

“As a Husband I Will Love, Lead, and Provide.” Gendered Access to Land in Ghana

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Summary. — Improving women’s access to land is high on the agricultural policy agenda of both governmental and non-governmental agencies. Yet, the determinants and rationale of gendered access to land are not well understood. This paper argues that gender relations are more than the outcomes of negotiations within households. It explains the importance of social norms, perceptions, and formal and informal rules shaping access to land for male and female farmers at four levels: (1) the household/family, (2) the community, (3) the state, and (4) the market. The framework is applied to Ghana, using the results from qualitative field work. Norms on household and family organization and on men’s and women’s responsibilities and capabilities play a key role in gendered allocation of resources. However, these norms and perceptions are dynamic and evolve jointly with the development of markets and changes in values of inputs such as labor and land. Theoretical models that represent the gendered distribution of assets as the result of intrahousehold bargaining should be revised, and extrahousehold factors should be included. From a policy perspective, laws that ensure gender equality in terms of inheritance and a more gender-equitable distribution of property upon divorce can play a key role in improving women’s property rights. Yet, their impact may be limited where customary rights dominate and social norms and rules continue to discriminate according to gender.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In most African countries, women own considerably less land and have less access to land than men (Doss, Kovarik, Peterman, Quisumbing, & van den Bold, 2015). Improving women’s secure access to land is considered to be a critical factor in achieving more gender equality. Research shows that it can increase female decision-making power in the household (Allendorf, 2007; Doss, 2013; Mishra & Sam, 2016; Panda & Agarwal, 2005), which in turn improves female, child, and household welfare (Doss, 2005; Fafchamps, 2001; Menon, Van der Meulen Rodgers, & Nguyen, 2014). It is also seen as a major opportunity to increase agricultural productivity (Goldstein & Udry, 2008; Holden & Bezabih, 2009). Encouraged by these messages, researchers, policymakers, and development agencies are urgently seeking appropriate ways to enhance female land ownership.

Qualitative and quantitative research on gender increasingly moves away from the household as a single decision-making unit and, instead, analyzes detailed information from individuals within the household. A substantial body of research is now developing that employs different intrahousehold models to understand how women’s access to land can be improved. It also estimates the impact of more secure access to land for women. Although this research has provided a wealth of information, most scholars and practitioners also agree that gender is essentially a social construct, which is established beyond the boundaries of individual households (Agarwal, 1997; Kevane & Gray, 1999; Meinzen-Dick, Brown, Feldstein, & Quisumbing, 1997). Rather than through differences in preferences or power between men and women, the observed gender-related patterns may be explained by differences in men’s and women’s positions created through existing social norms (Kazianga & Wahhaj, 2013). Yet, the principal role that social norms play in shaping men’s and women’s land rights is still absent in many studies. Where they are recognized, gender

norms are mostly taken as given or seen as static, rather than as dynamic social constructs.

This paper focuses specifically on gendered norms, rules, and perceptions that influence access to land in four main domains: household/family, community, state, and market. Understanding why societies and communities prioritize men’s or women’s access to land will also aid in detecting pathways of success or failure of past and future interventions and will provide further insights into gender impacts of society dynamics, such as the individualization and commoditization of land, urbanization, and so forth. According to Agarwal (1997, p. 2), “Models and policies could go awry if intra-household dynamics are assumed (as they often are) to exist in isolation, without examining the extra-household socio-economic and legal institutions within which households are embedded, and how these institutions might themselves be subject to change”.

In this paper, the theoretical framework is applied to Ghana, where there are substantial gender differences in access to land. In terms of ownership, 9.8% of agricultural parcels in Ghana are owned by an individual female farmer,

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compared to 83.1% owned by an individual male farmer (Deere, Oduro, Swaminathan, & Doss, 2013). Yet, these numbers differ strongly across the country. The country's diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, agroecology, and input and output markets provides an interesting case study context. The paper is structured as follows: The research approach is discussed in Section 2. Section 3 explains the key elements of the framework. A general background on gender and land tenure in Ghana is provided in Section 4. Section 5 applies the framework to Ghana. Section 6 offers a reflection on the findings. Section 7 concludes.

2. RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

This paper is based on a review of the existing literature on gendered access to land and qualitative data collected by the author in rural and peri-urban communities in Ghana. Qualitative research was conducted from February to August 2015 using key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

A first set of semi-structured, gender-separated interviews were held with the customary chief, individual male and female farm household members of respectively two monogamous male-headed households, a polygamous male-headed household and a single female-headed household in a community in West Akim (Eastern Region) (Figure 1). The aim of these interviews was primarily to develop a basic understanding of gendered pathways in access to land which would help in improving the guidelines for the focus group discussions and interviews with customary chiefs. No further interviews were conducted with individual smallholder farmers.

Gender-separated focus group discussions on land tenure and gender were held with 56 groups of 8–15 participants in seven different regions in Ghana (Figure 1). Focus group discussions were organized in two thematic sessions, which partly overlapped. The starting point of the first session was understanding the local land tenure system, after which we inquired on gender differences in access to land and the reasons for these differences. The starting point of the second session was gendered norms and practices in the community, after which we would specifically focus on differences in access to land. As fieldwork advanced, the guideline for each session was adjusted to accommodate further points of interest. Each session lasted from 1.5 h to a maximum of 2.0 h.

A maximum of four gender-separated group discussions were held in each community. Care was taken to conduct interviews in the different agroecological zones with a diversity of ethnic groups in both remote and more urbanized communities. Where possible, more than one community was visited for each district. A few locations were chosen based on their proximity to case study sites of previous empirical work on land tenure and gender (Bibiani and Akuapim North respectively for Quisumbing, Payongayong, Aidoo, and Otsuka (2001) and Goldstein and Udry (2008)).

In addition, the author also discussed tenure issues with a queen mother from the Central Region and interviewed customary chiefs in the Volta Region, Upper West Region, and Upper East Region. Land commissioners in Accra, Ho (Volta Region), and Tamale (Northern Region) and a representative of the Civil Society Coalition on Land (CICOL) were also interviewed. Section 6 contains a finding from group discussions in September 2015 for another study on non-farm enterprises in a peri-urban community in the Eastern Region. This was included due to its high relevance for the discussion on land in Section 6.

A few key summary statistics for this paper are calculated based on the sixth round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 6). The Ghana Statistical Service collected these nationally representative data from October 2012 to October 2013.

3. A CONCEPTUAL, CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK OF GENDERED ACCESS TO LAND

Individuals decide on access to and use of land either alone or as part of a group of decisionmakers (Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 1997). These individuals are commonly (1) members of households and families, (2) members of one or several communities, (3) residents in a country, and (4) people whose livelihoods are generated in the presence or absence of markets. The domains are not mutually exclusive; instead, they overlap and interact, affecting each other and the persons within (Figure 2). It is in these four domains that rural men and women bargain for access to farmland (Lastarria-Cornhiel, Behrman, Meinzen-Dick, & Quisumbing, 2014). Gendered perceptions, norms, and formal and informal rules in these four domains result in different access to land for men and women (Agarwal, 1997; Deere & Doss, 2006; Deere & Leon, 2003; Rao, 2006).

(a) *Men and women as household and family members*

The household is recognized as a legal or social entity by communities and by governmental and nongovernmental institutions throughout the world. Who exactly forms a household differs across time and location, but in all of its forms, household members are assumed to work together to produce their livelihoods (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2015). To a greater or lesser degree, the household is an area of joint consumption, production, and investment in which both labor and resource allocation decisions are made (Agarwal, 1997).

In many households, an individual's access to or use of land is not determined independently of other household members (Mishra & Sam, 2016). Instead, access to and use of land by one household member also affects other household members in terms of access to land, labor, and other resources (Kevane & Gray, 1999). Hence, individuals may have to bargain with other household members for access to land held within their household, or they may have to seek consent from other household members in order to acquire land outside the household.

The family¹ constitutes another basic structure that is customarily and statutorily recognized throughout the world. A family typically consists of individuals of different generations related through kinship and lineage. Who is considered to be a family member is subject to local norms and definitions. Certain events, such as marriage, divorce, or disputes, may cause individuals to be excluded from one family or become included in another family. Household members within the same household may or may not belong to the same family.

In many societies, land is perceived as a family, lineage, or community resource rather than as a household or individual resource (Rao, 2006). Even when farmers do not have outright ownership of land through inheritance or gifts from family or community members, farmers can access land for shorter or longer durations through cultivation rights on family land in the form of communal tenure. With communal tenure, individual members are allocated a specific parcel on which they have temporary or permanent use or transfer rights (Lambrecht & Asare, 2016). Women and men rarely have

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