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TESTING RURAL HOUSEHOLDS' PERCEPTIONS OF DIFFERENT LAND TENURE SYSTEMS

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This paper reports on a study of households in rural Venda to determine their perceptions of different land tenure systems and to determine their preference for an alternate land tenure system. Key household characteristics influencing rural households' land tenure preference were also determined. The understanding rural households have of a preferred land tenure system, and it's implied effects, were determined through log linear regression analysis. Although respondents mostly preferred individualized land tenure systems the implied effects of such land tenure systems were not fully understood.

1. Introduction

Land tenure is an important agrarian institution determining the power and economic relationships in the rural economy. As such the land tenure system is part of the institutional structure of society (Vink, 1987). The evolution of land tenure systems was not necessarily a natural process, because some changes were the results of government intervention (Noronha, 1988). Three types of intervention in the tenure over agricultural land have been followed in sub-Saharan Africa in this century, i.e. socialization of tenure, the individualisation of tenure and the maintenance of traditional communal tenure through legislation (Vink, 1986). The latter policy was followed by successive authorities in South Africa. Traditional tenure was fixed in law and specifically through such acts as the Natives Land Act, No.27 of 1913 and the Native Trust and Land Act, No 18 of 1936 (*cf.* Vink, 1987; Thompson and Lyne, 1993). In addition section 25(1) of the Native Administration Act No 38 of 1927 and sections 21(1) and 48(1) of the Native Trust and Land Act, 1936, empowered the State President to proclaim regulations concerning land tenure in the self-governing national states. One of the important regulations includes proclamation R188 of 1969 that specifies tenure on both tribal and Trust land (Vink, 1987).

These legislation prohibited any evolution of the traditional communal tenure system in the former homelands. Because land tenure is part of the institutional structure of society it has to adapt to the needs of society. Societies are dynamic and tenure systems must also change if they are to continue to fulfil their proper function. This did not happen in the "homelands" and as a result one can conclude that current tenure over agricultural land in these areas is inequitable and inefficient.

Given this background and in the light of the abolishment of the legislation referred to earlier, this article pays particular attention to household perceptions regarding traditional (or communal) tenure. The article reports on the results of a study of households in four Venda tribal wards in the Northern Transvaal province. One objective of this investigation was to determine the perceptions of rural households and traditional leaders towards the communal land tenure system and to determine their preference for different land tenure systems. Characteristics of rural households who prefer different land tenure systems were also identified and are discussed at length in this paper.

2. Research Methodology

A total of 107 respondents was randomly selected from four tribal wards in the former Republic of Venda, i.e. Mulenzhe, Musekhwa, Manenzhe, and Masakona. Respondents were interviewed using structured questionnaires. Only 100 of the questionnaires were usable of which 25 were from the Manenzhe ward, 23 from Musekhwa, 30 from Masakona, and 22 from the Mulenzhe ward. Also, included in the sample were twenty traditional leaders. Of the 20 traditional leaders interviewed, 5 came from Manenzhe, 5 from Masakona, 6 from Musekhwa and 4 from Mulenzhe.

Data obtained from this survey were cross-sectional by nature and were not normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk test). This demanded the use of frequency tables, Wilcoxon-rank sum tests, log linear regression and cross tabulation analysis methods.

Log linear modelling can be used to estimate the interdependency between variables. Similarly, it can be used to estimate and test interaction effects and to find an explanation for the difference between observed cell frequencies if it cannot be attributable to random fluctuations. The understanding smallholders have of their preferred land tenure system, and it's implied effects, can be deduced from this type of analysis.

3. Venda households' preference for different land tenure systems

A review of the communal land tenure system in Venda showed that traditionally one residential site, an arable plot and grazing rights of some sort, based on a system of open access are allocated to all households. Households thus have exclusive rights to arable land and communal usufruct on grazing land, as also identified earlier by Vink (1987). Community membership, and the view that traditionally all community members are entitled to land, are the most important aspects on which traditional leaders base the allocation of land. Previous farming experience was consistently given a low priority. Only 40% of respondents said that they were dissatisfied with the

way land is being distributed under the traditional tenure system. This percentage is lower than expected.

However, nearly 88% of respondents surveyed believed another land tenure system would improve productivity. Interestingly, all traditional leaders surveyed were of the opinion that another land tenure system would improve productivity. From Table 1 it is clear that private ownership of agricultural land (39%) is the alternative favoured by most respondents

The groups of households displayed in Table 1 were regrouped into three groups of households preferring a particular land tenure system as shown in Table 2 below. This was done to be able to identify any distinguishing factors that might exist between groups of farmers surveyed. Households in Group 1 were classified as those households preferring private ownership with a title deed (n=39). Group 2 households prefer the present "status quo" (n=38). Group 3 smallholders were classified according to their preference for centrally controlled land tenure systems (n=20).

The groups shown above are expected to have different characteristics that would influence their preferred land tenure system. This hypothesis is now more clearly explained and subjected to statistical testing to determine its validity.

First, households in group 1 are expected to be relatively small households, headed by young, educated individuals (with entrepreneurial skills), who would benefit most from the free market system. These households are expected to derive less from the present land tenure system and are therefore willing to undertake the risks involved with radical land tenure reform. Respondents in this group are expected to have jobs relatively close to the community to visit the area regularly.

Second, respondents in group 2 are expected to be older and more conservative individuals who benefit most from the present land tenure system. These households are therefore expected to have large arable and residential land holdings, combined with a large cattle herd. Subsequently they are not willing to support change in the present land tenure system. This group might be largely dependent upon agriculture as a source of income.

Third, group 3 comprises of households to whom the benefits (security) of a rural homebase are the most important considerations (*cf.* Low, 1984). Characteristics of this group would include high non-farm income from migrating labourers, a relatively high level of education or skill which would provide the opportunity for high returns from wage employment, and supposedly cattle are kept for consumption purposes. This group is further expected to be most susceptible to future rural-urban migration.

The key characteristics of the households in the various groups are summarised in Table 3. When the median and mode values in Table 3 are studied closely, a clear difference between the groups, for certain of the variables studied can be observed. The Wilcoxon rank-sum test (Ho accepted) however suggests no significant difference between the groups. The household composition and the economic active population in each group are compared in Table 4. The most significant conclusion to be drawn from Table 4, is that the levels of unemployment in group 3 households are lower than in the other groups. Generally it can be expected that group 3 households will have a larger percentage of migrating labourers, while group 1 households have the largest percentage of teachers with a smaller percentage of migrating labourers.

It was further evident that nearly 32% of the economic active population amongst the group 1 respondents are full-time employed in the PWV-area while another 25% work in the nearest town. The total percentage of full-time migrant workers is estimated at 57%. In the case of group 2 nearly 51% of work in the PWV area while another 22% work in the nearest town. The total percentage of full-time workers working away from home is estimated at 73%. In group 3 a large number (87%) of the economic active population is migrant workers with nearly 57% working in the PWV area, while another 30% of these people work in nearby towns.

The absence of significant Wilcoxon rank scores to show significant differences between groups, are not enough to reject the hypothesis as stated earlier. In this regard it is expected that data are insufficient to provide the required results. Certain of the survey results do however, correspond with the expected results as stated in the hypothesis. This, however, is not enough to accept the hypothesis as valid.

4. Households' perceptions of different land tenure systems

In reply to another set of questions, 45% of respondents indicated that if land was sold to members of the community, the purchaser should have sole ownership of that land. A log linear regression was done to determine whether group 1 smallholders are more likely to allow sole ownership of tribal land bought. Given their preference for an individualized land tenure system, this would be a logical expectation. However, evidently respondents who preferred formal private tenure did not necessarily prefer sole ownership of the land.

For the analysis done in **Table 5** below, respondents were grouped according to their opinion on whether a purchaser of tribal land should have sole ownership of that land. Respondents in group A believed a purchaser of tribal land should have private ownership of that land. Respondents in group B thought that sole ownership of tribal land should not be awarded to any member of the community, even if that person bought that land.

From the table of frequencies given in **Table 5** the following conclusions can be drawn. The possibility of classifying a group 1 smallholder (prefers private ownership with a title deed) that is willing to allow sole ownership of tribal land is 19.32%. The row percentages indicated in Table 5 show that only 43.59% of group 1 respondents would allow sole ownership of tribal land. Furthermore, the probability of a respondent being classified as group 2 and not be willing to allow sole ownership of tribal land, is 23.86%.

Table 1: Household preference for alternative land tenure systems

Tenure Preference	Percentage of Respondents (N=100)
Private ownership with title deed	39%
Private ownership of arable land and communal ownership of grazing land	19%
State ownership of all agricultural land	11%
Life time renting	7%
Development of tribal land e.g. irrigation or other agricultural projects	5%
Use of land exclusively by Tribal Authority	4%
Any other alternative tenure system	3%

Table 2: Preference for alternative land tenure systems grouped in three groups

Group 1	Private ownership with a title deed (n=39)
Group 2	Private ownership of arable land and communal ownership of grazing land (n=19) Life time renting (n=7) Respondents satisfied with the present land tenure system (n=12)
Group 3	State ownership of all agricultural land (n=11) Development of Tribal land e.g. irrigation or other agricultural projects (n=5) Use of land exclusively by the Tribal Authority (n=4)

Table 3: Comparison of key characteristics of the groups of rural households in Venda

VARIABLE	GROUP 1		GROUP 2		GROUP 3	
	MEDIAN	MODE	MEDIAN	MODE	MEDIAN	MODE
Household head age	58	65	65	65	52	36
Household size	7	6	7	7	8	8
Household head Eduation level (years)	0	0	0	0	4	0
Size of residential area	0.48 (ha)	0.25 (ha)	0.255 (ha)	0.1 (ha)	0.5 (ha)	0.5 (ha)
Residential area under cultivation	0.06 (ha)	0	0.025 (ha)	0	0.11 (ha)	0
Available arable land	1 (ha)	1 (ha)	0.925 (ha)	0.85 (ha)	1,25 (ha)	0.85 (ha)
Arable land cropped	0.6 (ha)	0	0.65 (ha)	0	0.85 (ha)	0
Cattle number	6	6	9	5	6	0
Total family income / year	R6 000	R2 400	R9 258	R2 400	R10 230	R4 800

Note: Total family income per year does not include agricultural income.

Table 4: Household composition of groups of households

ITEM	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3
Scholars/pupils (%)	40.5	38.8	41.7
Pre-school (%)	11.6	10.7	10.3
Employed full-time (%)	15.6	15.3	16
Unemployed not seeking work (%)	10.2	13.2	12.2
Unemployed seeking work (%)	9.5	12.5	6.4
Retired (%)	9.2	8.9	7.7

Approximately 65.63% of group 2 respondents would not allow sole ownership of agricultural land. Of the group 3 respondents, 52.94% would not allow sole ownership of agricultural land in tribal areas.

Further analyses (see Pretorius, 1994) have shown that there is a significant difference in perception among the groups on the question of sole ownership of agricultural land, if the individual bought that land. Of all the respondents who would allow sole ownership of tribal land, group 3 respondents represent only 22.22%. Groups 1 and 2 represent 47.22% and 30.56% respectively. Only 34.38% of group 2 respondents would allow sole ownership of agricultural land, while 43.59% of group 1 respondents and 47.06% of group 3 would be willing to allow sole ownership of agricultural land. The results from the maximum-likelihood analysis also show that the opinions of smallholders on whether an individual who buys tribal land should have sole ownership of that land, is chosen randomly and therefore independent of his land tenure preference. Respondents with a preference for a land tenure system that provides private ownership with a title deed, were expected to be willing to allow sole ownership of tribal land.

Table 5: Table of frequencies found for groups 1,2 and 3 by groups A&

ITEM	Group A* Allow	Group B* Not Allow
FREQUENCY	17	22
Group 1 PERCENT	19.32	25
ROW PERCENTAGE	43.59	56.41
COLUMN PERCENTAGE	47.22	42.31
FREQENCY	11	21
Group 2 PERCENT	12.5	23.86
ROW PERCENTAGE	34.38	65.63
COLUMN PERCENTAGE	30.56	40.38
FREQUENCY	8	9
Group 3 PERCENT	9.09	10.23
ROW PERCENTAGE	47.06	52.94
COLUMN PERCENTAGE	22.22	17.31

Note: Frequency missing = 2
Group A = Respondents that would allow sole ownership of tribal land
Group B = Respondents that would **not** allow sole ownership of tribal land

Table 6: Table of frequencies found for groups 1,2 and 3 (Table 6.2) by groups C & D

	ITEM	Group C* Allow Renting	Group D* No Renting
	Frequency	13	24
Group 1	Percent	14.29	26.37
	Row Percentage	35.14	64.86
	Column Percentage	38.24	42.11
	Frequency	15	21
Group 2	Percent	16.48	23.08
	Row Percentage	41.67	58.33
	Column Percentage	44.12	36.84
	Frequency	6	12
Group 3	Percent	6.59	13.19
	Row Percentage	33.33	66.67
	Column Percentage	17.65	21.05

Note: Frequency missing = 9
* Group C = Respondents that would support renting and share cropping
* Group D = Respondents that would not support renting or share cropping

This is clearly not so, as can be seen from the results above (56.41% of group 1 respondents would not allow sole ownership of tribal land). This analysis leads to the unavoidable conclusion that certain of the implications of households' preferred land tenure system are unclear to the respondents, (group 1) and that this would influence their land tenure preference.

For purposes of another analysis a respondent was grouped into group C if he was willing to allow renting. Group D respondents would not allow renting on tribal land. It is expected that respondents who chose formal private tenure, would also be more willing to allow renting in these areas. Surprisingly, this was not so.

The results obtained from the analysis are summarised in Table 6 and can be interpreted as follows: Of all the respondents surveyed, 14.3% would be group 1 smallholders (prefers private land tenure system) who would be willing to allow renting or share cropping, similarly only 6.6% would be group 3 respondents and would also be willing to allow renting and share cropping.

Furthermore, the probability that a respondent classified in group 1 would allow renting or share cropping is 35.14%, similarly 41.7% of group 2 would allow renting or share cropping. From this it is clear that respondents classified in group 1 would not necessarily be willing to allow renting or share cropping, although this is an integral part of their preferred land tenure system. Clearly this aspect was not considered when their choice was made, and given more information this is likely to influence their land tenure preference. Approximately 42% of group 2 respondents are expected to be willing to allow renting in traditional areas, opposed to only 38 and 33% of group 1 and 3 respondents.

Maximum-likelihood analysis showed that there exists a significant difference between the frequency levels of group C & D. This observed difference in frequency levels of groups C & D is not influenced by the answers received in groups 1,2 or 3. Variables used in this log linear regression are therefore accepted to be independent from each other and as such, randomly chosen. There is therefore no connection between answers received from respondents who prefer formal private tenure and their willingness to support a rental market for land. These answers were apparently chosen independent of each other. Contrary to expectation, many of group 1 respondents (64.86%) indicated that they would not be willing to allow renting or share cropping.

Respondents supplied the following reasons for resistance against renting of land:

- everybody has his own land and there is no need for renting (41%)

- the land is too small to be viable (14%)
- traditionally not allowed (10%)
- lack of knowledge of how such a system would work (9%)
- fear of conflict between both parties (7%)
- no available land (7%)
- social pressure (5%)
- fear of losing land (4%)
- other (3%)

In a market where labour is scarce, land is free, and returns from agriculture are at best doubtful, it would be inconceivable to invest scarce capital into a high risk operation from which conflict might arise. The slow development of a rental market is therefore not surprising. As long as land is not seen as a scarce production factor, the benefits of a rental market will not reach these communities.

5. Conclusions

Although 39% of respondents chose individualised tenure arrangements it is clear that these land tenure systems are not fully understood by them. Consequently, their land tenure preference is expected to be altered by the implied effects of such a system. Therefore it is suggested that individualisation of land tenure systems, within communal areas, should be a long term objective and should not be implemented directly.

Communal land tenure systems will adapt to changing circumstances, and reform measures should not inhibit this natural process. Land tenure legislation cannot reflect the changing needs of the diverse cultural backgrounds found within South Africa. It is therefore suggested that decentralization of land tenure policy decisions be undertaken, and that the choice of land tenure system, and the method of reform, be determined by the community members themselves. This will enable local communities to adapt faster to changes in their economic circumstances.

Flexibility within every land tenure system would in the end ensure a land tenure system that is to the advantage of every member of the community involved. Government should act as facilitator of the evolutionary process, rather than regulator. The move from communal to private ownership of property takes time. It may take from 50 to 100 years before the benefits of private ownership are realised (Nieuwoudt, 1992).

The establishment of a rental market for land should be one of the main objectives. This however, cannot be achieved easily and an extensive process of promotion of the benefits to be derived from it, should be launched. Without secure land tenure rights and as long as access to land is free, their progress will be slow.

The trend towards a freer market within the agricultural industry might lead to more environmentally sound production patterns. Policies that reduce population pressure, increase income, promote more efficient allocation of land and provide appropriate institutions in instances of market failure, should be promoted. This will have the added advantage of a reduction in land degradation within Southern Africa.

Group action and dependency upon community membership for rights to land is a powerful tool in the hands of developers. Cooperation with traditional leadership structures could lead the way to practical proposals, which are acceptable to the communities involved.

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