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## Women, land dispossession and agricultural production in south-east Nigeria An Eco-Feminism Perspective

<sup>1</sup>Luqman SAKA and <sup>2</sup>Oluwashina Maruf ADEBIYI

<sup>1</sup> Department of Political Science,  
University of Ilorin,  
PMB 1515, Ilorin,  
Kwara State, Nigeria.  
&  
Political Science Unit,  
Division of Humanities,  
College of Arts and Sciences,  
University of the Gambia,  
Republic of The Gambia.  
[sakaluqman@unilorin.edu.ng](mailto:sakaluqman@unilorin.edu.ng)  
[l.saka@utg.edu.gm](mailto:l.saka@utg.edu.gm)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Political Science  
University of Ilorin  
PMB 1515, Ilorin,  
Kwara State, Nigeria.  
[adebiyi.om@unilorin.edu.ng](mailto:adebiyi.om@unilorin.edu.ng)  
[shinnna7@gmail.com](mailto:shinnna7@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

#### Context and background

The Twenty-first century has witnessed change in the nature, dimension and dynamics of gender role and relationship. An important area of the change is in women rising engagement in agricultural production in Sub-Saharan Africa. While women profile in agribusiness has risen, there remains impediments. One of these is the denial of women the right to land ownership through inheritance. This denial continued to be sanctioned through reference to cultural practices that limit women's inheritance rights. Given that land remains the major factor of production for agricultural activities, its accessibility particularly to women that are engaging in agribusiness in sub-Saharan Africa remains a major concern. This is because dispossessing women right to land ownership impedes the production of food crops, thus exacerbating household poverty. Adopting eco-feminism as theoretical prop, this paper examines women engagement in agriculture within the context of the land dispossession using South-East Nigeria as point of reference.

#### Goal and Objectives:

The objective of this article is to highlights the centrality of women's contributions to agricultural production and how the restriction of their access to land (ownership) especially through inheritance undermines productivity and food security.

#### Methodology:

The article adopts the qualitative methodological approach. It draws data from secondary sources that includes; academic publications, commission reports, news articles, editorials and commentaries.

#### Results:

Among others, the study finds that women in South-East Nigeria play significant roles in agricultural production in myriad of forms. However, it notes that dispossession of women in terms of land inheritance arising from patriarchal values and tradition remains an important impediment constraining women's agricultural productivity and food security.

#### Keywords:

*Women, Land Dispossession, Inheritance, Agriculture, Nigeria, public policies*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The early period of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed a significant change in gender roles and responsibilities most especially in subsistence economic activities in Sub-Saharan Africa. One of the noticeable changes in this period is the increasing involvement of women in agricultural activities. In Africa, over 80% of agricultural production is derived from small scale farmers a sizeable percentage of whom are mostly women (Mugede, 2013). The International Fund for Agricultural Development (1993: 6) observed that, women constituted around 73% of economically active labour force in Agribusiness in the Congo and accounted for the production of approximately 80% of the national food crops in the country. In the same vein, statistics from Namibia's 1991 population census revealed that, women accounted for 59% of the labour force in the country's agricultural sector. The data also highlighted that women continue to bear the primary responsibility for food production and processing in the country. Around 57% of Moroccan women participates in agricultural activities, a large proportion of them in animal husbandry' (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 1993: 6). With these statistics, women no doubt occupy a pivotal position in the development process of African national economies.

The role of women in the development of African communities cannot be underestimated. With a population estimated to stands at 3,733,597,175 of the total world population, women folks accounted for 49.6% of the total world population (Country Meters, 2017). This is aside the fact that, women make-up 43% of the world's agricultural labour force rising up to 70% in some countries (Mugede, 2013). With these numerical characteristics women are considered the backbone of the development of rural and national economies. Women play vital roles in ensuring food security, particularly in the African continent. They do these by effectively fulfilling their roles as food producers and providers. Bafana (2012) asserted that there are three basic variants of household food production systems in Sub-Saharan Africa in which women are highly involved. First, women are responsible for production of all or most food crops. In this variant, food plots are considered women's plot. Secondly, men and women jointly cultivate staple food crops in fields controlled by male household heads. In this type, male household head controls the output. Thirdly, men are responsible for food production, while women specialize in food processing. This variant is mainly found in places where Islamic practices of female seclusion prevent women from engaging in fieldwork on the farms (Bafana, 2012). The first variant however, seems to be the most predominant in Africa.

While women contribute immensely to the development of rural communities and by extension national economies through engaging in subsistence agriculture, their access to and control over factors of production most especially land have been greatly constrained in Africa. The constraints are as a result of differential in gender status which is largely anchored on patriarchal norms, values and traditions. While land remains the major factor of production for agricultural activities its accessibility particularly to women in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular has remained a major source of concern most essentially as it relates to women acquisition of land through inheritance. While there has been attempt at reforming the land tenure system in the bid to open up access to land, women continue to be disposed in many communities across Africa. The inability of women to get access to and control over land impedes their productive potential and serves as

impediment to the task of achieving food sufficiency and security. In this regard, the livelihood and self-sustenance of women cannot be guaranteed, thus, increasing levels of poverty among rural women in African societies. It is against this background that this study examines the role of women in agriculture in Africa specifically as it relates to women's land dispossession with specific reference to South-East Nigeria. Following this introduction is the discourse on feminism theory with particular attention on marginalization of women as it relates to access to land. Section three is devoted to the discussion of the role of women in agriculture in Africa with emphasis on South-East Nigeria. The fourth section discusses women and land dispossession drawing insights from South-East Nigeria and the concluding section.

## **2. WOMEN AND LAND DISPOSSESSION IN AFRICA: AN ECO-FEMINISM PERSPECTIVE**

Eco-feminism as one of the variants of feminist theory emerged in the 1970's through an increasing awareness of the physical link between women and nature. Eco-feminism as a term was popularised in 1974 by Francoise d'Eaubonne, a French writer who instigated women to champion an ecological revolution which entailed a new gender relation between women and men and between humans and nature (Merchant, 2005). Since this period proponents of eco-feminism (Mann, 2011; Merchant, 2005; Archambault, 1993; Warren, 1987) have expressed concern about the linkage between the domination of women and nature in western culture. This linkage may have propelled Warren (1987) to assert that eco-feminism is based on the following claims: 'there are important connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of human nature; understanding the nature of these connections is necessary for the understanding of the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective and lastly, solutions to ecological problems must be informed by and take cognizance of feminist perspective' (Warren, 1987: 4).

Eco-feminism rests on the basic assumption that; patriarchal philosophy is harmful to women and have been the basis of the interrelations as it has to do with gender, land and land based conflicts (Nyukuri, 2006). Eco-feminists argued that the interrelationship between women and nature as derived from patriarchal philosophy has historically been used to put women at disadvantage in terms of access to and control over ecological factors such as land and water. Consequently, women are marginalised and earn less than their male counterparts as a result of their inability to access and own land. This predicament however, has been attributed to the outcome of a long colonial history in developing countries particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Lorber (1997) expressed the position that in colonial Africa, the conventional contribution of women to food production was largely eroded in favour of cash crops such as cocoa and coffee and the mining of raw materials such as crude oil. Under this condition, male workers were favoured by being able to earn enough for their subsistence. Their women counterpart on the other hand, had to provide food for themselves and their children by farming meagre pieces of land with good and fertile land confiscated for colonial and patriarchal interests. As a results women were forced to live at the margin through the dynamics of power relations embedded in the fabric of society (Lorber, 1997).

Patriarchal philosophy, culture, tradition, norms and values, constitute major hindrances to women's access to and ownership of land in Africa. Women in African societies find it difficult to inherit and claim land belonging to their husbands after their death. At the death of their husbands such widows

face widespread discrimination and uphill task in assets and property inheritance. In most traditional African societies, acquisition, transfer and inheritance of landed properties are determined and regulated by customary law and practices which largely excludes women from owning and inheriting land (Richradson, 2004). The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) noted that the deplorable nature of women's land rights is an historical problem in Africa (Kimani, 2008). The position was pushed that prior to colonialism, land ownership and access existed in myriad forms but were largely vested in lineages, clans and families with the male gender having and holding the power to control its usage. The use of such lands can only be granted at the permission of the community or family leaders (Kimani, 2008). Such permission however, may in most cases not be granted to women or widows. In few and exceptional cases can land inheritance pass through the mother. Land rights were characteristically inherited by sons. Women rarely and almost had no full rights to land. Through their male relatives, they are perceived as secondary claimant (Kimani, 2008).

### **3. WOMEN'S ROLES IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA**

Globally women play important roles in agriculture. They contribute to the livelihood of their family in particular and assist in developing communities and national economies in general. It is estimated that approximately 1.6 billion women live in rural areas and rely on agricultural activities for survival (IFAP, 2010). This figure accounts for more than a quarter of the total world population. Women farmers are responsible for more than half of the food grown in the world, precisely up to 80% in Africa and 60% in Asia (IFAP, 2010). Women no doubt contribute significantly to world food production. In most agrarian societies in Africa, women perform critical economic functions by being actively involved in agricultural activities. For example, in Tanzania, approximately '98% of rural women that can be taken to be economically productive engaged in the agricultural sector. Given their productive engagement, they produce larger share of the food crops for household consumption and cash crops for export' (FAO, 1995). In similar manner, 'women constitute 80% of the population segment productively engaged in the agricultural sector in the Republic of Sudan. They in turn, constitute approximately 49% of the farmers that are active in the country's irrigated sector and 57% in the traditional/non-irrigated sector. Given their preponderance, 30% of the food produced in the country comes from the labour and sweat of women' (FAO, 1995). In Benin Republic, '70% of the female population are rural dwellers, they accounted for between 60% to 80% of the labour force in the agricultural sector and provided around 44% of food produce for household consumption in the country'. In like manner, women constitute 48% of the labourers in the agricultural sector in Burkina Faso (FAO, 1995).

In Nigeria, women contribute close to 70% of agricultural labour, 50% engage in animal husbandry related activities while 60% indulge in food processing (African Development Bank, 2015). The federal ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development asserted that 'women account for 75% of the farming population in Nigeria, working as farm managers, and suppliers of labour' (Sahel Capital, 2014). In a study on the role of women in agricultural development carried out in Biliri Local Government Area of Gombe State in Nigeria, Fabiyi, Danladi, Akande and Mahmood (2007) find out that: 'women participate in almost all agricultural activities except felling of trees and spraying of chemicals'. It was discovered that women in the local government participates in land clearing, planting, weeding, harvesting, transporting of produce, processing and marketing of the produce.



Findings from the study also revealed that: 'more than 50% of the respondents planted groundnut and soybeans, about 40% planted rice, 28% cowpea, 25% maize, 20% sorghum and 10% planted vegetables' and engaged in animal husbandry such as the rearing of pigs and goats (Fabiya, et.al., 2007). The study also affirmed that, 'women tend to produce crops for family consumption as well as crops that generate income within their locality so as to enable them take care of their family' (Fabiya, et.al., 2007).

Studies had also revealed that among the Jukun, Fulfulde and Kulka, 70% to 80% of agriculture workforce is provided by women (Ngur, 1987). Women in subsistence agriculture in northern Nigeria were also reported to be involved in earning of income mainly through agricultural practices particularly those that engaged in the processing of agricultural products (Ogunlela and Mukthat, 2009). In a similar finding, Simons cited in Ogunlela and Mukthat (2009) noted that in a study conducted in three villages in Zaria, Kaduna state, 90% of the women were involved in at least one form of food processing activity or the other. In Benue state women largely engage in agricultural activities. Balogun, et. al. (2014) reported that women are in the forefront of post tillage activities partaking in activities as 'planting (85%), weeding (92%), harvesting (95%), processing (97%) and marketing (88%)'. This according to the authors is in line with the claim of Burfisher and Horestein (1985) as it relates to the traditional gender division of agricultural tasks among Tiv households. To that end, Tiv men were historically responsible for heavy tasks while the womenfolk took charge of the management of the farm. However, it has been reported in recent studies that women are gradually indulging in the performance of tasks that were initially designated as largely male. These include bush and land clearing, stumping, tilling of land and fertilizer application (Balogun, et. al., 2014). This scenario has also been found to also exist in Delta state (Uzokwe and Ofuoku, 2005). Though, the involvement of women in agricultural activities is characteristic of agrarian societies in Nigeria. The role played by women in agricultural production in South-East Nigeria is worthy of note.

South-East Nigeria is one of the six geo-political zones in the country. It comprises of five states namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. South-East Nigeria is majorly occupied by the Igbo ethnic group and majority speaks the Igbo language (Uchendu, 1965). South-East Nigeria is situated between latitude 5<sup>0</sup> and 7<sup>0</sup> North and latitude 6<sup>0</sup> and 8<sup>0</sup> East. The South-East region is bounded in the East by the Ibibio people, in the North by the Igalla, Idoma and Ogoja people, in the South by the Ijaw and in the West by the Edo people (My Guide Network, 2017). Communities in the south-East are primarily rural and agrarian and stand out as leading producers of food crops such as yam, palm produce, rice, cassava, potatoes, maize, beans, cocoyam, vegetables, and different varieties of fruit trees among others. Some South-East communities located close to rivers are also notable for fish farming (My Guide Network, 2017). With a total land area of 40,900 to 41,400 km<sup>2</sup> i.e. 15,800 to 16,000 square miles (Uchendu, 1965) the five states in South-East Nigeria has a total projected population (2016 projection) of 21,955,114 with women comprising approximately 50% of the population and contributing immensely to agricultural production in the zone (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018: 8).

Women in South-East Nigeria play significant roles in agricultural production in myriad forms. Adisa and Okunade (2005) noted that in the Eastern part of Nigeria women have taken over agriculture related chores such as bush clearing, bush burning, staking, tilling, and mould making. In a similar

comment, the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Service of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria claimed that women in Anambra state 'contribute more than the men in terms of labour input in farming and are solely responsible for household management duties' (Ogunlela and Mukthar, 2009: 22). Women in the rural areas mostly farmers take active part in food production activities which include land preparation, hoeing, weeding, harvesting, mulching and threshing. They also support agricultural development through ensuring that soil and water resources are adequately conserved and through afforestation and crop domestication (United Nations Development Programme, 2012). They also ensure that farm products get to the final consumer in urban centres that littered the geo-political zone.

The rural women play key role in the food distribution chain. Women in the zone engage in the transportation of farm produce from the rural areas to the urban centres. They are also involved in the processing and packaging of food crops such as cassava and yam flakes. They process varieties of agricultural food products for household subsistence. By being responsible for preparation of food majorly for household subsistence, south-eastern rural women are crucial to the survival and livelihood of various south-eastern households. While rural women play crucial role in agriculture and food production in the South-East zone they are largely constrained by the asymmetry ownership of and access to land which is a vital asset in agriculture. South-East women's ability to contribute to food production in the zone is largely constrained by their inability to own and have access to land. Women can hardly inherit land or take possession of land. This is largely a result of patriarchal culture, values, norms and tradition which are solidly enshrined in the customary laws of the zone. Nevertheless, despite the fact that African women comprise approximately 70% of Sub-Saharan agricultural workers and account for about 80% of food processors (Wakhungu, 2010) less than 2% own land (FAO, 2010).

#### **4. WOMEN AND LAND DISPOSSESSION THROUGH INHERITANCE IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA**

Women in many African countries have a legal right to own land noted the International Development Research Centre (2012: 1), however, their right to acquire and own land through inheritance is largely constrained by patriarchal culture, values and tradition of African societies. Consequently, less than 2% of African women can lay claim to owning land of their own (FAO, 2010). In many Sub-Saharan African societies, the allocation of land as property at death are deeply entrenched in the idea of culture and tradition and are closely tied to other rituals surrounding death such as burials, funeral celebrations, mourning rites and the transfer of traditional positions of authority within families, clan and larger ethnic groups. However, the transfer of land and property and the power to acquire and own them are always strictly restricted to men (Richardson, 2004). Under many customary laws in many communities across Sub-Saharan Africa, only men have the right to inherit land. Though rules which restrict men from selling land or houses without the permission of women relatives exist but those rules are often disregarded by men. At the death of the owner, the widow can be thrown out of the house and denied any rights to land or property (Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction, 2005).

Though inheritance laws are entrenched in the constitution of many African countries, such laws have not impacted on cultural practices. Therefore, their effectiveness has been drastically limited by predominance of cultural values and tradition when it comes to inheritance (Richardson, 2004).

In Botswana, despite the existence of codified laws, customary laws are allowed to discriminate against women. In Zambia, the constitution legalizes a discriminatory customary system. Thus, customary practices relating to marriage, divorce, sharing of properties and other family and personal issues are excluded from the country's equal protection and anti-discrimination provisions. In these countries, under customary law at the death of a man, the entire property acquired by the man which often may include properties acquired with the help and labour of his wife are taken over by his lineage. The land goes to a son or brother. The widow is usually left out completely and thus entirely dispossessed of land ownership (Richardson, 2004). In Kenya, despite the protection of women's rights to land under the 2010 Kenyan Constitution and other several National Statutes, women remain disadvantaged and discriminated against through customary laws and practices which continue to prevent women from owning and inheriting land and other properties. Customary norms and practices in Kenya do not grant women direct rights to land instead they are granted secondary rights through relationship to a male dependant (Musangi, 2017).

In an insightful and quantitative study on 'widowhood and asset inheritance in Sub-Saharan Africa' with panel data from fifteen African countries, Peterman (2010) found out that more than half of the widows in the fifteen countries studied reported 'no' asset inheritance, claiming they did not inherit any property. Findings from the study also revealed further that, 'only in Rwanda and Senegal do widows and their children report inheriting the majority of assets'. In all other countries included in the study, the majority of assets are reported as being, 'inherited by the spouse's families or other children' (Peterman, 2010: 23). To buttress this, Cooper (2010) lamented that the disposition of women to disinheritance of assets is purely a matter of systemic gender discrimination. The literature on 'women's land rights' most especially as it relates to Africa is indeed replete with instances of widows stripped of their belongings and forced out of their homes by relatives of their spouses. Citing an apparently typical case Federici (2011: 47) explained the plight of an African widow when he lamented that: 'one widow had hardly buried her husband, when she had to fight her in-laws trying to dig up their brother's yams from her fields, despite her pleas that they leave some for her children'. In another similar case 'a Ugandan widow found out that her in-laws had sold her husband's land behind her back when the new buyer came to evict her' (Kimani, 2008: 10). These examples highlighted above show the state of gender discrimination and dispossession of rights to inheritance sanctioned by customary practices across societies in Africa.

The Igbo ethnic nationality in South-East Nigeria are renowned to take pride in the preservation of their culture, traditions, values and norms. One of the major areas in which Igbo culture, values and tradition are conspicuous and well pronounced is the preservation and inheritance of properties most especially land. Igbo traditional practices classify property into three categories namely: land, commercially valuable trees including plants and moveable property such as household articles, livestock, money and debts (Obi, 1963). Igbo tradition of inheritance is very effective and dates back to the pre-colonial era when the Igbo pre-colonial political system was largely acephalous and was largely ruled by village and clan heads who were mostly men. Traditional Igbo societies accord more respect to men than women. This manifests in the inheritance customs and traditions. The inheritance rules of the Igbo ethnic group basically favour male members of the family over the female members. The male offspring is in a better position of inheriting the properties of his deceased father than the female offspring. Even though the National Laws of the country described the Igbo



inheritance practice as discriminative and repugnant to the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution, women are still being marginalized in terms of access to and ownership of land in South-East Nigeria (Gabriel, 2016).

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) stipulates that the practice of female disinheritance most especially as it relates to women land disinheritance is a breach of Section 42 (1) (a) and (2) of the Constitution (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Despite this provision, inheriting individually owned land is seen as the right of the first-born child who is usually the eldest son. When a man dies without leaving a legally valid record of how his properties should be shared (intestate) the largest share of his individual land would be ceded to the eldest son, with the other sons sharing the rest equally. If the deceased does not have sons, his individual land will be ceded to his brothers to be shared according to seniority (Wigwe, 1986). In essence female children have never being in the scheme of thing as far as land inheritance is concern in the South-East region of the country. Women in Igbo land as a result of patriarchal customs and values do not inherit from their father's property. This is derived from the notion that when a woman is married she doesn't need to inherit from her father's lineage. In this regard, the husband's family becomes the family of the woman. Thus, when property like communal land is shared, it is shared among men only (Gabriel, 2016).

Obioha (2003) lamented that focusing on the right of women in inheritance practice among the Igbos of South-East Nigeria is a major way of appreciating the many aspects of discrimination and injustice against the women population of our society. Women in most parts of the region rather than being perceived as parties to property inheritance are themselves regarded as property to be inherited (Mbu, 1999 cited in Obioha, 2003). Igbo customs and tradition are principally patrilineal in which the basic principle and idea governing inheritance is basically primogeniture. In this regard, the male gender is seen as the principal benefactor when it comes to the issue of land and landed property inheritance. This translates to the fact that the female gender is denied the right of inheriting their deceased husband's or father's land and landed property, therefore, grossly marginalizing and endangering their inheritance rights (Chika and Nneka, 2014). This problem of women disinheritance is further compounded by the judicial approval of the practice by Superior Courts of Records (Chika and Nneka, 2014). Citing the instance of the case between Ejiamike vs. Ejiamike, the Court held that that 'a widow had no right to the late husband's estate' (Chika and Nneka, 2014).

In a similar case between Neziyanya vs. Okagbue in Onitsha, Neziyanya the widow of Okagbue took charge of his house by letting it out to tenants. While trying to make ends meet, she sold part of the land and built a mud hut. Trouble however, started with the late husband's family when she attempted selling more portion of land. The late husband's family bitterly objected (Chika and Nneka, 2014). The Supreme Court in its judgement stated in part that: 'the widow shall not at any time acquire a distinct possession of her own to oust the family's right of ownership over the property' (Chika and Nneka, 2014). Citing the Onitsha native law and custom, the Supreme Court stated that:

A married woman on the death of her husband without a male issue, without the concurrence of her husband's family, may deal with his (deceased) property. Her dealings, of course must receive the consent of the family. The consent, it would appear, may be actual or implied

from the circumstances of the case, but she cannot assume ownership of the property as her own. If the family does not give their consent she cannot, it would appear, deal with the property (Chika and Nneka, 2014: 22).

While the contribution of women to agricultural production in Africa in general and South-East Nigeria in particular is indeed constrained by myriads of challenges, the challenge posed by dispossession of women in terms of land inheritance anchored on patriarchal values, culture and tradition is unprecedented and remains in the front burner of challenges facing women in agricultural production in the area. Restrictions placed on women in terms of land ownership represents a major challenge to food production in and subsistence livelihood of households in various South-Eastern communities. However, most of the potent challenges confronting agricultural production in the South-East are derivable from gender disparity problem prevalent in the region as is the case in most other parts of the country though with varying intensity. Njobe (2015) opined that for agriculture to achieve the transformational change that Africa requires there must be a clear understanding of the gender-gap blocking issues in the agricultural sector.

Access to finance and financial services constitute another major challenge to agriculture production in Nigeria and the south east in particular (Njobe, 2015). Women in South-East Nigeria experience more difficulty in accessing agricultural finance than their male counterpart. This has been attributed to the perceived risk involved in such finance. It is believed that African women operate in a riskier environment than those in non-African developing nations. This challenge is further compounded by the inability of women to access productive land. When women do not have secured land rights their ability to access financial facilities/loans is hampered (Garcia, 2013). The inability to access agricultural financial facilities hinders women ability to acquire necessary inputs. In the South-East region of Nigeria as in other African rural communities' women are able to access about only 1% of credit available in the agricultural sector. In situations when the inputs are readily available, most of it are accessed and taken up by men within the community (IFAP, 2010). The inability of the rural women to access finance in order to acquire tools and machines hinders agricultural productivity. While technology exists to improve productivity, most are fashioned in respect to tasks commonly attributed to men.

In essence, adequate attention is not being paid to developing and distributing tools that can easily be used by women. Even when the tools that are suitable for women are readily available most women farmers are not able to acquire them because of lack of credit and financial facilities. Consequently, they perform farm activities slowly and tediously, thus, decreasing agricultural productivity (IFAP, 2010). Another challenge facing women in agricultural production in rural communities across South-East, Nigeria is the problem related to transportation in food distribution process. The World Bank (2009) noted that women transport 26 metric-ton kilometres per year compared to less than 7 metric-ton kilometres for men. Another major challenge confronting women in agriculture is the lack of access to training programmes aimed at developing the skills and knowledge of women rural farmers in south-east, Nigeria. Njobe (2015) noted that advancing female gender technical knowledge and entrepreneurial skills is crucial because of the ever increasing

demand for food, the dynamic context of agricultural trade and the unpredictability of long-lasting impacts of meteorological change.

The inability of women rural farmers in the South-East, Nigeria to gain access to and control over land and other agricultural factors of production majorly through inheritance either from their paternal side or matrimonial home have grave implications for both agricultural production and the livelihood of women in the region. Mindful of the fact that land and other related resources are crucial to agriculture, the inaccessible nature of land particularly to women rural farmers in the region undermine their potential to engage in profitable agricultural ventures in long term plan. This discrimination against woman which manifests in their dispossession when it comes to land inheritance weakens their capability and potential to engage in large scale community farming in the region and in other parts of the country. Women constitute the largest labour force in subsistence farming in South-East Nigeria, yet the discrimination they suffer through patriarchal cultural values has impacted negatively on their potential to reap from where they have sown. In societies where patriarchal cultural values occupy prominent position as against constitutional provisions on women (land) inheritance rights, women are in most cases rendered homeless and are turned to people lacking the basic necessities of life particularly after the demise of their spouses and father (Richardson, 2004). In a related vein, women dispossession of land jeopardizes the female gender's economic security and independence especially as it relates to food security and housing. This has contributed to household poverty especially for female headed household (Richardson, 2004).

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Women land dispossession through inheritance chiefly brought about by continued adherence to patriarchal cultural practices is a ubiquitous phenomenon in many societies in Sub-Saharan African. This practice has largely been unfavourable to women, particularly those that resides in the rural area and whose major occupation and source of livelihood is mainly through engaging in subsistence agriculture. Women rural farmers whose basic survival largely depends on agriculture hardly own land of their own. This experience which was largely informed by gender inequity, constitutes a major challenge to agricultural production in South-East Nigeria in specific terms and across rural communities in other parts of Nigeria in general. This has also serve as hindrance to women empowerment drives embarked upon by various national governments in Africa directed at bridging the gender wealth and income disparity gap observable across countries on the continent. The prevention of women from owning land and other productive factors of production has further heightened the fears of threat to food security in Africa.

While recognizing the importance of land to women, Michelle Bachelet, erstwhile Executive Director of the United Nations Women, the global body responsible for gender equality and women empowerment, claimed that; 'When women are empowered and able to claim their rights especially as it relates to access to land, leadership, opportunities and choices, economies grow, food security is enhanced and prospects are improved for current and future generations' (Mugade, 2013). This statement is an important indication of the need to de-emphasize the observance of socio-cultural norms and practices that entrenched the disinheritance of women especially as it relates to land ownership. By discontinuing practices that enhance the disinheritance of women, we will in turn be enhancing their empowerment prospects, boost their capacity and capability to contribute

maximally to agricultural production, aids the reduction of household poverty and enhance economic prosperity.

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The authors contributed equally to the conception and completion of the study.

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## 10. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Agricultural Land;** This is land that is essentially devoted to agricultural production process through crops production (food crops, cash crops and commercial trees) as well as animal husbandry (Wikipedia).

**Dispossession;** this entails the act of depriving and/or denying someone access to land, property and other material possessions (Wikipedia).

**Inheritance;** this connotes the act of passing over ownerships of property, titles, rights, obligations and debts among other following the demise of an individual (Wikipedia).

**Land;** solid part of the earth surface that is largely not covered by important body water.