - regarding land tenure and intra-household division of rights and responsibilities for women is critical in formulating

effective policy measures to address women's secure access to land (Iruonagbe, 2010a).

In many African countries, the social rules of a community, or customary law, oversee the use and ownership of common property. These rules can provide poor households with greater access to land and tenure security. Research has shown that government land titling programmes do not always provide stronger security than customary laws, and may even be a source of insecurity for women and poor households with limited access to obtain government land regulations (II:PRI, 2006).

There are, therefore, clear distinctions among Nigerian societies as to the customary treatment of men and women. Ogunleye (1993) frames women's entitlements and rights in terms of restoring equitable access to resources. The inability of women to exercise independent control over their life relates to the role of culture in the exercise of social control over individuals. Women are in a subordinate position to men and such control is directly beneficial to men economically, culturally and politically. Women themselves share the thinking that these practices have some validity to their lives.

The Conflict Theory and African feminist theory have been used as the theoretical foundation for the study. Conflict theory is oriented towards the study of social structures and institutions. To Marx, the motivating force in history is the manner in which human beings relate to one another in their continuous struggle to extract their livelihood from nature (Labinjoh, 2002). Conflict is seen to exist when people and groups with different economic and other interests and roles interact in a society. Every society contains elements of contradictions. These contradictions involve the exploitation of one social group by another. In feudal societies, lords exploit their serfs; in capitalist societies, employers exploit their employees. The family is often a management of conflict between a man and his wife or his wives or his extended family relations depending on the society in question. Conflict involves struggle between segments of society over valued resources such as land.

What is evident, therefore, is that in Ozalla community the relationship between men and women is based on gender inequality, due to the discrimination and other cultural constraints suffered by women. Consequently, in this study, emphasis is placed on gender or the relation between men and women, where the men are in the dominant group and the women are in the disadvantaged group. Since Ozalla community is a patriarchal one, in which the father or husband dominates and has the

final say in decision making, what is noted is that there is a lack of equity and social justice especially in terms of ownership and control of land so as to attain food security.

On the African Feminist Theory, the starting point is a look at the feminist perspective. According to Barker (2004), feminism examines the position of women in society and tries to further their interests. Igenozah (2004) has also observed that the concern with the gender question is primarily on the secondary standing of women in society. Feminists see the secondary standing of women in the scheme of things as a form of victimization, especially the subordinate role women are made to play in relation to men. According to Heldke and O'Connor (2004), the emphasis of the feminist theory is on oppression, discrimination, injustice and exploitation. And Sheffield (2004) further opined that patriarchy is a system whereby maleness is glorified and femaleness denigrated.

Based on the contributions of Lengermann and Niebrugge (1995), Ritzer and Goodman (2004) stated that among other things, gender ideology identifies men as the bearers of socio-cultural authority and allocates to the male role, the right to dominate and to the female role, the obligation to serve in all dimensions of social production. Two key terms in feminist theory are 'subordination' and 'patriarchy'.

Despite the varying reactions to feminism, many African women seem to agree that the way African women perceive their reality and the exigency that shape their consciousness and mobilization has to be different from the way Western women perceive and react to their situation. The average African woman is not a hater of men; she desires self-respect, and dignity alongside the men.

Steady (1981) formulated a feminist theory for African women. She examines the socio-economic and class factors which contribute to African women's oppression and her response to this oppression. A closer examination of the African women's situation vis-a-vis the layers of oppression that have to be torn away is offered by Ogundipe-Leslie (1984) who locates the condition of women in Africa within the socio-economic realities of culture and development. African feminism does not emphasize a reduction in the power of men, but a refinement geared specifically to deal with the concrete realities of African women's life. Consequently, with regard to gender equity and food security in Ozalla community, African feminist theory is concerned with how to reduce the inequalities and discriminations suffered by women and how this will improve their life and society in general.

Methods of the Study

A combination of methods was used in this study. They include survey method used to generate quantitative data. In-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions were also used to generate qualitative data to complement the quantitative data generated from the survey research. The study population selected for this research is women in Ozalla community, Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State with Headquarters in Sabongida-Ora, with the population of women as 2,917 (1991 Population Census). Projected for 2005 using an annual growth rate of 2.4%, the population of women in Ozalla community was 4,055. Ozalla community is made up of Eight Quarters comprising Uhonmoke, Igbidin, Ekeke, Iraede, Usuamen, Ivbihere, Ekhon and Uwiara quarter. Of the 4,055 women (18 years and above irrespective of their marital status), approximately 20% or 800 women were chosen for this study because of the need to ensure that the sample size adequately represents the entire population of women in Ozalla community. However, 789 questionnaires were found suitable for the study.

The study utilized a stratified sampling technique as the number of respondents for the study was first proportionally determined on the basis of the relative numerical strength of each of the quarters in the community. The systematic sampling technique was employed in each of the quarters to determine the women in households who should constitute respondents for the study. Three major research instruments were used in this study. They include: Survey questionnaire, In-depth interview guide and Focus group discussion guide. A 31-item questionnaire was the major research tool for the study. Both closed and open-ended questions were asked as the questionnaire was personally administered so that answers can be easily quantified statistically while also giving room to respondents to express their views and feelings on the subject matter.

In-depth interviews were conducted with a few selected individuals using a guide. These individuals were identified as possessing special or detailed knowledge of the subject matter of the research. As a cultural study, in-depth interviews were therefore conducted on eight highly respected elders from the eight different quarters in Ozalla Community. The elders were made up of six men and two women, each of whom was said to be above the age of 70 years. They were not selected on the basis of their sex but on the qualities they possessed. An in-depth interview guide was constructed prior to contact with the respondents. Two sets of

participants comprising eight women as Focus Group Discussion A and eight men as Focus Group Discussion B were each selected from the eight quarters in Ozalla community. These participants according to the researcher's key informants and interviewers are persons of proven integrity and knowledge in the area of research, who are 50 years and above. The discussions were conducted in the local language of the people and this was properly transcribed as the researcher is well acquainted with the local language of the community.

In analyzing the quantitative data, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to create tables, frequency distribution, Multiple Regression Analysis and Chi-Square to test the hypotheses stated for the study. These were further complemented by the use of qualitative analysis derived from the in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Here, all audio-taped information was transcribed and the contents analysed qualitatively. Responses were summarized and important quotations were reported verbatim to highlight some vital views.

Results

In examining the interplay between gender equity and food security, it was necessary to ascertain the relationship between women's status to land and amount of food crops produced in acres. The food items considered include Yam, Cassava, Maize and Plantain.

Table 2: Distribution of Types of Food Crops and the Amount Produced in Acres

Crops	Acres Cultivated	Percent %
Yam	1,090	10.30
Cassava	5,635	53.24
Maize	882	8.33
Plantain	2,977	28.13
Total	10,584	100.0

The result showed that of the 10,584 acres cultivated, Yam had 10.30% of acres, Cassava had 53.24%, Maize had 8.33% and Plantain had 28.13% of acres cultivated. So the food crop the women cultivated most

was cassava and participants in the in-depth interviews affirmed that cassava was the cheapest crop the women could grow.

Table 3: Regression Coefficient Showing the Degree of Prediction in the Relationship between Status to Land and Amount of Yam Farmland Cultivated in Acres

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	
1	Constant	4.651	.606		7.679	.000			
	Hired the land	.306	.123	.165	2.479	.013	.109	.099	
	received the land	.368	.119	.223	3.090	.002	.372	.123	
	joint farming with husband	1.833	.135	-.655	13.621	.000	.776	.481	.343

The result of the multiple regression analysis (Table 3) revealed that the predictor variable – hired the land is not significant at a value of .109. This, therefore, shows that hired the land has no predictive value on amount of food crops produced in acres. Received the land and joint farming with husband both show that there is a correlation between the amount of food crops produced per acre and status to inherited land. Though both are significant at 0.05 level of significance, receiving the land has a positive predictive value of .372. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) result showed that the F value of 321.010 at 3 degrees of freedom is significant at 0.05 level of significance as the tabulated value is 9.013. So for Yam cultivation, there is a significant relationship between status to inherited land and amount of food crops produced per acre.

Table 4: Regression Coefficient Showing the Degree of Prediction in the Relationship Between Status to Land and Amount of Cassava Farmland Cultivated in Acres

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	11.211	2.777		4.036	.000			
	hired the land	-.683	.578	-.074	-1.182	.237	-.058	-.042	-.028
	received the land	2.083	.557	.288	3.742	.000	.664	.132	.087
	Joint farming with husband	-4.374	.568	-.539	-7.705	.000	-.698	-.265	-.180

The result of the multiple regression analysis (Table 4) revealed that the predictor variable – hired the land is not significant at a value of -.058. This implies that there is no correlation between amount of food crops produced and the status to inherited land by those who hired the land. Therefore, hired the land has no predictive value on amount of food crops produced in acres. Whereas, received the land and joint farming with husband both show that there is a correlation between the amount of food crops produced per acre and the status to inherited land. Though both are significant at 0.05 level of significance, received the land has positive correlation or positive predictive value of .664. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) result shows that the F value of 340.513 at 3 degrees of freedom is significant at 0.05 level of significance as the tabulated value is 9.013. This implies that with regard to Cassava cultivation, there is a significant relationship between status to inherited land and amount of food crops produced.

Table 5: Cross Tabulation Showing Women's Status to Land and Farm Income in Relation to Monthly Expenses

Status to Land	Farm income in relation to monthly expenses				
	75% - 100%	50% - 74%	25% - 49%	1% - 24%	Percent %
Hired the land	133	8	-	-	18.58
Received the land from my husband	-	310	53	42	53.36
Joint farming with my husband	3	200	10	-	28.06
Total	136	518	63	42	100

The cross tabulation (Table 5) shows that in the relationship between status to the land and income generated from the farm, 759 respondents responded to both items. Those who hired the land and obtained between 75% and 100% income were 17.52% of the women, while 1.06% of them obtained between 50% and 74% income making a total of 18.58% of the respondents. With regard to those who received the land from their husbands, 40.84% of them obtained between 50% and 74% income, while 6.98% of the respondents obtained between 25% and 49% income, and 5.54% of the women obtained between 1% and 24% income from their farms, making a total of 53.36% of the women. In addition, for those involved in joint farming with their husbands, 0.39% of them had between 75% and 100% income from their farms, while 26.35% of them had between 50% and 74% income and 1.32% of the women obtained between 25% and 49% income, making a total of 28.06% of the respondents. Using the Chi-Square test, the study revealed that with a calculated value of chi-square of 732.817 at 6 df and 0.05 level of significance, and a tabulated chi-square (χ^2) value of 12.59 at 6 df, there is a significant relationship between the income of women and their status to the land cultivated. This view was corroborated by the in-depth interviews and focus group discussants.

Table 6: Cross Tabulation Showing Status to Inherited Land and Decision on Choice of Crops to Cultivate

Status to inherited land	Decision on choice of crops to cultivate				
	Discussion with my husband	Discussion with my fellow farmers	Due to the cultural beliefs of the people	By my own choice	Percent %
Hired the land	2	1	-	142	19.18
received the land from my husband	234	72	71	23	52.91
joint farming with my husband	207	1	1	2	27.91
Total	443	74	72	167	100

The cross tabulation (Table 6) shows that in the relationship between status to inherited land and decision on choice of crops cultivated, 756 respondents responded to both items. Of this number, 19.18% of the respondents hired the land for farming. A breakdown of those who hired the land showed that, 0.27% of the respondents decided on the crops to grow after discussion with their husbands and only 0.13% of them discussed with fellow farmers, while 18.78% of the women decided on what crops to grow by their own choice. Furthermore, 52.91% of the respondents received the land from their husbands. Of this number, 30.95% of them decided on what crops to cultivate based on discussion with their husbands. Also, 9.52% of the women decided on crops to grow after discussing with fellow farmers, while 9.40% of them considered the cultural beliefs of the community before arriving at what crops to grow. In addition, for 3.04% of the respondents, the decision was based on their own choice. The result from the cross tabulation further showed that, 27.91% of the respondents were involved in joint farming with their husbands. Of this number, 27.38% opined that discussion with their husbands determined the crops to grow on their farms. Also, 0.13% said the decision on crops to grow was based on discussion with fellow farmers, while 0.13% reported that the cultural beliefs of the community determined what crops to grow. And for 0.27% of the respondents, the

decision on crops to grow was based on their own choice. The Chi-Square test result further showed that with a calculated value of 724.711 at 6 df and 0.05 level of significance, a tabulated chi-square value of 12.59 at 6 df, there is a significant relationship between decision on choice of crops cultivated by women and status to inherited land.

Responses given through in-depth interviews and from focus group discussions showed clearly that land allocation was determined by men. Some contributions from in-depth interviews showed the following:

In Ozalla community, we operate a patrilineal society as family lineage is traced through the male. So the male in the family depending on the number of wives he had would share the inheritance including his land. Only men have control over inherited land. Women are expected to get married and become members of other families.

Another discussant added:

Only men can have control or ownership of inherited land. '*Okhwo I ebe uku*', which, simply put, implies that a woman is not entitled to family inheritance. A man is the one expected to hold his father's house. Any woman who wants to stay in her father's house and begin to take charge there is seen as a disgrace. Women must honour themselves by getting married and living peacefully in their husband's house. This is why you see that when a woman gets married and visits her parents, once it is time to leave, she simply tells them that she is going home, thus referring to her husband's house.

In the focus group discussion for men, some of the participants remarked that:

Men have control over inherited land. If a man has only one wife, then his first son inherits and takes care of his siblings. But if the man has several wives, then the first males from the women so blessed will inherit his land and other properties. Once a man inherits his late father's land, he gives to his wife or wives and other relations to farm. But he has the final say on the land and how it should be used.

The study, therefore, revealed clearly how essential the process of land acquisition is. A woman's relationship to the land determined her long term benefits from the land. In terms of comparison, those who hired the land, or received the land from husband or involved in joint farming with husband did not get the same results from the land since the conditions for access to the land were different.

Discussions

The study revealed that while women constitute the bulk of those engaged in food crop production, they hardly have adequate access, ownership and control of land. Land ownership and control is highly intertwined with the culture and social life of the people. This has invariably affected the amount of food crops produced by the women in Ozalla community. Also, for a woman to have access to land, she must go through a male, such as, her husband, brother or brother in-law, etc. A woman must be conscious of the fact that she could be asked to live the land at any time. As a result, the culture also stipulates what kind of crops one should grow. These are usually seasonal crops with short life span because land use is temporary.

The study revealed that women in Ozalla community do not have control over land. The men have control over land and other properties because women are usually not considered in inheritance rights. Invariably, this affects the amount of food crops produced by the women and invariably affects food security. This view is in support of Adepoju (1997) that discrimination against women is especially serious in the case of widowhood when women usually end up without inheritance rights and are subjected to harrowing widowhood rites.

Unfortunately, while statutory law guarantees women inheritance rights as shown from the works of Oke (2001) and Strickland (2004) that numerous barriers impede women's ability to claim their *de jure* rights to property ownership and inheritance, the situation in Ozalla Community is that statutory law is subservient to customary law. This supports the view expressed by Nakazibwe (2003), who, in a 2002 study conducted on Land, Gender and Poverty in Uganda, observed that customary protections for women were weakening, and that unequal land tenure relations between men and women are contributing to conflict within families. Also, the absence of economic assertiveness on the part of the women runs counter to the male dominance of all economic activities and

creates a gulf between men and women. This has often created avenues for enmity and hatred in the community.

The study revealed that the level of income women generated was a reflection of their status to the land cultivated. With a tenural system in Ozalla Community that denies women enough and unconditional access to land, they often get limited production from it due to the crops grown and their financial capacity with which to engage in adequate economic activities as they cannot own or inherit land. Such is the low status accorded women in the Ozalla Community.

As pointed out from the research in Ozalla Community, women do not own property as they are seen as part of the property to be inherited. As it was stated by some of the in-depth interview participants, "*Okhwo l ebe uku*", which means women cannot own property. This clearly is in consonance with the contributions of Kwesiga (2002) and Tuyizere (2007) that, in traditional African societies, women cannot own property as they are considered to be part of the household property. In the study, it was established that how land was acquired determined the choice of crops to grow. The reason why this has persisted can be traced to the deep-rooted customary practices that have often determined the role and status of women in relation to the men. This view was shared by UNICEF (2001).

The study established that majority of women in Ozalla community who hire land and some who receive land from their husband or his relations are those who are widowed and have little or no male support. This is aptly supported by the work of Boserup (1990) that women, particularly the female heads of households without male support, and who account for a large share of the agricultural population, are discriminated against in terms of access to land, agricultural inputs and credit facilities, leaving them with few resources to produce sufficient food.

The study further revealed that with its patriarchal social and cultural structures and gerontocratic style of rulership, in family, quarter and community meetings, women are not usually invited even when the issues under consideration greatly affects them. At best, a male representative attends to her needs. They are indeed the voiceless in the community. Hence, there is male preference in inheritance and male privilege in marriage because patriarchy thrives. This unfortunate situation is clearly observed in the work of Ebila and Musiimenta (2004) that in most African societies, women are oppressed and they suffer several disadvantages in all aspects of life.

The theories of conflict and African feminism adopted for the study and which emphasize subordination and patriarchy as aspects of gender relations leading to social conflict, truly captures the oppressive situation in Ozalla community as it relates to gender equity and food security in the community. This therefore captures the need to understand the reasons behind the quarrels, hatred and enmity, which often exist between siblings at the death of their father, or between siblings and their families due to their marital experiences. This most times is as a result of women's inability to have access in some cases to the land left behind by their father after his death or that left behind after the death of her spouse. This indeed is discriminatory as espoused by Oke (2001). According to him, denials of individual's rights on the ground that they are women are human rights violation and oppression on account of their sex

While these issues are not peculiar to Ozalla community, they have provided insight and possible avenues towards approaching and addressing the challenges confronting rural societies across Nigeria and other African societies in their quest to develop and contribute to national development, including the suppression and subordination of women.

Case Studies of Quarrels, Hatred and Enmity due to the challenge of Gender Equity in Ozalla Community

This story is that of a renowned farmer who had seven wives and several children. Three of his wives had male children while the other four had only female children. After his death, it was time to share his assets. At this time, three of his wives had also died. As the culture stipulates, the available lands and property were to be shared amongst the children whose mothers had sons. So, all the lands and property were shared for only the first sons of the three women who had male children. Those with female children got nothing because of the culture that says women are not entitled to property as they are expected to marry and go to their husbands' houses where they can benefit from any available inheritance. One of the women whose mother had died quite early without a male child, and who over the years worked tirelessly alongside her father until she got married, wanted a portion of land to farm as she had challenges getting land to farm in her place of marriage. She therefore presented her request before her half brothers. After several visits to them, one of her half brothers accepted to help her and took her to a thick forest several kilometers away. She spent so much money

hiring labour to clear the portion of land given to her, including that of felling the trees as the land was like a virgin land. Thereafter she planted some food crops such as Yam, Cassava and Maize. To get to the farm she would have to trek kilometers as she had to go from time to time weeding and maintaining the farm with the assistance of her children. At the period of harvest, her half brother who gave her the land met her in the farm and discovered that she had gotten very bountiful yield. But just before the beginning of the next planting season, when she had not yet harvested half of her crops, her half brother set fire on the land after which he began to plant Maize and Plantain without informing his half sister. So the next time she went to the farm, she was shocked and amazed to discover what had happened. She went to her half brother who said he was sorry and that he wanted to make use of his land. In the long run the wickedness of her half brother was talked about in the community and no one could do anything about it especially in terms of some form of compensation for all that she lost. This generated very serious conflict which over the years grew into so much bitterness, hatred and discord even among their children.

The second story is that of a woman who was living in a far away town with her husband and children. At the death of her husband, family relations of the late man brought all his property down to the village. Several months after his burial, all the money with the woman got exhausted and none of her husband's family members was willing to help her and her children. This was because she had refused to be married to any of the men in the family. All she wanted was to bring up the six children her husband left behind. She was hated, maltreated and abandoned by her in-laws and eventually thrown out of the family house along with her children. Eventually, she packed her belongings and began to live with her children in an abandoned kitchen of an old woman in the village who volunteered to help. From there she became a hired labour in peoples farms, sometimes going with her children as they gradually grew older. From her earnings she began to also take care of the children's education. Her relationship with her in-laws never improved and the children too wanted nothing to do with their father's relations. Unfortunately, after more than fifteen years of hard labour, she suffered a devastating illness which eventually took her life.

Conclusions

The study has revealed that there are inherent challenges and contradictions in the social relationships among people in Ozalla community and these are sometimes associated with the interplay between gender equity and food security. In the community, access to land is different from ownership of land. Women may have access to land but they do not own land and this access is usually through marriage. Access to land is highly conditional as it depends on the kind of status to land that the woman has. This depends on whether the land is hired, or given to her by her husband or his family, or if she is involved in joint farming with her husband. Any of these would determine her level of access and what crops she is able to cultivate on the land.

What determines a woman's access to land is the relationship she has either with her husband, his relations or her own brothers. Only a male can determine a woman's access to land because only men have ownership and control over family land. Women in the community benefit more from access to land when their husbands are alive. At the man's death, she is at the mercy of her in-laws who may want to marry her to any of her late husband's brother. Refusal to comply may cause her to fall out of favour with them and she may be denied further use of the land for farm purposes. Women hardly benefit from their father's land and property after his death. This is irrespective of what ever contribution she may have made on the farmlands, economic trees and overall wellbeing of the family. A woman can only benefit from what her father publicly declares as belonging to her while he is alive to the knowledge of family relations and elders in the quarter.

Cases of enmity, hatred and discord are more difficult to handle in families where the man had many wives. The eldest son or sons from the different women may try to keep everything to themselves. Conflicts emanating from this often escalate to bitter rivalries, transcending generations.

In Ozalla community, women are discriminated against in terms of land ownership because of their sex; hence they have some level of access and not ownership to land. As a result, rural women are among those with no or very insecure rights to land in spite of the fact that increasing numbers of them bear primary responsibility for agricultural production. This indeed has greatly affected food security in Ozalla community and other communities in similar situations.

It is imperative to add that researchers and advocacy groups have not done much with regard to how best to tackle issues relating to gender discriminatory norms and practices embedded in communities including the policies that have sustained such barriers and how to ensure that any remedial measures taken will be sustainable and effective in building the institutional capacity needed to interpret and apply gender-sensitive laws. Such issues define the cutting edge for researchers, policy advocacy and practical interventions.

As a patrilineal society, women in Ozalla community only have access to land without ownership and control. It operates rule by the aged (gerontocracy) which lacks any element of creativity and dynamism and is seen as retrogressive in nature. Only men inherit land and other property for which their children and wives could benefit depending on the prevailing circumstance. The study has, therefore, established the fact that there is need to modify injurious cultural practices which will help promote equitable ownership and control over land and other property by women that will eventually lead to improved agricultural productivity, food security and enhanced living conditions for them.

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