GENDER GAP IN LAND RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN OKIGWE AGRICULTURAL ZONE, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Land is a vital resource for agricultural productivity and economic growth. Inequalities in access and rights to land by male and female farmers could hamper agricultural productivity. The study assessed the gender gap in land rights and access to agricultural production in Okigwe Agricultural Zone of Imo state, Nigeria. The study identified the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers in the study area; determined the farmer's access to land; ascertained the land rights of the farmers; determined the socio-economic factors influencing access to land in the study area. It was hypothesized that there were no significant differences in the access to land by male and female farmers. Ninety-six (96) male and female farmers were sampled, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, percentages, Ordinary Least Square Regression and t-test. Results showed that the mean farm size of male and female farmers was 0.2842 hectares and 0.1842 hectares. All male farmers had the right to land, while a few female farmers had the right to land. The result showed that age, income and education significantly affect male and female farmers' access to land and that there were significant gender gaps in access to land. The study recommended the provision of agricultural credits to enable farmers to acquire land for agricultural production.

Keywords: Gap, Gender, Land right, access, agriculture, production, growth

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INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector is critical for economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa, as it is a major source of food security and income (Wudil et al., 2022; Chidiebere-Mark et al., 2022). Most of the rural population is agrarian, and they depend on their agricultural production for their sustenance. Jayne et al. (2021) report that there is a high rate of agricultural production growth in SSA; however, this growth mostly depends on the expansion of cropped areas rather than

productivity growth. The low productivity in the agricultural sector has been recognized as the cause of increased poverty, food insecurity, and biodiversity loss in the region (Mukasa & Salami, 2015; Henri-Ukoha, 2013). The decline in agricultural productivity is attributed to several factors, including climate change, soil quality, low adoption of modern technologies, low input use, and access to credit and insurance markets (Bjornlund et al., 2020; Onyeneke et al., 2022; Chidiebere-Mark et al., 2018). The expansion of cropped areas has consequences for preserving the biodiversity of our forest. With the ensuing decline in agricultural productivity, there also exist gender disparities (gaps) in the ownership of resources, particularly land resources. However, an equal right to land presently under agricultural use may foster agricultural practices aimed at improving the quality of the soil and hence increasing productivity. Land is important in any agrarian society because of its economic and social importance (Bioye et al., 2006). It supports the agricultural production of farming households and provides food security and nutrition for rural farm families (Onyeneke et al., 2022). Land availability is significant for agricultural productivity in SSA, as most rural farmers depend on the availability of land for crop and livestock production.

Land access refers to the process by which people collectively or individually gain temporary rights and opportunities to use or occupy land for productive purposes, and also for other economic and social purposes temporarily (Cotula et al., 2006). Farmers gain access to cultivable land in various ways: through marriage, inheritance, rent, lease, or outright purchase. However, a farmer can have access to use land within a specific period for agricultural production but does not have legal rights and cannot make permanent decisions over the land. Land right refers to the "inalienable ability of individuals to freely obtain, utilize, and possess land at their discretion, as long as their activities on the land do not impede on other individuals' rights" (Adi, 2009: pp 16). The right to land supports the livelihood base of rural dwellers, and this impacts their willingness to utilize technology and value-added inputs for increased agricultural production.

In Nigeria, women are involved in 70 per cent of agricultural work, and they play a significant role in the value chain of food crops (FAO, n.d.). Despite the involvement of women in agricultural production, they have low control over agricultural productive resources, particularly land, compared to men (Onuwa, 2021; Bello et al., 2021). Many scholarly articles have

confirmed that there exists a gender gap in land rights and access in SSA countries and Nigeria in particular (Kang et al., 2021; Ghebru & Lambrecht, 2017; Bello et al., 2021).

Land rights and ownership of land are acquired by men and women in multiple ways, either by inheritance, community or State distribution of land, the land tenure system, or by the purchase of land. Land rights are enshrined in the constitutions of some countries in Africa, and the law may advocate for equal access to land; however, cultures may hinder an individual's right to own land (Landesa, 2012; Roe et al, 2022). In Nigeria, laws are important, however, they must be culturally, traditionally, and social acceptance. Cultural barriers and poverty traps limit poor farmers' ability to own land or make decisions concerning the use of land. In Nigeria, women seldom inherit the land and primarily obtain rights to land use through their husbands, and 90 per cent of land registrations are in the man's name (FAO UN, n.d.). In Nigeria, under the 1978 Land Use Act, men and women have equal access to and ownership rights over land. The Act, which is applicable nationwide, stipulates that the State government can grant statutory rights of occupancy for urban lands, while the Local government must grant customary rights of occupancy for rural lands. In Southeast Nigeria, dominated by the Igbo tribe, the customary laws and cultures inherent in the area favour men to inherit the land, as opposed to women who primarily access land through marriage. The Igbo custom of succession violates the equality rights of women, which are enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution (Emeasoba, 2020). However, the majority of rural communities are still patrilineal, so family lands are typically transferred to men.

Rights and access to land influence the economic opportunity and participation of male and female farmers in agricultural production in the study area. Even as nations are aiming to close the gender gap, there is a need for an in-depth investigation of the gender gaps that exist in rights and access to land for agricultural purposes. Given the foregoing, we investigated the gender gap in land rights and access in Okigwe Agricultural Zone, Imo State, Nigeria. The following specific objectives guided the study: describe the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers; determine their access to land by gender; ascertain the land rights of the farmers by gender; and to, determine the socio-economic factors that influence their access to land by gender.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in the Okigwe Agricultural Zone of Imo State, Nigeria. Imo State is located in the Southeast zone of Nigeria, and it is home to the Igbo tribe. Okigwe agricultural zone is made up of six Local Government Areas, i.e. Isiala Mbano, Ehime Mbano, Onuimo, Okigwe, Obowo and Ihitte Uboma Local Government Areas. Okigwe agricultural zone remains one of the food baskets of Nigeria with terrace cultivation practised on its hilly farmlands. The soil is predominantly partly red clay and black or dark brown. The major crops grown in the district on its hilly farmlands are palm trees, cassava, rice, and vegetables. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select farmers in Okigwe Agricultural Zone. First, a simple random technique method was used to select 3 Local Government Areas from Okigwe agricultural zone, comprising Ehime Mbano, Okigwe and Isiala Mbano Local Government Areas. Secondly, two communities were randomly chosen from each Local Government Area to give 6 communities. Thirdly, two villages were randomly selected from each community to give 12 villages. A list of ADP contact farmers was drawn from the ADP agricultural Zonal Offices in the Local Governments. This list was merged to form a sample frame, and from the sample frame, 8 farmers were randomly selected from each village to give a total of 96 farmers sampled. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, and a face-to-face interview was used to elicit information from the respondents, who could not read or write. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, percentages, Ordinary Least Square Regression, and the t-test.

The hypothesis was analyzed using Ordinary Least Square Regression and the model was stated explicitly as follows;

$$Y = b_o + b_1X_{1+} b_2X_{2+ b3}X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + b_6X_6 + e$$

where,

Y = Land access for agricultural production (size of land in ha)

X_1 = Age (years)

X_2 = Sex (dummy variable: male=1 female=0)

X_3 = Marital status (dummy variables, single=0, married=1, divorced=2, widowed=3)

X_4 = Income (Naira)

X_5 = Education (the number of years of schooling)

X_6 = Household size (number of persons)

e = error term, random variable

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of the farmers

The results of the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers are presented in Table 1. The distribution of the farmers showed that 54.2% of the male farmers and also 54.2% of the female farmers were within the age range of 60-79 years and 40-59 years respectively. The mean age for male farmers was 59 years, which signifies an ageing population of male farmers, and the mean age of female farmers was 49 years, which signifies an active age. An ageing population may have negative implications for agricultural productivity; however, more aged males in Igbo land are expected to own land which they inherit from their fathers. The findings is in line with the results of Azubike et al (2016), who reported that the majority of female farmers in Enugu State, South East Nigeria were their active age. The findings showed that 85.4% of male farmers and 77.1% of female farmers were married. This suggests more family labour is available to work on the farms. The result also showed that the mean number of years spent in school for male farmers were 11 years while that of female farmers was 12 years. The mean monthly income of the male farmers was ₦53,833 and female farmers were ₦53,812. The results also showed that the mean household size of male farmers was 5 persons while that of female farmers was 4 persons. The result is consistent with Ejiogu et al., (2021) who reported a mean household size of 6 persons in South East Nigeria.

Access to Land

The result of the distribution of farmers by access to land is presented in Table 2, and discussed according to the type of access and size of land. The results showed that 65.5% of male farmers had access to cultivable land by inheritance, and 75% of female farmers had access to cultivable

land by marriage. This implies that most female farmers get access to land through marriage. Udoh et al., (2020) opined that following customary law, where men are regarded as the head of the household, women do not enjoy equal land rights. The findings further showed that the mean land holding for the male farmers was 0.2842 Ha and the mean for female farmers was 0.1842 Ha. Though the average land holdings were less than 1 Ha, the male farmers had a larger land holding than the female farmers.

Land rights

The right to land is presented and discussed according to right to land, type of land right and farm size. The results as presented in Table 3 showed that 100% of male farmers had the right of ownership, while only 22.9% of female farmers had the right of ownership. This signifies that the male farmer had more rights to farmland than their female counterpart. The findings showed that 62.5% of male farmers had the right to cultivable land by inheritance, and 77.1% of female farmers had the right to cultivable land by marriage. This implies that the female farmers had less right to cultivable land while the male farmers had more rights. Women's right to land by marriage is limited in the study area, as they can only decide on what to cultivate on the land, but cannot make major decisions concerning the land use, for example erecting buildings or sell of the land. The findings showed that 56.3% of male farmers' size of land was within the range of 0.21-0.40 Ha and 62.5% of female farmers' size land was within the range of 0.01-0.20 Ha, the mean size of the land of male farmers was 0.3 Ha and the mean size of the land of female farmers was 0.2 Ha.

The resulting hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the access to land by gender in the assessment of the gender gap in land right and access for agricultural production in Okigwe agricultural zone, Imo state, Nigeria was tested and the result is presented in Table 4. The t-test was 5.294 and significant at the 1% level. This result suggests that there was a significant difference in the access to the land of male farmers compare to access to the land of female farmers. This implies that male farmers have more access to land and probably higher farm size (hectare) than females.

Socio-economic factors that influence access to land

The result of the socio-economic factors that influence farmer access to land by gender is presented in Table 5. The result showed that the exponential form was the lead function because it had the highest no of significance variables, the highest R^2 value of 0.413 and an F-value of 10.418 that was significant at 1%. The value of the F-ratio signifies the regression of good fit. The coefficient of multiple determination of 0.413 indicates that about 41% of the variation in land access was explained by the explanatory variables in the model. From the result of the regression analysis, the coefficient for sex, income and education were significantly positive to land access. The coefficient of sex was significant at 1% and had a positive sign. This implies that male farmers have greater access to land than female farmers. A high percentage of men have access to land by inheritance than the female yet women make significant contributions in agricultural production, food security and economic growth. Acord *et al.,* (2012) assert that in most African countries, customary laws and practices on land use, management, and transfer discriminate against women.

The coefficient of income was significant at 5% and had a positive sign. This implies that the farmers' income influenced their access to land. This means that farmers with higher incomes would have more access to cultivable land. Women, with lower income than men are disadvantaged, as they may not be able to purchase land. This is consistent with the opinion of Henri-Ukoha et al., (2014) who affirm that the higher the level of the farmer's income, the larger the landholding accessed. The result further shows that the coefficient for education was significant at 5% and had a positive sign. This implies that education as a factor influences farmers' access to land. This means that farmers who are educated have other non-farm livelihood activities engaged in to earn more income, which may be invested in purchasing land.

Therefore the Hypotheses which state that the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers do not significantly influence their access to land were rejected for sex, income and education and were accepted for age, marital status and household size.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study shows that the majority of male and female farmers were married and that the male farmers had access to land through inheritance while the female farmers had access to land through marriage. Age, income and education significantly influenced access to land by gender and the result from the t-test in the study area, showed that there were significant differences in the access to land by gender. It is suggested that the male farmers have more access to land and therefore had more farm size compared to their female counterparts. Orientation about land right and access should be conducted for the farmer by extension agent for a better understanding of land right, land access and its benefit to agricultural production.

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APPENDICES

Table 1: Distribution of farmers by socio-economic characteristics

	Male		Female	
Variables	**Max. %**	**Mean**	**Max. %**	**Mean**
Age	54.2% (60-79yrs)	59years	54.2% (40-59yrs)	49years
Marital Status	85.4% (married)	-	77.1% (married)	-
Education	70.8% (7-12)	11	54.2% (7-12)	12
Other occupation	56.3% (Traders)	-	60.4% (Traders)	-
Income	47.9% (<₦40,000)	₦53,833	58.3% (<₦40,000)	₦53,812
Household size	75% (4-7)	5	52.1% (4-7)	4

Table 2. Distribution of farmers based on access to land

	MALE		FEMALE	
Access to land	**Max. %**	**Mean**	**Max. %**	**Mean**
Type of access	62.5% (Inheritance)	-	75% (Marriage)	-
Size of land	54.2% (0.21-0.40ha)	0.2842ha	60.5% (0.01-0.20ha)	0.1842ha

Table 3. Distribution of farmers based on land right

	Male		Female	
Variables	**Max. %**	**Mean**	**Max. %**	**Mean**
Right of ownership	100% (Yes)	-	22.9.1% (Yes)	-
Type of land right	62.5% (Inheritance)	-	77.1% (No right)	-
Farm size	56.3% (0.21-0.40ha)	0.3ha	62.5% (0.01-0.40ha)	0.2ha

Table 4. T-test result of the difference in the Access to Land

Source of variance	Mean	d.f	Std dev	T-test	P value
Male Access to land	.2890	-	.12052		
Female Access to land	.1825	-	.06787		
Access to the land of male and female	.10646	47	.13932	5.294***	.000

Table 5. Socio-economic factors influencing access to land

Variables	Linear	Exponential	Double log	Semi Log
Constant	.016	-2.750	-4.310	-274
	(-.213)	(-9.923***)	(-5.094***)	(-1.237)
Age	.001	.006	.220	.019
	(.870)	(1.611)	(1.106)	(.364)
Sex	.098	.407	.412	.101
	(4.744***)	(5.153***)	(5.324***)	(4.976***)
Marital status	.019	.117	.020	.000
	(.530)	(.866)	(.137)	(.009)
Income	2.636E-007	1.444E-006	.096	.022
	(1.640)	(2.358**)	(2.717***)	(2.381**)
Education	.006	.026	.186	.039
	(1.903)	(2.107**)	(1.412)	(1.145)
Household size	.011	.036	.157	.042
	(1.711)	(1.529)	(1.514)	(1.562)
R^2	.341	.413	.525	.358
F-ratio	7.670***	10.418***	16.416***	8.287***

*** Significant at the 1% level; **Significant at 5% level