

Full Length Research Paper

The effect of land tenure system on women's knowledge-base and resource management in Manjiya County, Uganda

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This study examines the status of women in relationship to land ownership, the resources they are exposed to and management practices, consequently its effect on the environment of Manjiya County, Mbale District in (now Manafwa since 2008) Uganda. It was found out that low levels of education limit women's abilities of creativity and innovativeness to work on the land sustainably. They lack access to land and family property making it difficult for them to hire casual labour, to make long term investment in land conservation, such as terracing the hillsides and other good farming practices on the hill slopes. This has resulted in high rate of land degradation as a result of soil erosion and landslides. There is need to empower women through education to enable them accept and use family planning practices to reduce the high fertility (7.1), adopt modern farming practices, as well as improving their opportunity to get formal employment.

Key word: Land tenure system, women's access to household property, women's resource base knowledge, resource management

INTRODUCTION

Land is the most valuable form of property in agrarian societies because of its economic, political symbolic and ritual importance. It is the basis of political power and social status in most societies of the world. It is a productive wealth-creating and life sustaining asset which every human being craves for and provides a sense of identity and rootedness within a community (Argawal, 1994). Land is used for production of biomass, ensuring food, fodder, renewable energy and raw materials for existence of human and animal life. It is a base for settlement and industrial use and a store of our cultural heritage and is actually a source of raw materials like minerals, clay, energy, water etc. (Blum, 1998). Land stands for continuity of ownership since it is a burial ground where all clansmen are buried and consequently a central place for the spirits of their ancestors for example African societies.

The concept resource refers to the physical wealth, such as the family property like land, mental resources like confidence in one's ability to solve problems of life, courage, creativity, knowledge, skills, stamina to make sustained effort, interpersonal strategies and powers of

decision making. Resource management, in this context means the way resources mentioned above are utilized by people in a unit area sustainably for their survival and conserved for the future generation. It means the way people use their mental competences to make decisions about resources they are exposed to maintain families as they develop the region.

The paper examines the status of women in relationship to land ownership, the resources they are exposed to and management practices in Manjiya County, a rich, volcanic, mountainous region of Mbale district (now in Manafwa District) Eastern Uganda.

Land rights and land ownership in Africa

Land rights can be defined here as claims that are legally and socially recognized and enforceable by an external legitimized authority (Argawal, 1994).

Rights in land are of various forms in Uganda:

i.) Ownership or rights of use associated with differing degrees of freedom to lease out mortgage or sell.

- ii.) Land rights through inheritance for an individual or on a joint family basis.
- iii.) One can also have a right to community land if he/she is a member of a clan or tribe like the pastoral societies in East Africa.
- iv.) Rights may be temporary and conditional depending on the location of the person's residence.

Access to land can be through right of ownership, through informal concessions granted by individuals to kin or friends. For example a man allows his sister to use a part of his land out of goodwill and this is not a right. Legal ownership is normally accompanied by legal restrictions on disposal, that is, there is no effective control here. In most African societies women have land use priorities from husbands but have no independent rights which allow them control or produce from the land.

The direct advantage of land rights are that a woman can use it to grow food crops, fodder for animals, keeping livestock, practicing sericulture, growing trees and vegetable gardening. Land rights facilitate access to credit and strengthen support the women receive from relatives. Access to land means reliable food supply, better health-care, better housing and reliable income in most cases.

Population pressure and resource management in rural areas of Africa

In some developing countries, population growth is putting pressure on farmland which has led to a reduction in land available for agriculture and non-agricultural uses threatening the livelihood of mankind. This requires farmers to use appropriate methods of cultivation, necessary inputs to sustain agriculture, by use of fertilizers, manure, compost, make terraces and bunds on hill slides. Sustainability here means "meeting basic human needs while maintaining ecological processes and life support systems, supporting genetic systems, preserving genetic diversity and ensuring sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems" (D'Souza and Gebremedhim, 1998). Areas with high population growth rate 3.5% per year in Uganda as a whole, over the fixed land resource has led to population pressure, leading to over cultivation and encroachment on marginal lands such as steep slopes and forested lands. Lack of women's access and control over household resources often limits their ability to act effectively and practice what they feel is valuable in sustaining their environment.

Context of Manjiya

Location of Manjiya County is between Latitudes, 1° and 1.01° North and Longitudes 34,41' and 34,31'W. The total land area of Manjiya is 292.8 Sq. km which is 19.8% of Mbale District. The district is mountainous and at a

height of 4010 ft above sea level at its peak with steep slopes and relatively narrow valleys between the hills. The people have settled on the hill slopes right up to 3500 ft on the slopes of mountains and above. According to the 2001 National Housing and Population census, the population of Manjiya is 124,282 people. Population growth rate is between 3 - 3.5%. The males are 63,301 and females are 60,981. The fertility rate is 6.7 and population density is one of the highest in the country, which are 600 persons per square kilometer in some parts of the county. High population is partly explained by the fact that the cold conditions are not conducive to tropical diseases like malaria, sleeping sickness, worms and partly to lack of access to family planning facilities as well as high levels of mortality rates, and the need for children to provide labour for domestic work, that is, cultivation and looking after animals etc. The population of Manjiya was drastically increased when Mt. Elgon became gazetted National Forest Reserve forcing people to move down to lower slopes. This explains the severe shortage of land, the high rate of environment degradation and land disputes. Mbale district especially Manjiya County is predominantly settled by the Bagishu ethnic Bantu speaking people. The Bagishu are a patrilineal society where women are dominated by men and access to family property is practically limited.

Manjiya has one central government road running round the sub-counties of Bushala, Bukigani and Bushika. There are several feeder roads leading to the lower slopes, especially to schools and other government institutions. Otherwise the rest of the county is inaccessible; bridges are temporarily and usually swept away during the rain season. The majority of people use foot paths on the steep slopes, making movement difficult.

Statement of the problem

Manjiya County in Mbale (Manafwa) district faces dangers of landslides every rainy season. The population density of 600 persons per square kilometer is one of the highest in rural Uganda. Although the county has one of the richest soils in Uganda, land degradation is on the increase and agricultural productivity is declining as well. However the women who work on the land do not seem to have enough environment knowledge essential for the conservation of this fragile area of Manjiya County. It is not clear whether lack of access to household property including land affects the way women work the land or it is lack of basic knowledge essential for the conservation of the environment. The researcher was interested in finding out the relationship between land ownership, women's access to property and knowledge of resource management and sustainability of the resources in the area.

Purpose: The main purpose of the study was to establish women's status with regard to land ownership and their ability to use the land resources sustainably in the male dominated society of Manjiya County.

Objectives

- i.) Identify the dominant land tenure system.
- ii.) Describe women's access to household property including land.
- iii.) Establish women's knowledge base and resource management practices.
- iv.) Identify consequences of land tenure system on knowledge base and on resource management practices in Manjiya County.

Research questions

The following research questions were developed to guide the study.

- i.) What is the dominant land tenure system in Manjiya county Mbale district?
- ii.) How accessible is household property to women in Manjiya area?
- iii.) What are the dominant resources management practices used by women?
- iv.) What are the consequences of land tenure system on knowledge base and resource management practices on the environment of Manjiya?

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used qualitative approach to gather data from households and local authorities. Two sub-counties of Manjiya County were used in this study, Bushika and Bukigai. A total of 10 households and a total of 60 people participated in the study between 2002 - 2004 during both the rainy and dry seasons. The researcher used four main methods of qualitative data collection, focus groups discussions, document analysis, interviews with extension officers (ten in number) and observations in the homesteads and fields. Data was analyzed under selected themes developed after data collection which were the land tenure system, women's access to household property, resource management practices, consequences of land tenure of land tenure system on knowledge base and resource management. A total of fifty (50) people were used in the study, 30 women and 20 men from Manjiya County. In addition ten (10) extension officers from both Mbale district and the two sub-counties of Bushika and Bukigai participated in the study. Manjiya County is presented below:

Findings

The dominant Land tenure system in Manjiya County

According to the constitution of Uganda (1995) the lawful bonafide occupants of mailo land, freehold or leasehold

land and traditional customary land holders, enjoy security of occupancy on the land (article 8). In reality the majority of people who enjoy this security of occupancy are men who own land among most societies in Uganda. The dominant land tenure system in Manjiya County is the traditional customary land ownership in which Land is owned by men who either inherit it from their fathers or purchase it and then later subdivide it among their sons leading to severe fragmentation. Today the population is very high (600 persons per km) therefore most households own only one acre of land which is not in one place but scattered in different places. All respondents said, the majority of women do not have rights to property including land; however a few with some income have purchased land in the trading centers. Women have no land title security; even those who get married have no guarantee of a secure land tenure and access to household property. This was similarly observed in Ghana (Ardayfio – Schandorf, 1995). This lack of security to land prevents them to look at the land they cultivate as their own and therefore cannot work at it sustainably by using good land use practices.

Women access to household property

Women of Manjiya look after birds, planting, weeding, harvesting and processing produce but the proceeds from marketing is transferred to men. They also grow crops

Like fruit trees, coffee, vanilla which they look after as source of family income. Food crops like cocoa yams, beans, greens, maize and bananas are grown by women but as mentioned before, if there is surplus for sale, men take the money and this discourages women. Some women and youths however have access to government forest resources in the upper slopes of Elgon Mountains. Those able to trek the long tedious journey up the mountain, go to gather food e.g. bamboo shoots (Malewa), firewood, mount beehives, collect herbs and other wild fruits since the government owns this land. Income from sale of goods obtained from the government land can easily be retained by women.

Although there is evidence of soil degradation women who work on those plots of land cannot conserve the soil through conventional practices like terracing, bunding, establishing trenches, catch dams, agro-forestry etc. Either they lack knowledge and skills of land management or they lack money to pay casual laborers to help terrace the land or they fear to invest heavily in land in terms of energy and time when they will not enjoy the income. Family income is controlled by men who are the heads of the family although women are allowed to utilize the land.

- i.) Some women do brick making, sand mining, stone-quarrying, but as long as it is being done on the family

land, men take and control the cash from such sales.

ii.) It is difficult for women to decide on what income-generating project they can do, for example:

There are NGOs in Uganda which focus on rural development. For example the Heifer project, "Send a cow," a Church of Uganda Project. These NGO's attempted to give heifers to the women in the mountains including those of Manjiya County. Some men rejected them, "I don't want the cow on my land". Those men who accepted cows in their homes sell all the milk and use the money to buy alcohol, while the women and children who look after the animal loose out.

Resource management practices by women of Manjiya County

Most cultivation is done by the women and children who grow the following crops: bananas, cassava, beans, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, maize, onions, arabic coffee and a variety of vegetables. Land is fragmented into small pieces ranging from half an acre to 3 - 5 acres. The small sizes of farm plots has an impact on the rate of adoption erosion control technologies which makes it difficult to sustain better and modern scientific methods of farming such as soil conservation.

Women use the hand-hoe and panga as the main tools in cultivating the land using the following practices;

- i.) Multiple cropping is the most dominant conservation practice in use. Bananas and coffee are inter-cropped, cassava, beans and maize are also intercropped in same plots of land. These add nutrients to the soil by improving fertility, cover to protect soil against erosion.
- ii.) Some people have planted trees like avocado, mangoes and a few have Eucalyptus trees which is a form of agro-forestry.
- iii.) There is no crop rotation and fallowing because of shortage of land.
- iv.) Mulching is practiced especially in the banana plantations on small scale because of lack of grass.
- v.) There is no crop rotation and fallowing because of shortage of land.
- vi.) Establishment of trenches and catch dams is not done because it is either costly or farmers lack knowledge of their importance.
- vii.) Terracing and bunding of their arable land is not practiced at all.
- viii.) There is zero-grazing of animals; goats and cows, which are fed on banana leaves and crop residues.

The Ten (10) extension officers and researcher made the following observations:

i.) Lack of incentives to women from household heads (men) like benefiting equally from land resources, like

sharing income from sale of crops and animals prevents women from managing household resources carefully. Secondly, women in rural areas are either illiterate or dropout of school at early age. Women do not attend farmer's courses at sub-county levels and this prevents them to have modern knowledge of good farming practices.

ii.) There is declining soil fertility as evidenced by stunted crops and yet the women are not aware of the underlying causes of this degradation.

iii.) A high rate of soil erosion is due to clearing forests on steep slopes, planting crops up-down the slopes, over cultivation etc. The high rate of erosion is a result of steepness of land and intensified human activities. Rill erosion is dominant on middle slopes and lower slopes while sheet erosion dominates the upper slopes. Land slides are common every rain season especially in the following areas; Bunakalabo, Lusha, Tsambana and Bubita.

There is limited forest cover on the hill slopes, no grass for animals and yet farmers who are illiterate continue to clear the land without realizing the consequences of deforestation. The cultivation of river banks has resulted in silting of rivers and streams (Manafwa) and nobody has taken steps to help these people.

Sanitation is poor, only 35% of the households in Bushika sub-county have pit latrines (Mbale Environment Officer, 2004). Women do not normally use latrines because of cultural beliefs, however, some women argued that this is not women's role to dig and build pit latrines. This kind of ignorance and the attitude of "I don't care" is a result of women not having the confidence and courage to work on land they feel they don't own.

Women have to walk long distances to reach the nearest source of water that is from ½ - 3 km. Sources of water are springs, streams and rivers, boreholes and gravity water pipes. However the quality of water is still low since no household visited uses any form of water purification process. For example shortage of fuel-wood prevents people from boiling drinking water. People in this area have not yet adopted the practice of rain harvesting from house roofs.

This heavy domestic work, with little support from members of the family hinders women from adopting new technologies which are labor intensive like terracing, soil bounding, constructing water ways, catch dams etc.

Consequences of land tenure systems on resource management practices in Manjiya County

i.) Position of land titles favor long term investment. Farmers who are not sure of security of tenure disregard the use of conservation as they don't expect long term gain from investing in conservation of the land.

ii.) The ever increasing population, land fragmentation, deforestation and shortage of fuel wood are crucial issues resulting from inappropriate utilization of land resources in Manjiya County.

iii.) The problem of soil erosion is serious in this mountainous county and is the most destructive form of land degradation leading to reduced productivity and occasional famine.

iv.) The traditional culture that discriminates against women is making people in the area poorer everyday because the land tenure system constraints, it limit women from being creative and innovative in the process of utilizing the land sustainably. Because women are poor they cannot afford modern technology let alone practice and use modern farming practices because it is expensive and yet women have no access to family funds.

v.) Poverty, inadequate education and lack of confidence, constrain women from participating in decision making that would affect their lives and families.

vi.) Some of the farmers in Manjiya are aware of the destructive effects of soil erosion but are limited to adopting soil erosion preventive practices because of the tenure system.

vii.) There are women, not married but, are engaged in business especially across the border to Kenya. They sell bananas “bogoya” to Kenya and Kampala as “middlemen” traders. There are also women selling bananas, Irish potatoes, tomatoes, onions and cabbages on market days in various villages markets as well as in Mbale the regional capital. These women are empowered and have been able to purchase land, build houses and lead a relatively better live. This is a good initiative that can be used as a basis for empowering other women in the area. Those women can be used as role models for other women in Manjiya to copy.

Challenge: These relatively financially stable women are unmarried, so they may not socially be respected. The challenge is how to involve the unmarried women.

Recommendations

i.) Soil and water conservation is not well developed in Manjiya County. There is a need to increase people’s environment awareness, to gain knowledge and skills of environment conservation through sustainable methods of farming. People using the land especially the women who interact with the environment on a daily basis should be target of environment officers and other extension programs from the district. This can be done through environment literacy programs in schools, church and other community gatherings by extension officers and NGO’s working in Manjiya County.

ii.) The laws and regulations of Uganda which enable women to inherit and acquire land should be disse-

minated to all people at the grassroots by government and NGOs. Helping women to know their rights will help them reduce poverty by demanding their rights, of access to family property.

iii.) Empowering women through Education, better medical care, improvement in communication (newspapers, radio, telephones, and roads) will help them gain confidence and consequently participate in decision making both at home and the community level.

Government and NGO’s should increase the number of extension officers, especially the females, to increase interaction with female farmers who have had no access to technical information.

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