

Landholding Inequality Among Smallholder Farmers in Imo State, Nigeria: Implications for Agricultural Development and Rural Livelihood.

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Abstract: Land is a key asset for the rural and urban poor. It provides a foundation for economic activity and the functioning of market in many developing countries. It is the primary means for generating a livelihood and a main vehicle for investing, accumulating wealth and transferring it between generations. Denying one access to land is like denying one life. This is done in the allocation and distribution of landed property in many parts of Africa and the study area. Land is unequally distributed. While a few have large track of land, many others do not have. This poses a serious problem in the study area both to agriculture and the people who suffer deprivation. The study using questionnaire to gather data observed that land is allocated traditionally on family ties, serious inequality in holding exist and this has caused problems as most farmers are thrown out of farming business, while others steal farm produce and even harbor resentment and animosity against those with large holdings. This, many times has led to communal clashes in the study area. Government should put in place a legal mechanism for equitable distribution of land to all sexes willing to farm.

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1. Introduction

Land lies at the heart of social, political and economic life in most of Africa. Despite the huge diversity of regions, peoples, and economies across the continent, agriculture, natural resource use and other land based activities remain key to livelihoods, income and employment for all African nations. African income levels per capita are the lowest on the planet, despite abundant land and natural resources. Such poor levels of growth are the product of both external barriers, such as trade rules, commodity prices, farm subsidies, and internal constraints like infrastructure, climate, soils, and governance. The growing impacts of climate change on rural and urban life will add further challenges to growth in income and welfare. Hopes for equitable and sustainable growth depend on securing the benefits of economic growth and development for the large majority of the population. Key to such broad based growth will be the strengthening of accountable institutions at local and national levels, to manage land and resource rights (Toulmin, 2006). Land rights are coming under heavy pressure, especially near towns and in high value farming areas in West Africa, it is estimated that less than 2% of land has any formal paper documentation with most rights claimed through unwritten systems of tenure. Rights are particularly vulnerable for women,

migrants, tenants, and those reliant on common property resources. Overlapping rights, and the plurality of systems and institutions create conditions for contested claims and corrupt practice. Such insecure rights to land tenure and shelter provide a major obstacle for promoting investment. Land competition can also trigger and exacerbate wider conflicts (Toulmin, 2006).

Land issues need to be understood in historical context. This history is often centuries old, with people laying claim to land on grounds of first settlement, conquest, or market acquisition by distant ancestors. Because of long term rule of the colonial masters in Africa and even the study area, they left behind a very unequal pattern of land ownership. Addressing historical injustices is recognized as important by governments, yet efforts to re-distribute land claims have move rather slowly.

There is currently a growing emphasis on the need to improve the social and economic conditions of people living in the rural areas. As observed by Acquaye and Murphy (1973), one of the ways by which this can be achieved is through helping such people to improve their skills in their main occupation - agriculture. This will involve the reformation of the existing agrarian structures. The reform and improvement of the land tenure system are considered to be of crucial importance in this

respect, in view of the general recognition that land tenure is one of the main pivots on which agriculture revolves (Acquaye and Murphy, 1973).

Agricultural productivity can be influenced by the degree of security and incentives given to farmers or cultivators, the ease with which land can be acquired and the size of farm which are all dependent on the land tenure system. Important as the influence of land tenure system on agricultural development is, it must also be recognized that agricultural development in general has also, in turn, some effects and influence on the prevailing land tenure system (Acquaye and Murphy 1973; Lennart and Vollrath, 2000).

This is particularly true of land, as ownership or control of it is still a sign of economic power and social standing. The issue of control over agricultural land and even pastoral resources is a major concern and there have been armed clashes between groups resulting in loss of human lives (Maiga and Diallo, 1998). Furthermore, land tenure systems are changing at different paces, more or less profoundly and probably not in a single direction. The transformation of tenure systems is not a smooth process but one of conflict and confrontation, and conflicts over land have received increasing political and scholarly attention over the past years. These conflicts have social, political and cultural dimensions as well as legal. This puts serious demand on the societies' capability to resolve or manage conflicts (Lund, 1997; Momale, 2003).

It is at this point that one begins to envisage agrarian reform as a process of transforming the society into a viable nation state. Thus, there is a need to create better socio-economic milieux, the need to that the system of land acquisition and control, supports the development needs of the rural sector in order to reduce community conflicts, threats to farmer's security and encourage planned development which aims at revolutionizing agriculture through the introduction of different types of technological innovations in order to raise the levels of living for the subsistence farmers. Therefore land which used to be a communal property for the use of benefits of others has become an individual property. Other individuals can now exclude others from having access to land, or even determine the rights other individuals should have toward land. This paper thus examines land administration in the area, determines existence of inequality of holding and the effects of such holding equality on agricultural development and on rural livelihoods.

2. Theoretical background

Conflict theory is considered as a revolutionary perspective and a paradigm of social change. Conflict is viewed as central to the social system rather than conformity and integration. As individuals struggle with nature to meet their primary needs, various forms of conflict and domination evolve, representing the basis of the social system. Qnuoha and Nnadi (1998), sees social system as a group of persons who interact with and influence the behaviour of one another on a more or less permanent basis.

According to this perspective, conflict is inevitable in any society that includes diverse element-ethnic groups, groups with different norms and values, different socio-economic level, and so on. Conflict is not necessarily disruptive, but a possible means of renewing a society (Biesanz, 1978). It can encourage cooperation, identity and unity within a group. It can also lead to needed social change. They also believe that when conflict results from a differential distribution of power among various social groups, social cohesion may be threatened. The group that have power are likely to use it for social control. These powerful groups attempt to influence public policy. If they succeed, they are able to control lives of the less powerful groups. Thus, society is in continuous conflict and evolution. Life involves a struggle for control of resource.

The traditional conflict approach is evident in the work of Karl Max who applied the methodology of dialectical materialism to a historical analysis of humanity's struggle with nature and itself. The dialectical materialism would look at the relationship between the forces of production and the production relations. The production forces are land, labour, capital and technology. The production relations look at the ownership structure, who owns the land and how they relate to structures in society (Maigida, 2003), and the modes of production. Marx believed that change is built into the nature of a social structure because of the tension and conflicts between classes, and that such change is directed towards a vague, wonderful and, presumably, unchanging utopia (Biesanz, 1978). He believed that conflict is the only possible means of renewing the society.

Conflicts, therefore, arise from competition in the distribution of scarce resources between social classes, claims to ownership of resources inheritance, increase in population, erosion or abandonment of previously accepted rules, disagreement over arbitration procedures, and tenure right of individuals. Conflict emerged as

a result of opposing interest. Ranchers and farmers may engage in conflicts, for instance, over an area of land and its use to support cattle or crops (Chitamber, 1973). Conflicts also occur when groups attempt to impose their will on other groups in order to acquire commodities considered of value such as wealth, power and prestige. Therefore, struggle is inevitable among groups in the acquisition of scarce resources, the dominant or stronger group continue to suppress the weaker one, thus perpetual subjugation of the lower or wicker class.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in six villages in Imo State. Imo State is in the South east zone of Nigeria. The State is made up of twenty-seven Local Government Areas out of which Ohaji/Egbema was chosen for the study. Ohaji was purposively chosen because it is an agricultural area in the State with high frequency of occurrence of land conflicts among villages. Ohaji/Egbema has a total population of about 209,593 persons in 2011 projected from 2006 census figure (NPC, 2006; FGN, 2009).

Imo State occupies a landmass of about 5,530 square kilometers with a total population of about 4500.987 million persons in 2011 projected from 2006 the census figure. The State shares boundaries in the North with Anambra State, South and West with Rivers State, while to the East, it shares boundary with Abia State.

The State has two dominant seasons - rainy and dry seasons. Rain falls between April and October while the dry season starts from November to early March, though early rain starts March. The Igbos are the exclusive ethnic group in the State; Christianity and traditional African religions are beliefs professed by people in the state. The State falls within the tropical rain forests zone with dense forest in the south and rich savannah in the north (FGN, 2004).

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of the State. This is basically due to the rich arable land suitable for the growth of a wide range of tropical crops. Food crops grown in the state include yam, cassava, maize; oil palm and cocoa fall under the category of cash crops. The people also keep animals like goats, pigs and poultry (NARP, 1998). Six villages were purposely selected from the study area. The selected villages include Umuilem, Urnushike, Umuokeduru, Umuhaja, Umuokoroka and Umuotu. The estimated number of households from the villages was 1,400 which was obtained from the National Programme on Immunization in the area. A total of

one hundred and forty (140) households from the six villages was randomly selected from the sample frame of households, using lottery method. This represented ten percent of the total household. The household head was used as the sampling unit. The household heads included widows who fend for themselves and family. The study made use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected by administering questionnaire to household heads. Secondary data sources were utilized to provide background information and other necessary information to achieve some of the objectives of the study. Such secondary data include, journals, proceedings, text books and households register of the National Programme on Immunization Office located at the Council headquarters, Egbema. Basically, descriptive statistics were used to analyze objectives 1 and 3. These involved the use of frequency counts and percentages presented in tabular forms. The distribution or ownership of land among farmers as studied using the Lorenz curve and Gini coefficients. Lorenze curve is used to study concentration, distribution and inequality of wealth (Barrow, 1996).

The Gini coefficient is an exact measure of numerical representation of the degree of inequality in a distribution and can be directly derived from the Lorenz curve. This is got by calculating the ratio of the area between the diagonal and the Lorenz curve (to be labeled A), as compared to the total area of the half-square in which the curve lies (to be labeled B). The Gini-coefficient is simply the ratio of the area A to the sum of areas A and B (Todaro, 1992; Barrow, 1996).

Denoting the Gini coefficient by G, we have:

$$G = \frac{A}{A + B}$$

Where:

A = Area between diagonal and the Lorenz curve, calculated as:

$A = \frac{1}{2}(l \times h)$ Area of triangle

B = Total area of half-square in which curve lies, calculated as:

$B = \frac{1}{2} (x_1 - x_0) \times (y_1 - y_0)$

$(x_2 - x_1) \times (y_2 - y_1)$

:

$(x_k - x_{k-1}) \times (y_k - y_{k-1})$

Where:

x = cumulative percentage of farmers

y = cumulative percentage of land in hectares

k = number of classes. (adapted from Barrow, 1996 and was used to achieve objective 2.

Table 1: Land Administration in Study Area

Administrator	Frequency	Percentage
Family heads/Okpara	65	46.4
Council of elders	35	25.
Traditional rulers	23	16.4
Community	12	8.6
Government	5	3.6
Total	140	100

The table at a glance reveals how land is administrator in the study area. The family head/Okpara is the chief land administrator. He is the eldest living male of the family whose duty involves other rituals. The response of 46.4% indicates that his position is important. Others are the council of elders with 25% and traditional rulers with 16.4% and the community with 8.6%. The administration of land by the council of elders, traditional rulers and even community varies from one place to another depending on the arrangement or where the family head is dead, the community, council of elders and traditional rulers may administer land. Finally 3.6% said the government administer land, this represent the wealthy few who under the Land Use Act acquired large of land.

The table also shows that in the study area, farmers still find it easier to gain access to land through the customary land tenure arrangement rather than the land allocation advisory committee. This is as a result of the strong traditional attachment to land which farmers and rural inhabitants still hold to land.) The basis of landholding in the survey area is that the family head exercised authority in consultation with the elders. This unit comprises a man, his wife or wives and children. Family heads grant land use rights for food production to members of the family as well as strangers who are found acceptable to the community at large. When the occupier of the family land dies, his portion reverts to the family pool. A new member of the family automatically has a stake in family land from time of birth.

This is in line with Arua and Okorji (1997), who posited that all land belonged to the community. However, individuals who need land for personal or private uses, obtained such land from the community leaders. Discussion with key

informants showed that joint decisions are taken on which land to cultivate, which crops to be grown, the number of seasons during which the land is to be cultivated and the length of the fallow period. Johnson (1982), posited that traditional leaders decide who has the right to use land, and this brings them social status and political control - hence they resist efforts to change the system.

These findings are in line with the conflicts theory, which demonstrate the changes that have taken place in the land tenure system. Rich individual have control over landed property, which is seen as a source of wealth, power and prestige to the detriment of the poor farmers (Chitamber, 1973, Biesanz, 1978).

4. Ownership structure

As a result of differences in access to farm land, farm land ownership structure shows wide variations in the size of holdings in the study area. Majority of holdings, however tend to be small sizes. The distribution of farms by size of holdings in the study area shows that majority falls within 0.25-2 hectare as shown in table 2. Data from the field revealed that among these groups are the widows who acquired land by rent especially, farmers with small family size and new entrants in farming business

In the study area, women are not considered eligible to claim land or share part of the land left by the deceased, and ownership of land by women is frowned upon or rejected. When a man dies, his land is divided equally among his wives who had borne him male children. The land does not go to the wives, but rather to sons of the wives. Problems often resulted when one wife had several sons and another had only one son, leading to unequal distribution.

Table 2: Size distribution of holdings in the six surveyed villages

Size in hectare	Midpoint (x)	Farmers (f)	fx	<u>Umushike</u>			
				% farmers	% cumulative farmer	% hectare	% cumulative hectare
0.25-2	1	6	6	60	60	16.2	16.2
2.1-5	4	0	0	0	60	0	16.2
5.1-8	7	3	21	30	90	56.8	73
> 8	10	1	10	10	100	27.0	100
		10	37			100	
<u>Umukeduru</u>							
0.25-2	1	22	22	48.9	48.9	11.3	11.3
2.1-5	4	5	20	11.1	60	10.3	21.5
5.1-8	7	11	77	24.4	84.4	39.6	61.0
8.1-11	10	5	50	11.1	95.6	25.6	86.7
> 11	13	2	26	4.5	100	13.3	100
		45	195	100		100	
<u>Umuotu</u>							
0.25-2	1	16	16	64	64	0.3	25
2.1-5	4	5	20	20	84	31.3	56.3
> 5	7	4	28	16	100	43.8	100
		25	64	100		100	
<u>Umuokoroka</u>							
0.25-2	1	7	7	70	70	31.8	31.8
2.1-5	4	2	8	20	90	36.4	68.2
> 5	7	1	7	10	100	31.5	100
		10	22	100		100	
<u>Umuhaja</u>							
0.25-2	1	12	12	60	60	16.9	16.9
2.1-5	4	2	8	10	70	11.3	28.2
5.1-8	7	4	28	20	90	39.4	67.6
8.1-11	10	1	10	5	95	14.1	81.7
> 11	13	1	13	5	100	18.3	100
		20	71	100		100	
<u>Umulem</u>							
0.25-2	1	17	17	56.7	56.7	15.7	15.7
2.1-5	4	3	12	10	66.7	11.1	26.9
5.1-8	7	7	49	23.3	90	45.4	72.2
> 8	10	3	30	10	100	27.8	100
		30	108	100		100	

Table 2 gives the size distribution of holdings among farmers in the surveyed villages. The basis for choosing 0.25 hectares as a base is due to the fact that every farmer is customarily entitled to 0.25 hectares by allocation by virtue of birth or marriage, in the case of widows. There are however, variations among villages and between individuals. A cursory glance at the table will show inequality in the distribution of land resources in the villages. It is obvious for instance, that many of the farmers hold less land in contrast

to a small group better endowed with land. Using columns 6 and 8, the Lorenz Curve is as represented below: This shows a fairly smooth Lorenz curve with perhaps a greater degree of inequality at the bottom of the distribution than at the top. The more the Lorenz curve or data line curves away from the diagonal (perfect equality) line, the greater the degree of inequality represented. Again, the greater the degree of inequality, the more bend and closer to the bottom horizontal axis will be the Lorenz curve (Figure 1).

Table 3: Gini coefficients in the surveyed villages

Villages	Gini
Umushike	0.46214
Umuokeduru	0.45943
Umuotu	0.4275
Umuokoroka	0.40438
Umuhaja	0.50353
Umuilem	0.535138
All sample	0.487252

Employing the Gini coefficient, table 10 shows that greater degree of inequality in land holding exist in the study area. Umuilem has the highest Gini of 0.535138, followed by Umuhaja with 0.50353. While for all sample, the Gini coefficient is 0.487252.

The relevance of conflict perspectives applies in this study because it demonstrates the existence of individuals in the social class who struggle for individualized ownership of land –

instead of allegiance to the traditional system. This loss of land to rich individuals through purchase or gift hinders the farmers from making any meaningful investment in their farms, neither can agricultural loan be guaranteed them. These features are a significant social reality in the study area. Therefore, this perspective provides the leads in explaining the possible competing and conflicting interest in land ownership among farmers.

Effects of landholding inequality on agricultural development and rural livelihood

Table 4: Effects of inequality of holding N=140.

Effects	Frequency	Percentage
Inequality favors a few farmers	100	71.4
Leads to urban migration	60	42.8
Some farmers are thrown out of production	90	64.2
Increase hunger and starvation	135	96.4
Leads to loss of farm labour	85	60.7
Leads to stealing of farm produce	120	85.7
Inequality leads to envy and enmity	101	72.1
Leads to unrest/conflicts among farmers	87	62.1
Leads to feeling of inadequacy	50	35.7
It may lead to rebellion of youths	60	42.8
Exploitation of fragmented land	120	85.7
Increase number of landless tenants	87	62.1
Increase sharecropping arrangement	95	67.8
Prevent long-term improvement of land	100	71.4
Erodes food security of households	105	75.0
Encourages absentee landlordism	88	62.8
Encourages land speculation	76	54.2
Increase poverty incidence among farmers	70	50.0
Leads to economic hardship	98	70.0

The economic, social and emotional effects of landholding are numerous and legion to mention. table 3 at a glance shows that inequality of land holding favour on a few individuals who may have used their position or status to acquire large track of land as shown by 71.4% response. Inequality leads to hunger and starvation because the landless or near landless who are willing to work but have no access to land will suffering great deprivation and hunger as indicated by overwhelming response of 96.4%. Massive stealing

of farm produce, enmity, exploitation of fragmented land, prevention of long-term improvement of land, erosion of food security are all major effects of landholding inequality in the study are. The above points have high response of 85.7%, 72.1%, 71.4% and 75.0% respectively. Other effects are urban migration with 42.8% farmers being thrown out of production with 64.2%, loss of farm labour with 60.7%. This is especially since the active labourers may have been denied access to land and they move to city to push

trucks and wheelbarrows. Emotionally, inequality pains. The landless have a feeling of inadequacy and wonder why they were in the first instance created. Conflicts, rebellions spirit on the part of youths, increase number of tenants, sharecroppers, and absentee landlordism are other effects of inequality in landholding. Land speculation, increase incidence of poverty, economic hardships and other worries have been found to have effect on agricultural development and rural livelihoods. The above findings are in line with Toulmin (2006) who posited that conflict is widespread in many parts of Africa. Security of people and property are key to any real prospects for development and poverty reduction. While land may not always be at the source of this conflict, competition for land often inflames tensions between groups, since politicians find it an easy issue with which to mobilize emotions and support. Land seizures, eviction of migrants and ethnic cleansing have characterized a number of conflicts. Even those countries at peace face major problems spilling over from neighboring conflict, such as large numbers of refugees who need to be accommodated.

The role of land and resource conflict in generating wider insecurity makes it vitally important to find means to resolve disputes early before they can escalate. In post-conflict settings, establishing legitimate institutions governing access to land for re-settlement of migrants and refugees becomes hugely important, as do questions of restitution. A new land policy in demonstrates that even in difficult circumstances, progress can be made, though tins ma in making difficult choices between the rights of different groups.

Smallholder farmers have been central to the agricultural economies of most African nations. Despite their responsiveness to new markets and opportunities, African farmers today face many challenges in gaining access to markets, both local and global. In domestic markets, cheap foodstuffs produced by heavily subsidized farmers are being dumped, displacing the harvests of local producers. In European and US markets, imports from Africa are facing rising barriers, through new standards and norms imposed by governments, and private sector actors, such as supermarkets.

Much economic evidence shows that yields per hectare tend to be higher on small to medium sized holdings rather than large commercial farms. Yet despite this, some observers argue that farmers need to be encouraged to leave the agricultural sector, to help consolidate land into larger holdings that can cope with the demands of

the global economy. According to this view, larger holdings will lead to higher incomes and productivity for those remaining in the farm sector. Former smallholder farmers should seek employment as farm workers or shift to the industrial or service sectors. But others ask whether this is realistic given little sign of an industrial or service sector creating ninny jobs.

The debate about the future of smallholder farming is often argued in economic terms alone, with evidence brought about yields, efficiency, and growth. But there are also many other dimensions which relate to the stability, social cohesion, identity, and equity within rural society. In the push for “modernization” of the agricultural sector, governments need to reflect on the consequences of opting for large scale farm development at the expense of the smallholder sector, rich country governments must also urgently address farm policy, export subsidies, and market barriers which are making it ever more difficult for smallholders to access domestic and international markets, from which to gain a livelihood.

Land is not just an economic asset and market commodity, but has strong political, social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Where land distribution is very unequal, programs to title land will further entrench such unequal property rights. Sharp inequalities in land distribution need urgently to be addressed, as found in parts of Eastern and Southern Africa where the legacy of colonial land alienation remains strong. Decisions concerning the “formalization” of land rights, whose rights count and how those rights will be managed are not just technical choices, but are highly political. The choice of structure to manage land rights and resolve land disputes and resource conflicts will have consequences for different interests and groups of people. Some will win and others lose.

There are multiple ways of registering rights to land, from short term certificates of occupancy to more formal registers and titling procedures. Rights can be secured at different levels, such as the individual or family, and at collective levels, such as the village or clan. The state should play a fundamental role in managing or facilitating the process. This is best done in a decentralized way in partnership with local institutions which can check and validate claims on the ground. In some places, the registration of rights has been carried out in a systematic fashion with all land in a given village or area being adjudicated and registered at the same time.

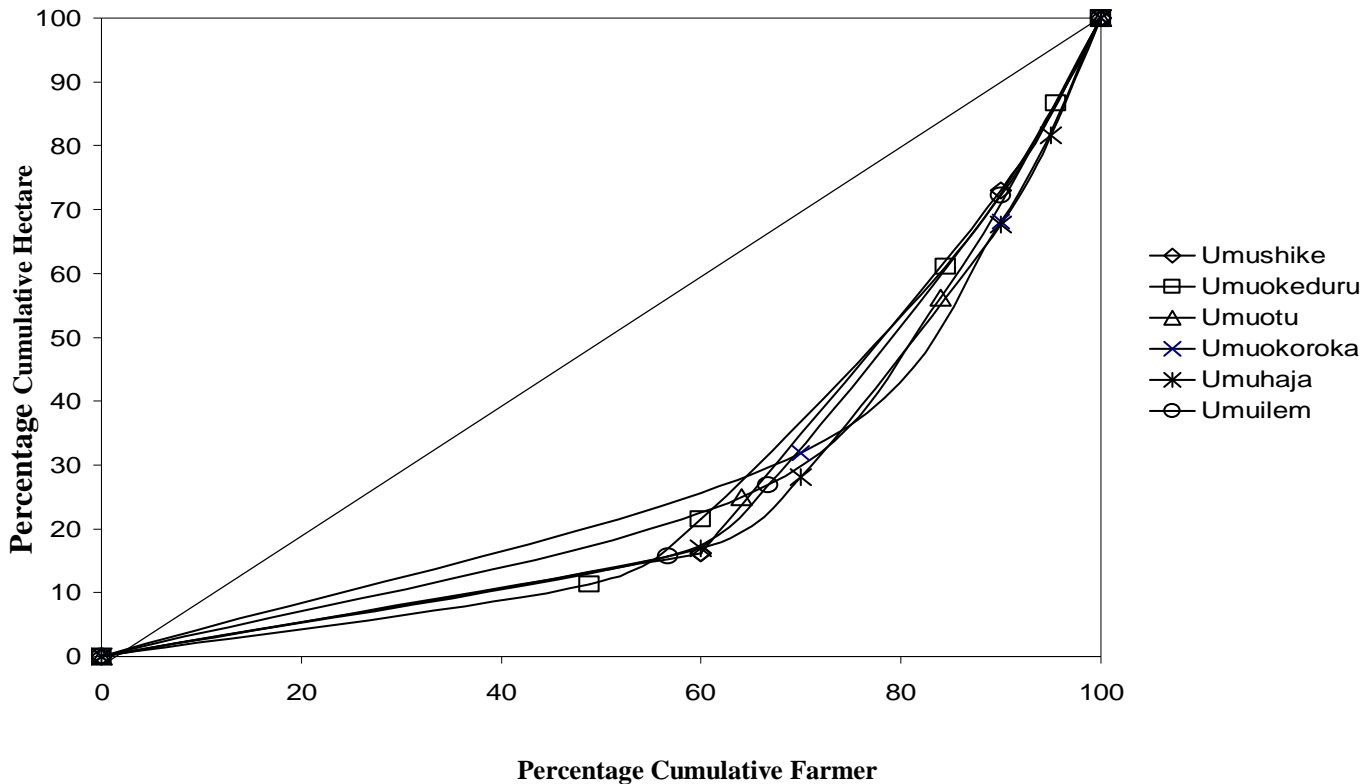


Figure 1: Graphical representation of the Lorenz Curve showing the relationship between number of farmers and the hectares of holdings in the survey villages.

There are advantages to such a method, as it is more efficient and less liable to fraud. In other cases, registration of land has been done on demand, leading to a patchwork of registered and unregistered land. Blueprint solutions to land registration should give way to locally appropriate initiatives and actions.

In many countries, the ultimate ownership of land remains in government hands, with land allocated administratively rather than through the market. This brings serious risks of rent seeking and corrupt behavior. Compensation is often not paid when land has been taken by government for public purposes. Many large land holdings remain in government hands, and constitute a valuable asset for gift to political allies.

While governments have an important role to play in regulating and administering land rights, the degree and form of intervention must be balanced against the costs imposed. In many cases, systems to register land ownership are so complex as to render them effectively inaccessible to any but the elite. Given weak bureaucratic systems and poor controls on the performance of government officials in a number of countries, the design of land administration requires

careful thought to minimize the risks of corruption, at central and local levels. Institutional strengthening means developing better checks and balances to make structures accountable both upwards to central government but also downwards to the people they are meant to be serving.

Conclusion

The institution of family property seems to be well established in south eastern Nigeria. The head of the family, community and his other elders control and manage everything pertaining to land in their community. Individuals who need land for personal, private use obtained such land from the community leaders. Individualizing titling in the study has resulted in some individuals holding large tracks of land, while majority of holdings tend to be small in sizes. This does not favour agricultural production as those who are really ready to go into full-time farming are prevented from doing so. The implications are varied: Loss of labour, enmity, rancour, stealing of farm produce, urban migration, food insecurity, landless tenants emergence, low yield and increase hunger/starvation. Legal framework be put in place to

apportion land equally and to ready individuals to go into agriculture.

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