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The Land Question And Agricultural Production Among Women In Ozalla Community, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The plight of Nigerian women in terms of their developmental and economic opportunities is often circumscribed by gender discrimination. They have continued to suffer the disadvantages of an unequal household division of labour, barriers to ownership of communal land, discriminatory inheritance practices which are grounded in deep-rooted customary practices that stem from ingrained presumptions about the role and status of women vis-à-vis men. Using Ozalla Community, Edo State, Nigeria, this paper examines the gender dimensions of the land question as a principal economic resource that attracts constant disputes, with particular reference to women's right of access to land and the need for ownership of land, so as to enhance their level of food production and living standard. This is imperative, because, in this community, a woman's right to use land is pegged on her marital status. If she is abandoned, divorced or becomes widowed, she may likely lose her right to the land that has been her source of survival. It is a patrilineal community with a gerontocratic style of rulership, which is seen as retrogressive with little room for change. A combination of methods was used in the study. They include survey method to generate quantitative data, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies for the qualitative data.

KEY Words: Agricultural Production, Gender Discrimination, Gerontocratic Rule, Land Ownership, Patrilineal Community.

Introduction

Across Africa, women make up more than one-third of the workforce. They account for 70% of agricultural workers, 80% of food producers (CTA, 1993). Women come up against all sorts of difficulties in their attempts to be seen as agents for development in their own rights. First and foremost, they have no land ownership rights. In some communities, they have only temporary rights of use of individual fields given to them by the head of the household. Studies have shown that the majority of rural women obtained their farmland from their husbands or their families (Aidoo, 1988).

Adepoju (1997) affirmed further that discrimination against women is especially serious in the case of widowhood, when women usually end up without inheritance rights

and find themselves subjected to harrowing widowhood rites. Although statutory law provides for women's capacity to inherit assets following the death of their husbands, in practice this is often overridden by the local customary law of succession. It is almost universal in Nigerian customary law that widows have no capacity to inheritance. One reason for this is that there is no concept of co-ownership of property by couples in traditional Nigerian culture, the presumption being that all substantial property, including land belongs to the husband. Indeed, the woman herself is virtually considered a form of property.

Osuntogun (1988) in his study of four communities in Oyo and Ondo States of Nigeria observed that the rural women in his area of study play very significant role in the farming operations of the communities. The women were involved in bush clearing, land preparations, ploughing, hoeing, planting and weeding. It was observed that men do not engage much in farming. They only clear the land for their wives and spend their time hunting and producing palm oil, while the women are left to carry out all the agricultural activities. Most African societies have patriarchal social and cultural structures; consequently, women are oppressed and they suffer several disadvantages in all aspects of life (Ebila and Musiimenta, 2004). According to Tuyizere (2007), in traditional African society, women cannot own property left behind by their deceased husbands as they are often considered to be part of the household property to be inherited by his relatives.

Women in Africa tend to produce and prepare food for the household as well as exchange knowledge about natural resource management. Despite this role, many women are prevented from owning land and instead must gain access through male relatives. Widowed women in Africa traditionally do not inherit land from their husbands, but are allowed to remain on the land until death or remarriage (IFPRI, 2006). According to Brown (2002), rural women in India and worldwide own very little land. In a study in West Bengal, she examined the reasons behind this and the possible government steps for fostering women's land ownership. The first question asked was: Why do rural women need to own land? Most landless women answered this question very simply: "Owning land would give me security, in case my husband leaves me or in case I am widowed".

In a developing nation like Nigeria, the concern for increasing women's economic participation especially in food production can be seen within the wider general concern to alleviate the economic conditions of the poor households, especially, those in the rural sector, majority of whom are women and who occupy lower socio-economic status compared to their male counterpart. After Boserup's work (1970), much literature has been devoted to documenting her points that women farmers were disadvantaged in comparison to their male counterparts. Women are disadvantaged in their access to all factors of agricultural production. And for Okeyo (1980), women are less likely to own land in their own right. When a woman loses her husband, her inheritance is more in terms of liabilities than of assets. She is subject to sexual harassment from younger male in-laws who view her as part of their relative's property to be inherited. Women in African societies are therefore almost always regarded as their husband's property and being themselves property, they could not aspire to own property (Orebiyi, 2002).

The usufruct of the land which an individual cultivated passed from the owner to his immediate heirs at his death. In cases of failure of heirs, the land reverted back to the land-owning family or community. So, on the death of a father, land held by him is divided into as many portions as he had wives who bore him sons. Wives who had no sons were assigned plots to cultivate for their upkeep; but such interest as they might have in them was mere life occupancy and use rights, and the land would revert to the sons in the family after the death of such women (Otite & Ogionwo, 2006).

Land problems therefore include African women being denied their own farms as they are deprived of inherited land which would have been used by rural farmers, majority of whom are women. Researchers with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI, 2006), point out that the marginal nature of women's land rights is an historical problem in Africa. Except in a few communities where inheritance passed through the mother, land rights were typically only inherited by sons. Women rarely had full rights to land. They were seen as secondary claimants, through male relatives. Before getting married, a woman might have access to her father's land. But in many communities, she lost that right with marriage, on the assumption that she would then gain access to the land of her husband or of his family. When a husband died, his land passed on to any sons they might have had or to male in-laws if there were none.

In Ozalla community, once a woman loses her husband, her inheritance is more in terms of liabilities than assets. She is subject to sexual harassment from younger male in-laws who view her as part of their relative's property to be inherited. Since the women have no control over land and are often in subordinated positions, they are sometimes subjected to dehumanizing treatment from male relations and male in-laws when ever request for land is put forward to them. Even when such requests are granted, women suffer from inconsistent and temporary use of land despite their contributions to food production in the community. The critical question that this scenario raises then is how to reconcile a situation, where a woman who is perhaps widowed and completely depends on land for her survival is denied access to land by those who may not necessarily need it. Limiting women's access to land invariably limits their ability to produce enough food and this affects the well-being of their families including their income generating capacity and living condition.

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of the study is to examine the gender dimension of the land question and how this affects women's agricultural production.

The objectives of the study include:

- i. To examine how gender discrimination affects women's access, ownership of land and low food production.
- ii. To examine how women's lack of access and ownership of land affects their income generating capacity and living condition of their families.
- iii. To examine how cultural constraints affects women's status to land and choice of food crops to cultivate.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws its theoretical strength from two highly related theories. These are the Conflict theory and the African Feminist theory.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is oriented towards the study of social structures and institutions. It emphasizes the fact that there are fundamental differences of interest between social groups. Due to these differences, conflict has become a common and persistent feature of society. The greatest influence on the conflict theory is Karl Marx. The world according to him is produced and reproduced through man's labours. And for Labinjoh (2002), 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. However, human beings continue to struggle against nature even after primary needs have been satisfied. This struggle leads to new or secondary needs. In the effort to satisfy primary and secondary needs, human beings engage in antagonistic cooperation from which divisions of labour have emerged in human societies. It is the divisions of labour that have led to the formation of antagonistic classes in all societies throughout history.

Conflict theory assumes that, in order to survive, humans must produce food and material objects. In doing so, they enter into social relationships with other people. Conflict is seen to exist when people and groups with different economic and other interests and roles interact in a society. 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 theory, therefore, covers a wide range of sociological problems in most African societies each with its own diversities of social cultural systems. Conflict involves struggle between segments of society over valued resources. This can take many forms as individuals may quarrel, some family members/relations may quarrel just as some communities have long standing rivalries due to valuable resources such as land. 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 theory, therefore, covers a wide range of sociological problems in most African societies each with its own diversities of social cultural systems. The predominance of the man in marriage is simply a consequence of his economic predominance. It sees society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and change. It investigates how factors such as social class, race, ethnicity, gender, and age are linked to the unequal distribution of economic resources, power, education and social prestige. In other words, it emphasizes how social patterns benefit some people while depriving others.

What is evident, therefore, is that in Ozalla community the relationship between men and women is based on gender inequality. Here, women are discriminated against in terms of land ownership because of their sex. Consequently, in this study, emphasis is placed on gender or the relation between men and women as it relates to land ownership and the question of inheritance and how this affects the economic life of women in Ozalla community where the men are in the dominant group and the women are in the disadvantaged group. The community is a patriarchal one, in which the father or husband

dominates and has the final say in decision making. Also, there is a lack of equity and social justice in its land ownership pattern since land is appropriated as a reflection of the dictates of the culture to the neglect of the women who actually engage more in food crop production.

African Feminist Theory

In one sense, there has always been a **feminist** perspective. Whenever and wherever women are subordinated, and they have been subordinated almost always everywhere, they seem to have recognized and protested that situation in some form (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). According to Barker (2004), feminism examines the position of women in society and tries to further their interests. In general terms, feminism asserts that sex is a fundamental and irreducible axis of social organization that, to date has subordinated women to men. This structural subordination of women has been described by feminists as patriarchy with its derivative meanings of the male-headed family, mastery and superiority.

Gender ideology also systematically flattens and distorts women's productive activities by (i) trivializing some of them (e.g. housework); (ii) idealizing to the point of not recognizing other activities (e.g. mothering); and (iii) making invisible other crucial work (women's multiple and vital contributions to the production of market place commodities). Unlike Marxists, they see the exploitation of women by men as the most important source of exploitation, rather than that of the working class by the ruling class. Many feminists characterize contemporary societies as patriarchal, that is they are dominated by men.

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. It is also not in conflict with traditionalism, but tries to point out to societies some of the inequities in the system and is involved in a struggle to reshape society for the good of all. Consequently, with regard to the land question and women's agricultural production 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 agricultural production and quality of life. It further asserts that women, though in subordinated position, are indeed indispensable as they have worked to sustain and recreate the society they live in.

Methods of the Study

The study involved the use of survey method to generate quantitative data, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to generate qualitative data. The study population was women in Ozalla community, Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State. With the population of women as 2,917 (1991 Population Census) and 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), approximately 20% or 800 women were chosen for this study, though 789 questionnaires were retrieved from the field.

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.

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. 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 later transcribed. Reports of some case studies showing events that have transcended years were also presented.

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 in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Findings and Discussion

In examining the land question and agricultural production in Ozalla community, three hypotheses were considered and presented below.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant 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 1: 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 2: 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	Part
(Constant)	4.651	.606		7.679	.000			
Hired the land	.306	.123	.165	2.479	.013	.109	.099	.062
received the land	.368	.119	.223	3.090	.002	.372	.123	.078
joint farming with husband	-1.833	.135	-.655	-13.621	.000	-.776	-.481	-.343

The result of the multiple regression analysis (Table 2) 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 3: Regression Coefficient Showing the Degree of Prediction in the Relationship Between Status to Land and Amount of Cassava Farmland Cultivated in Acres

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
(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 3) 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.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between women's status to land and farm income in relation to monthly expenses.

Table 4: Cross Tabulation Showing Women's Status to Land and Farm Income in Relation to Monthly Expenses

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 4) 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.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between status to inherited land and decision on choice of crops to cultivate.

Table 5: Cross Tabulation Showing Status to Inherited Land and Decision on Choice of Crops to Cultivate

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 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.

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 I ebe uku*", which means women cannot own property left behind by a deceased husband. 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.

This study also 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 showing challenges associated with the Land Question and Agricultural Production among Women in Ozalla Community

This case study involves 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 case study 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 findings from this study have revealed that many women in rural communities are into agriculture, especially food crop production. It is imperative that the women have facilities and are aware of improved farming techniques in order to boost their agricultural productivity, which will invariably ensure their being economically, empowered. Researchers and developmental workers have noted lately that the roles played by women in food production are significant and cannot be overlooked. They have noted that women engage in a lot of farming practices contrary to previous opinions held by them regarding women's involvement in farming activities.

Therefore, successful development must take into account women's roles as the principal providers of basic needs (fuel, water, health care, sanitation, and so on). For instance, although rural women in most of the developing world are the main food producers for their families, agricultural research and education programmes generally target cash crops grown by men (Tuyizere, 2007). This trend must change as emphasis on food crop production will help avert the food crisis currently been experienced.

Wrapped in the land question are not just economic concerns but also political, social, historical and cultural claims. Not surprisingly, disputes over land are often amongst the most bitter sources and forms of conflict in Africa. Although various aspects of the land question in Africa have been closely studied over time, it is only recently that there has emerged an increasing intellectual and activist concern with the gender dimensions of the issue, with particular reference to women's rights of access to this critical resource (Meer, 1997).

There must be a concerted effort to intensify women's land rights against the background of the fact that although, in most parts of Africa, women are active farmers,

their rights of ownership and control of land are circumscribed either by law, custom or religion, or a combination of all three. Efforts must also be made to address the plight of women because in the face of tradition, religion and the law, women are simply the passive victims of discriminatory and disempowering practices.

Lack of ownership of land by women retards development and contributes to poverty. Because land in most families belongs to the men, many women do not have security of tenure, as their tenure depends on the male access givers (Tripp, 2004). Invariably therefore, in the traditional African society, achieving sustainable development requires addressing inequality between men and women in the distribution of resources such as land.

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