

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Land Crisis and Poverty of Farmers in the North Central Zone of Nigeria

Ukwuteno, S.O., O.J. Saliu and Audu S.I

Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria

Ukwuteno, S.O., O.J. Saliu and Audu S.I: Land Crisis and Poverty of Farmers in the North Central Zone of Nigeria, *Am.-Eurasian J. Sustain. Agric.*, 3(3): 340-343, 2009

ABSTRACT

A survey to evaluate land crisis and poverty of Nigerian Farmers was understudied using Ibaji Local Government Area in the North Central Zone as a reference point. A sample of one hundred and twenty (120) respondents made up of farmers (literate, illiterate and leaders) were selected from four villages, viz: Enweli, Iyano, Odeke and Uchuchu. The farmers were interviewed with structured questionnaire and oral interviews. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Since the objective of the study was to assess the effect of land crisis on poverty level of farmers in rural Nigeria, the study observed that land was being made artificially scarce and production process has been hampered. For example, while average household income per year was only ₦50, 500.78, the approximate average cost of land crisis per house hold per year is ₦233, 333.19. This coupled with lack of access roads has further worsened poverty situation of the farmers. Leaderships of the Area have also aggravated the situation; for rather than help to solve problems support unnecessary litigations in law courts which increase poverty of farmers in the area. Of the total cases in court, land crisis constitute about 42%. This has further endanger cordiality of farmers. It is recommended that urgent measures be taken to construct all season access roads to enable farmers evaluate their produce to markets. While out of court settlement should be encouraged.

Key words: *Land ownership, Land crisis, Poverty and rural farmers.*

Introduction

The economies of all countries, no matter their level of development depend on land, for no economies exist without the exploitation of land directly or indirectly in one form or another. Famoriyo (1979), observed that the direct exploitation is even more in Nigeria where at least 70 – 80 percent of the working population rely on agriculture for their livelihood. The importance of land and indeed agriculture in alleviating poverty cannot be over-emphasized.

The third National Development Plan (1975 – 1980), shows that Nigeria has a total land area of 98.3 million hectares. There was a total cultivable land of 71.2 million hectares. Of this, 34 million hectares, about one-third was under cultivation of crops. This means that less than half of cultivable land was actually being cultivated. Presently, uncultivated land can still be found lying waste in Nigeria Partly due to manner of land ownership in Nigeria.

Famoriyo (1981), observed that Nigeria is made up of hundreds of ethnic groups. Ownership of land depends on being a member of land owning community. Since there is no Nigerian who does not associate with a group, he argued, it follows, at least in theory that there should be no landless Nigerian. He noted that it would be right to say that “there is no land in Nigeria without owner”. One cannot but agree with this assertion particularly with regards to agricultural land.

Barlowe (1978), noted that the traditional concept of free simple ownership under which owners were free to use and abuse their property with little regards for others is now out of place. The old doctrine of *laissez faire* is giving way to a doctrine of *savoir faire*. Individual owners in using their property must consider the impact of their action upon others and upon society in general.

Corresponding Author: Ukwuteno, S.O., Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria
E-mail: josaliu@yahoo.com, Tel: 08064465597

The concept of land crisis may be described as the relentless struggle by people to take possession of land through claims and counter claims over ownership rights in land including the use of force for its occupation and use or control (Ukwuteno, 1994, 2002). The phenomenon is a complex one and it marks the turning point in time of difficulty expressed in anticipated future. It is a dimension of more serious magnitude than just land dispute. In Ibaji Local Government Area (L.G.A.), land crisis has impoverished many farmers.

Poverty is the state of being poor (Hornby, 1995). Macaver and Banta (2000), Sen (1983) defined poverty as lack of basic opportunities of material well-being and failure to attain a certain minimum capacity. Poverty they noted is conventionally measured by income or expenditure level that can sustain a bare minimum standard of living such as access of food needs, education, decent shelter, health care and clean portable water supply.

The condition of our rural farmers is being worsening by crisis on land particularly farmers in Ibaji L.G.A. It has contributed to poor access to usufructuary rights in land. This coupled with poor incentive as the policy of the “haves” helping the “have-nots” has virtually disappeared.

This situation becomes pathetic when issues like improve farm technology adoption which goes with intensive and extensive use of land to boost production are imagined to receive the attention of farmers. Farmers in the area of study can neither increase their farm production through increase in farm size nor invest their little income on improved farm technology but spend beyond their average income to manage land crisis. The end result is small farm size, low yield and consequently level of poverty is aggravated.

One may then ask; can the economic losses due to land crisis be estimated? How has land crisis been managed by the rural communities in the study area? Are there remedies to land crisis? Can litigation put an end to land crisis? To address these research questions, bearing in mind the broad objective which is to analyse land crisis and poverty of farmers in the North Central Zone of Nigeria, this study therefore put forward the following specific objectives;

1. to estimate the economics losses of farmers who suffer from land crisis
2. to determine the role of judiciary in the management of land crisis and poverty
3. to find out the effect of environmental degradation on land availability for farming
4. suggest ways of ameliorating land crisis in Nigeria

Materials and methods

Ibaji Local Government Area of Kogi State is a typical rural setting. It is an area where access road is seasonal. Geographically, Ibaji L.G.A is located between Latitudes 6.5⁰N and 7.0⁰N and Longitudes 6.5⁰E and 7.0⁰E of North Central Zone of Nigeria. Ibaji L.G.A is along the Eastern bank of River Niger. In the area, 80 – 90% of the population are farmers. The area produces about 40% of the food crop requirement of Kogi State of Nigeria. Unfortunately farmers in the area have continued to remain poor. This typical nature was responsible for why Ibaji Local Government was picked as a reference point for the study.

The study used survey method based on oral interview and administration of structured questionnaire. A total of 120 respondents consisting of 30 respondents from each village, viz: Enweli, Iyano, Odeke and Uchuchu were interviewed respectively.

The selection of the villages was based on their historical background and evidence of land crisis in the area. Based on this criterion, the area was stratified according to wards in the area and the selection of the villages was purposive. The selection of the respondents however, was random. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results and discussion

The poverty situation in Ibaji Local Government is caused by the fact that in due season traders buy up their farm produce at a very cheap rate only to impoverish the farmers. As a matter of fact, up to now there exists what is considered as “hungry gap” between March and August on a yearly basis.

The level of poverty is worsened where there is land crisis either on individual basis or of a communal dimension. This is because where land crisis has resulted in dispute, series of litigations and/or skirmishes often follow, thus making them to spend more than their average household earnings. Table 1 below may serve to illustrate the point.

Table 1 above shows the average income and average cost of crisis.

Considering the costs associated with land crisis and average income of the farmers in the area, it is obvious that the crisis could be having adverse effects on the inhabitants. This will entail some adverse consequences on the living conditions of the people. In Odeke for instance, where average income is only ₦9, 763. 68, the average cost of crisis is ₦130, 728. 09 per household while the per capita income is only ₦836.89. Apart from managing the crisis, he has to manage his family as well.

The Role of the Judiciary in Land Crisis and Poverty of Nigeria Farmers:

In the survey conducted, there was substantial evidence that people actually take land cases to court. Table 2 below shows a summary of average number of cases per month in some courts and how many are land cases.

Resolving issues in dispute to the satisfaction of both parties has been the case in point. The study revealed that the High Court of Justice, Idah had a total of 472 land cases on appeal between 1996 and May 2002. A breakdown showed that 240 (or 50.85%) of the decisions were upheld while 232 (or 49.15%) decisions were reversed. This leaves doubt as to the credibility of lower courts in handling land cases.

Although in deciding land cases, the court relies on facts in evidence before it, what constitutes facts in evidence are matters of opinion. In other words, sometimes facts in evidence may not be real facts due to possible connivance. The study also revealed that communal land dispute matters are not easily settled in court. Settlement it was noted, actually lies in the desire by the parties to the dispute for settlement and lasting peace. The fact is that court decisions in some cases may be influenced by the use of money particularly in land cases with the law enforcement agents having favourable disposition to the highest bidder.

The Environmental Degradation and Poverty of Nigeria Farmers:

Ibaji area of the state is water-logged environment in that most parts of the area is covered with water during rainy season. This has subjected the farmers in the area to severe environmental hazards such as severe erosion, severe annual flooding that sometimes leads to displacement of the inhabitants of the area, abrasion, splashes and landslide. Abrasion and landslide have posed serious environmental danger to the extent that even farm lands are being devastated, cut and washed into the River Niger. The erosion has caused severe loss of soil since there is no land conservation being embarked upon, the environmental soil loss has seriously affected farming activities.

Despite the disabilities suffered by the farmers, government at whatever levels seem to take no notice of the events or plight of the farmers. For instance, two villages, Odochala and Ojala have been cut and washed into the River Niger without government at whatever levels, local, state or federal coming to their aid. This is a mere tip of ice-berg of disability suffered by the farmers in the area. Where there is a deposit of alluvial soil, it becomes a potential source of land crisis. The summary of the environmental hazards and losses suffered by farmers of the area is presented in table 3 below:

Property include economic Trees and Tree Crops and Houses*

The supply of inputs such as fertilizer, improved seeds and technology to the area has been poor. Most often human labour has been the only source of labour supply. Agricultural mechanization cannot even be considered since there are no mechanical tools. The extension services are poor. The only available extension service is that offered by the Catholic Diocese of Idah, a non-governmental organization.

It is actually a great sight to see the farmers during the period of "hungry gap". In other words, there has been over exploitation of the farmers of the area. Poverty alleviation which could have taken a more practical steps to alleviate the poverty of farmers in the area, land crisis may not even allow it to succeed.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Land crisis is a phenomenon which has in recent years become a source of worry to agricultural productivity in Nigeria and has adversely increased poverty of Nigerian farmers. Poverty is a form of disease which kills while one is still alive. Since land crisis can and in fact aggravate poverty in our society, it is only reasonable that policy makers and administrators make policies that alleviate the suffering of Nigerian farmers. Even poverty alleviation currently being implemented is yet to have effect on Nigerian farmers. This is because the administration has been poor.

It is recommended that:

- i. Government should take urgent measures of constructing all season access roads to enable farmers evacuate their produce to market.
- ii. Land crisis can be avoided if leaders trace the path of truth in land dispute matters. In other words, exchange of money for truth will further worsen the poverty situation of Nigerian farmers.
- iii. Where land crisis exist dialogue should be the alternative to litigation to promote lasting peace.

- iv Government should find better methods of distributing inputs to rural farmers. This can be done by government making them available in rural areas in adequate amount and at affordable prices to shield farmers from the exploitation by few rich ones.
- v. Development projects should be spread evenly rather than concentrating them in one geographical location so that citizens can feel a sense of oneness.

Table 1: Comparison of Average Income with Approximate Average Costs Associated with Land Crisis Per Household Per Year.

Location:	Sample Size	Average Income (₦)/Household/ Year	Approximate Average Cost of Crisis (₦)/ Household/Year	Per Capita Income (₦)
Enweli	30	13, 125.40	35, 238.13	1,193.22
Iyano	30	13, 260.70	36, 877.88	1, 156.70
Odeke	30	9, 763.68	130, 728.09	836.89
Uchuchu	30	14, 351.00	30, 489.06	1, 439.74
Total	120	50, 500.78	233, 333.19	4, 626.55

Source: *Field Survey, 2005***Table 2:** Summary of Cases Taken to Court, 1996 to May, 2002.

Location and Designation of Court	Average Number of Cases in Court/ Month	Land matters	Percentage (%)
High Court of Justice, Idah	32	23	71.88
Chief Magt.'s Court, Idah	30	6	20.00
Upper Area Court, Idah	40	15	37.50
Upper Area Court, Onyedega	12	4	33.33
Total	114	48	42.11

Source: *Field Survey, 2005***Table 3:** Summary of Environmental Hazard and Average Value of Loss Suffered in (₦).

Nature of Hazards	Average Value of Loss Crop (₦)	Property*
Annual flooding	50, 140.54	302, 185.00
Land slide	58, 107.67	3, 611, 326.00
Erosion	9, 105.75	-
Total	117353.96	3913511.00

Source: *Field Survey, 2005*

References

- Barlowe, R., 1978. *Land Resource Economics*. The Economics of Real Estate. (Third Edition). Prentice Hall, Inc: Eagle Wood Cliff New Jersey.
- Famoriyo, S., 1979. Private and Public Ownership of Land in Nigeria (in Nigeria Journal of Political Science, 2979 1(1): 7-19.
- Famoriyo, S., 1981. Socio-Economic Analysis of Land Use Act (No. 6) of 1978: I.A.R., Zaria Bibliography.
- Honrby, A.S., 1995. *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (Fifth Edition). Jonathan Crowther (Ed). Oxford University Press.
- Macaver, O.J. and Banta, A.L., 2000. Framework for Measurement of Poverty: The Building Block for Sustainable Development Programming in Nigeria in Nigeria Journal of Rural Economy and Society., 2(1): 7-10.
- Sen A.K., 1983. *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Clarendon Press Oxford. United Kingdom.
- Third National Development Plan (1975-1980) Chapter 6.
- Ukwuteno, S.O., 1994. Agricultural Land Crisis in Nigeria: A Case Study of Idah Local Government Area of Kogi State. M.Sc. Thesis Department of Agric. Econs and Rural Sociology, A.B.U. Zaria.
- Ukwuteno, S.O., 2002. The Impact of Land Crisis on Agricultural Development and Land Use Policy in Idah Local Government Area of Kogi State, in Savanna Journal of Science and Agriculture. 1: 1.