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Land access and poverty reduction among women in Chansa in the north western region of Ghana

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Abstract

Millions of families in Africa depend on agriculture for their livelihood and poverty reduction. Women who are the majority and poorer in Africa and particularly those at Chansa in Ghana are engaged in farming and they contribute immensely to agricultural production in their capacity as farm owners, farm partners and farm labourers. What is not known, which the study is interested in finding out, is whether their role as farm owners' enables them have access to productive farm lands and the returns from farming contributes to the reduction of poverty among them. It is a case study and we employed qualitative methods such as interviews and focused group discussion in gathering data. The study revealed that land is a key factor of production in the community and contributes significantly to livelihood assets. However, the lack of ownership, control and full access to land by women in the Chansa community makes it difficult for them to cultivate food crops and invest in other projects that could reduce their poverty levels significantly. The study concludes that there is the need for customary land reform to modify customary laws on access to land and inheritance, which do not support the course of women.

Keywords: Land access, Poverty reduction, Women in Chansa

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1. Background

In pre-colonial days, Ghana was a conglomeration of independent states each with a self-controlled scheme of landed interest. Even where these states formed a confederation as they were in Ashanti, the political association did not entail the surrender of ownership of land to the federal authority. When the British later attempted to declare unoccupied lands as crown lands, Ghanaians successfully resisted the measures as confiscatory on the basis that by the customary law of Ghana, such unoccupied lands were already vested in the stool. This confirms the importance of land to the Ghanaian people. It is also important to note that Ghana particularly the northern regions, even before British colonization was a patriarchal society and the customary law regulating land ownership and usage recognized males as custodians of land and not women. The vested interest of women on land matters were through their husbands, fathers and brothers. This fact has been buttressed by researchers at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) based in Washington DC, who noted that the marginal nature of women's rights is a historical problem in Africa. Bomuhangi et al (2011) equally noted in their research work that before the advent of colonial rule land ownership was largely vested in lineages, clans and families with the males having the exclusive power to control these lands. Currently the situation today in the savannah regions of Ghana particularly Chansa, has not changed from the pre-colonial patriarchal order and women hardly have any say in the management of family/clan land.

In view of this arrangement, getting women in to the mainstream development agenda as stipulated by Article 36 of the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana has become problematic. The dominance of customary laws particularly in Northern Ghana over constitutional laws on land management has perpetuated inequality of access to, ownership and the use of land against women even though "women in Africa contribute seventy percent (70%) of food production, accounting for nearly half of all farm labour and also eighty to ninety percent (80-90%) of food processing, storage and transport as well as hoeing and weeding" (Kagwanja, 2008).

The male dominance regarding access to landed property in Ghana is even worse in the northern parts of the country. Available data indicates that, women form about 52% of the agricultural labour force contributing to between 55%-60% to total output (Duncan 2004). In the food chain, women again play a very crucial role. They engage in post harvest activities such as processing of grains, storage, and marketing. Tasks that traditionally were the exclusive preserve of males are now even better handled by women.

Access to and control over land in Ghana can be best explained in the context of the land tenure system. In the Upper West Region land is vested in the "Tendambas" and chiefs who play the role of title holders, holding land in trust for the whole community (Songsore and Denkabe: 1995).. If land is held in trust for the community, then women should have the right to be part in land sharing but this is not the case. It has been stated in the case of Roura and Forgas Ltd vs. British Bata Company Ltd (1961), GLR.339 that "*the land tenure system of Ghana is governed by the customary law which is the basic law which neither Ghanaians nor non-Ghanaians may contract out of*" (Duncan, 2004). Women thus, have to operate within this framework to obtain a parcel of land which is a source of wealth creation for their various activities. This sometimes creates a lot of barriers to their easy access to and use of land. In spite of the difficult situation women find

themselves in the land tenure system, they still struggle to have access to pieces of land for agricultural production and other purposes. Their motivation for the struggle to have access is premised on the fact that land and its use as a factor of production has direct relation to poverty reduction.

Based on the limitation posed on women's access to land, particularly those in the Chansa community, the study is meant to investigate this access limitations and the implication of that to poverty reduction. Therefore some of the research questions that need to be asked on this broad objective to guide the study are thus: do women have free access to land? If no, what limits their access to land? What is the relationship between access to land and poverty reduction?

1.1. Research methodology

A case study method was used in the study. This approach allowed the researcher to do a critical investigation and analysis of the land tenure system and land holding rights in the community. Both primary and secondary sources of data were gathered for the findings. Also the data collected were in quantitative and qualitative form. Probability and non-probability techniques were used to select 70 women and 30 men respondents out of a population of 1,308.

Three (3) key informants (Chief, Magazia and Tendana) were also interviewed. Women constitute the majority (70%) of the sample because the study focused mainly on women's access to land. Men were also interviewed to ascertain their views on women's access to land as their perceptions could be different from that of the women. The Tendana and the Chief were interviewed because of their position and roles in land administration in the Chansa community. The Magazia who is the women's leader in the community was equally interviewed to ascertain her opinion on women access to land as well as their roles on land issues in the community.

1.2. Conceptualizing land, land access, culture and poverty

The theoretical and the conceptual underpinnings of land, modes of land acquisition and ownership, land access and culture and finally an overview of poverty and women land access in Northern Ghana are very vital to a clear understanding of women's access to landed property in Chansa.

1.3. Generic meaning of land

Land is a term with diverse meaning to different people depending on their interest, orientation or outlook at any given time. In some jurisdictions, land is considered to be the solid portion of the earth surface as nations, traditional authority areas, areas occupied by clans, stool/skin territories, a political division, the ground, soil, or earth. Others consider land as something on which they can farm, build a house, walk, play, worship, express themselves, construct a sports complex, and portray their culture and tradition or rear animals.

From the legal perspective, land is any portion of the earth surface over which ownership rights could be exercised by a person or a group of persons. These rights do not only include the surface area but also all

natural (e.g. trees, fish, rivers, valleys etc.) and man-made (e.g. buildings, and other improvements) objects that are attached to the surface and all valuable objects located beneath or above the surface (Barlowe, 1986)). Since the study dwells much on land access and its economic relations to women, the economic viewpoint of land is worth examining. The economic concept of land refers to all nature-given resources and improvements made by man over which control is granted by the possession of a portion of the earth's surface. This concept of land includes; the earth's surface, water, ice, ground, building sites, farmland, forest, minerals and water resources, sunlight, rain, wind, temperatures, and locations relative to areas or various land uses. Similarly, man-made improvements that are attached to the land which cannot be removed easily are also included (Barlowe, 1986)). The economic concept of land could be sub-divided into various overlapping concepts. These include; land as space, nature, a factor of production, consumption good, situation, property and capital.

1.4. Modes of land ownership and acquisition

1.4.1. Traditional mode of land ownership and acquisition

In ancient times, the original settlers in an area as a result of migration, conquest and natural disasters became the owners. These 'original settlers' in some communities in Ghana are often referred to as the Tendana. Thus, land could subsequently be acquired through negotiations with the Tendana and or the chiefs. As Duncan and Brants (2004) put it, "women had not played a traditional role in original land acquisition since land was commonly appropriated under the leadership of a stool or lineage head..." This meant that, customary law created no such haven for women's land access since they had no chances of ascending a stool or occupying a skin or even becoming a family head unless occasioned through the death of all males in the family line, which is very rare.

Traditionally, land is not sold due to its sacred nature and as such, for an individual to obtain a parcel of land, items such as cowries, cola nuts, fowls, sheep and some drinks are presented for the negotiation. These items are not ends in themselves but means of calling upon the ancestors to protect and bless the land to be more fertile and fruitful. Indeed, what pertains, generally, at the moment in the Upper West Region is that, land is controlled through family ownership which is a further development of the communal ownership of land that existed from pre-colonial times.... , (Songsore and Denkabe, 1995, p. 34). This form of family ownership of land in modern times, however, does not promote investment and large scale commercial production.

Most of the land litigation cases in the courts of Ghana can be attributed to the family or communal form of land ownership and usage especially when it comes to issues of inheritance. For instance, in the Chansa community in particular, oral tradition has it that land is not sold. This has the tendency of inhibiting development of permanent projects and sustainable use of the land if obtained.

Generally, a peculiar feature of land tenure practices in the Upper West Region is that women do not own land. They, however, have the right to collect fuel wood and gather the fruits of economic trees, barks, roots and foliage on well established fallow lands ... (Songsore and Denkabe, 1995, p. 35). Women should therefore

be encouraged and given the right based on the above assertion to engage in more productive economic ventures to stimulate development.

1.4.2. Modern mode of land ownership and acquisition

In the modern democratic dispensation of Ghana, subject to the provisions of article 257(1) of the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitutional provision that states that, "all public lands shall be vested in the president on behalf of and in trust for the people of Ghana". Furthermore, clauses 3 and 4 states that for the avoidance of doubts, all lands in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions of Ghana after the coming into force of the Constitution shall be given back to their original owners. The Lands Commission of Ghana, which is also established under article 258 (1) of the constitution is the body solely responsible for the appropriation of lands in Ghana in collaboration with other relevant public agencies and governmental bodies.

In recent times, individuals seeking to obtain a piece of land for an economic activity do not need to perform only the traditional rites. There is interplay of both traditional and modern elements of land acquisition in the process. After one has undergone all the traditional processes, there is still the need to verify and obtain relevant documentation from the Lands Commission and the other coordinating agencies. Other works of Songsore and Denkabe (1995, pp. 34-35) indicated that

Increasingly, the emergence of commodity production as opposed to subsistence production has left a mark on the land tenure system in the region ..., it has not led to the development of sharecropping patterns as obtains in the cocoa growing areas of southern Ghana. Neither has it led to the buying and selling of land.

Over a decade, the above situation has changed dramatically since buying and selling of land is now a common phenomenon in most towns in the region. This still has the tendency of affecting women's land access, especially in the open market as their income levels are mostly inadequate for them to also acquire some parcels of land.

1.5. Land access and culture

1.5.1. Land Access

The term 'access' is a generic term with various meanings. For the purpose of this study, it refers to "the right or opportunity to obtain, have or use something that will bring you benefits" (Macmillan English Dictionary, international student edition, 2002). Access to land can thus be referred to as the right or opportunity to obtain, have or use land to obtain benefits now and or in the future. Throughout sub Saharan Africa, there is a common view that, women are 'owners of crops' rather than 'owners of land'. Recent attempts to streamline land administration in Ghana have led to genuine fear that, women will be left out altogether (Bonye and Abaazami, 2008). This African view is a replica of what is happening in most parts of Ghana. Land accessibility and the sustainability of this access are very crucial for any meaningful development.

Women usually have very little or no access to land, which is very important in determining productivity and labour welfare. As indicated in Owusu et al. (2007) and Yankson and Kala (2007), there is an increasing access to land among women in Ghana and that, sustainability of this access and whether women have adequate control over the land after obtaining access is often the difficulty. This might only be true for wealthy and elite women since the rural poor illiterate woman still struggles to obtain land within the dictates of socio-cultural factors. In worse situations, rural women are even denied access to lands owned by their husbands after the demise of the latter. This is because a lot of these women do not know the basic rights they have over land and other properties that their deceased spouses may have left behind. They are unable to seek redress over such unfair treatments meted out to them sometimes not out of ignorance but due to the obnoxious cultural practice that fundamentally frowns upon women who stage claims over what rightly belongs to their deceased spouses and therefore theirs and their children's by extension. Duncan et al, 2004 also reveals that women have not played a traditional role in original land acquisition. The work further indicated that, in primordial times, land was commonly obtained through conquest or appropriation under the leadership of a stool or lineage heads and that, women had little or no role to play in this process.

A critical analysis of some rural communities in Ghana shows that apart from two traditional institutions namely inheritance and marriage that offer women greater opportunity to have access to land, market oriented forces and capability issues such as purchasing of land and leasing arrangements tend to limit women in their bid to obtain and use land. This is because the ability of a woman to purchase land may depend among other things on her economic status. Also, her ability to access land by way of leasing arrangement may depend on procedures or processes involved in competition, bargaining, and negotiation (Afutu-Kotey et al., 2009). Though land is traditionally owned by families and clans in most communities in Ghana, there are a few parcels of land owned by individuals who are mostly men. Women find it difficult to even obtain family and clan lands in most Ghanaian indigenous communities on the belief that they cannot perform sacrifices to pacify the earth goddess and that this could spell doom for the entire family or clan.

A study conducted by Afutu-Kotey et al. (2009) in selected communities in the Ga West and Dangme East districts of the Greater Accra region of Ghana indicated that, about 17% of women have access to land. Even though evidence from the above work indicates that women have some level of access to land in Greater Accra region, certain socio-cultural factors limit their ability to have control over their land. Women's limited access to land and its usage for land related activities is also likely to affect the sustainability of access. In such circumstance, the woman cannot make major developmental decisions on the land and in extreme cases, the woman could even loose the land entirely.

As evidenced in the Social Enterprise Development Foundation Ghana's report (SEND, 2008), most women complained about the difficulties they encountered in accessing land. This further confirms that, women in general have problems with land issues. SEND Ghana's (2008) study included women respondents from Matsekpoe in the Dangbe East District of the Greater Accra region, Tangasia in the Upper West Region, Gane in the Kasena Nankana District of the Upper East Region and Kalende in the East Gonja District of the Northern Region.

1.5.2. Culture and its impact on women land access in Northern Ghana

Culture has proven to be one of the ancient institutions which continue to determine the way of life of a group of people and should therefore be critically examined. Culture is defined by Taylor (1871) as "Culture is that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". It is also recognized that (UNESCO, 1982)

Culture... is... the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

This connotation of culture as a complex whole reflects a perception that, human life is experienced in totality to the extent that (Kpieta et al., 2012):

Among the people of Africa especially Ghana, there is a traditional concept of land worship. Significantly, the African regard the earth as a "god" or "Mother Earth", offering prayer in the form of libation pouring before cultivating the land and during harvest.

From the foregoing, culture is an invaluable feature necessary for a peaceful communal living and is the springboard to the blossoming development of every community. What is important is that, culture should not be rigid; it should not be treated as if it were a "demigod" but should rather be seen to be flexible so that it could be adopted and adapted to suit current realities that confront humanity.

According to Manu et al. (1993, in Songsore and Denkabe, 1995, p. 74), "it was men not women who founded clans, fought for land or in the process of hunting, discovered the village boundary..., established permanent use rights on any piece of clan land by being the first to cultivate it". Many other cultural factors demonstrate the extent to which the way of life of a group of people has affected women land access. Within the context of patriarchal society as pertains to the situation in northern Ghana, cultural values tend to subordinate women thus inhibiting their right to land access. Inadequate support for women land access will therefore imply the inability of women to scale up production to meet the growing food deficits of the country where chronic food insecurity is widespread and livelihoods are more vulnerable. There is therefore the need to find a lasting solution to the difficulties women face in trying to obtain land for use. The absence of this effort implies that, the potentials of women will not be fully and efficiently realized and might also mean the forfeiture of an opportunity to addressing poverty in Ghana, Upper West Region and the Chansa community in particular.

1.6. Poverty and women land access

Poverty as defined by the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy I (GPRS I, 2003), is an unacceptable physiological and social deprivation caused or exacerbated by low levels of consumption through lack of access to capital, social assets, land and market opportunities. In the view of Humado, "Poverty in the country had remained a disproportionately rural phenomenon, explaining that an estimated 86 percent` of the total population living below the poverty line came from the rural areas" (Daily Graphic Oct 2009).

Commenting on the subject, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2007) indicated that poverty is most severe among food crop farmers, who are mainly traditional small-scale producers six out of ten of whom are poor, and many of whom are women. Since women in Ghana contribute so much to national output, difficulties pertaining to their land access have the potency of even reinforcing the poverty cycle as low productivity could be an outcome. This development is well demonstrated in the poverty cycle (Figure 1).

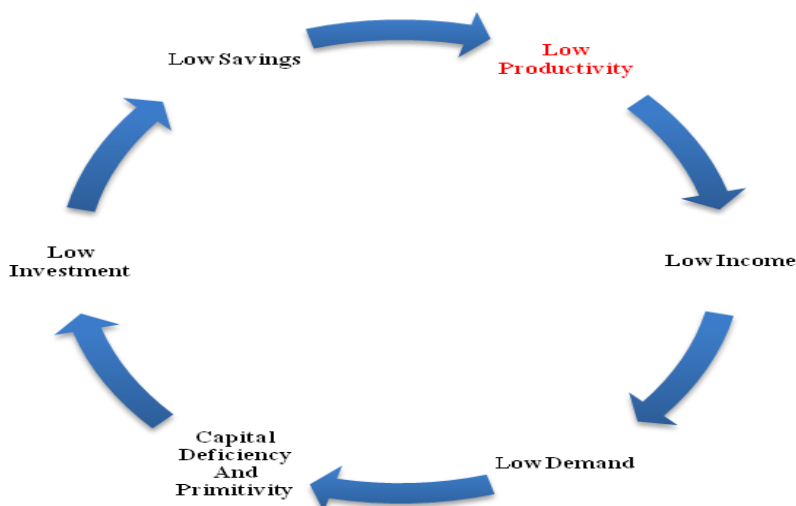


Figure 1. Poverty Cycle (Songsore and Denkabe, 1995)

Women's poverty could therefore be addressed if the desire to improve the living conditions of the rural folks is prioritized and given the needed attention. This can aptly be pursued through the adoption of a harmonized system that is capable of breaking through the cultural barriers to women land access. Indeed several strides have been made as regards the access and ownership of land. Women access to land is not a problem in Ghana alone but also in Swaziland, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda, (Kagwanja, 2008).

2. Data presentation, analysis and discussion

2.1. Age distribution of respondents

The column bar chart below clearly depicts the gender composition of the respondents. Over 18 of the female participants have had extensive experience as far as access to land and more specifically, women access to land is concerned (women respondents between 46 and 60 years). From the graph (Figure 2), while the Y-axis represents the frequencies of respondents, the X-axis represents the income categories/range of the respondents.

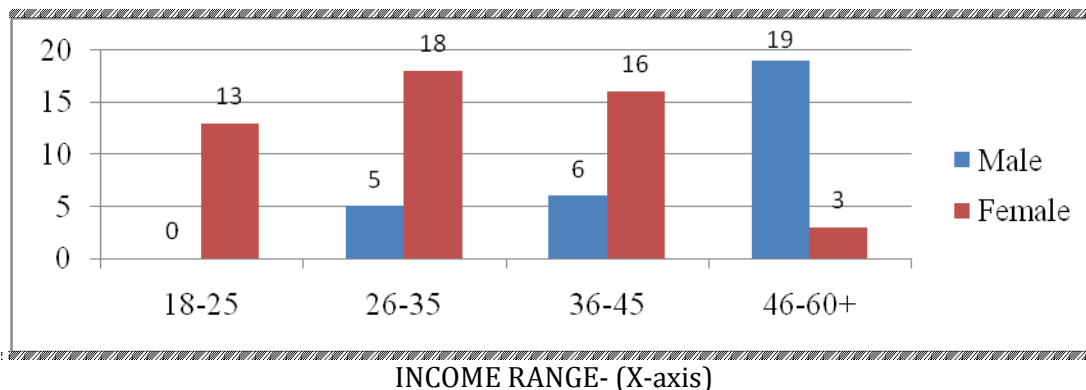


Figure 1. BAR Chart Showing the Age Distribution of Male and Female Respondents (Authors’ construct, May/June, 2012)

2.2. Marital status of respondents

The research also examined the marital status of respondents. Below is a table indicating the findings. The table does not include the key informants since they are not part of the sample group. However, all three key informants were married.

Marrital Status of Respondents

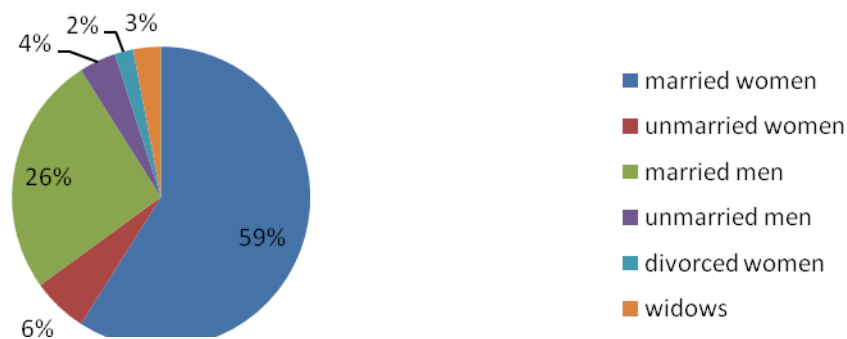


Figure 2. PIE Chart Showing Marital Status of Respondents (Authors’ construct, May/June 2012)

From the pie chart, the various categories of people were selected due to their different perceptions and views on land issues. Also further analysis of the data gathered indicated that out of the 85 married couples identified, 54 of them involved marriages where women shared their husbands with other women whiles 31 were monogamous. These represented 63.5% and 36.5% respectively.

The system of marriage whereby a man marries more than one wife is dominant in the community as compared to monogamy. According to the women respondents, this practice has reduced the size of land

available to each individual in the household. This stems from the fact that there is often pressure on the family land since the land has to be divided among many people in the family thereby reducing the land per head. This can lead to low output, low income and increased poverty levels of women in particular thus reinforcing the poverty cycle in tandem with the literature.

2.3. Occupation

Farming is the dominant occupation for women in the Chansa community which constitute about 72% as against petty trading and others constituting 18% and 10% respectively as evidenced in Table 6. Others as indicated in the table include; dressmaking, charcoal burning and Shea butter processing. Farming is thus, the dominant occupation in the Chansa community. All the respondents engaged in petty trading were women. The women engage in petty economic activities to support the family income and to also get themselves busy in the dry season.

Table 1. Occupational Distribution

Occupation	Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative percent
Farming	72	72.0	72.0
Petty Trading	18	18.0	90.0
Others	10	10.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	

Field Survey, May/June 2012

Land ownership and access is very crucial in the Chansa community since the major occupation in the community is farming. Women in the Chansa community only have access to land which is widely regulated by culture and marriage systems. According to some of the women respondents, their inability to own land in the Chansa community has limited their production levels since they mostly do not get fertile lands at the right place and time and this often results in low productivity and food insecurity.

The challenges confronting women in Chansa in their land acquisition process has thus been regarded by the women respondents as one of the causes of poverty among them.

2.4. Educational background of respondents

Education is an essential feature that has been acclaimed and adopted by most people to be a necessary condition for an individual to adequately meet the basic needs of life. As a result of this fact, the study tried to find out the educational status (as presented in Table 7) of the respondents since the perceptions, thoughts and outlook of a literate may differ from that of an illiterate.

The study revealed that as many as 48% of respondents have never had any formal education even though in absolute terms 36 female respondents as compared to 12 respondents have never had any formal education. Only 1% of the total respondents progressed to the tertiary level (Table 7). All the three key

informants for the study do not also have any form of formal education. Low level of formal education in the community mean there are very few opportunities for diversification from agriculture and petty trading.

Table 2. Educational status of respondents

Educational level	Frequency		Total Frequency	Total Percentage (%)
	Male	Female		
Primary	10	23	33	33.0
JHS	5	8	13	13.0
Secondary	3	2	5	5.0
Tertiary	-	1	1	1.0
None	12	36	48	48.0
Total	30	70	100	100.0

Author's construct, May/June 2012

2.5. Income distribution of respondents

The ability to meet the basic necessities of life depends on how much an individual is able to earn from any economic activity undertaken. This is also closely linked with land access and ownership since most income-generating activities require the use of landed resources. In order to assess how land access can influence the incomes of respondents, knowledge on their annual income was necessary. Table 3 presents the findings on respondents' income.

Table 3. Income distribution of respondents male and female respondents (Per Annum)

Income Range (GH¢)	Frequency		Total	Total percentage
	Male	Female		
0-100	1	25	26	26.0
101-200	1	19	20	20.0
201-300	1	16	17	17.0
301-400	11	8	19	19.0
401-500+	16	2	18	18.0
Total	30	70	100	100.0

Author's construct, May/June 2012

As many as 16 of the 18 people who were within the relatively higher income bracket were males as compared to only 2 females. Two of the key informants of the study (the linguist and Tendana) fell within the income range of GH¢401-500+ while the magazia is within the range of GH¢301-400. This implies that,

poverty levels in the community are generally high among women than men in the community. This statistics is presented further using the line graph below.

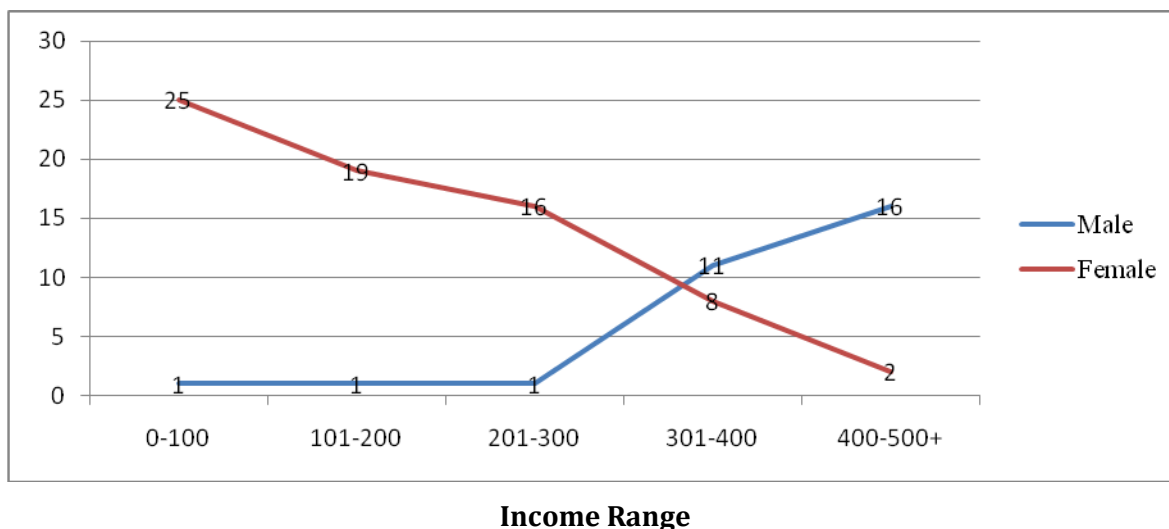


Figure 3. Trend Line Graph for Income of Male and Female Respondents (Authors' construct May June 2012).

As shown on Figure 4, the majority (16) of male respondents fall within the income range of GH¢401- GH¢500 whilst only 2 female respondents fall within the same income range. On the other hand, most (25) of the female respondents fall within GH¢0- GH¢100 while only 1 male respondent is found within the lowest income range. The above also means that, as the income range increases from GH¢0-100 to GH¢401-500+, the frequencies of the male respondents also increase while the frequencies of the female respondent decrease. From the responses gathered, compared to the male respondents, the female are poorer with respect to the lower income range for the study (GH¢0- GH¢100). Women's inability to own land can be said to be responsible for the sharp disparity in their income levels with the male respondents as in Figure 4.

From the FGD, women respondents also indicated that, the problems they encounter regarding land ownership and control are partly responsible for their poverty levels since fruits of economic tress as well as fuel wood cannot be harvested easily to support themselves.

2.5.1. Implications of land access and income levels of respondents

Given the current trends in prices of goods and services, an individual whose annual income falls within the median income range (GH¢201- GH¢300) in Table 9 will find it difficult to meet his or her basic needs. This financial burden is particularly the case where there are other external financial requirements (such as payment of fees of children in secondary and tertiary educational institutions, buying textbooks etc.) on the income earner. The low annual income of women in the Chansa community as per the study means that, there will be less money to be invested in their farming and other income generating activities to increase output and improve their livelihoods.

2.6. Women land access

The ability of women to obtain land for economic activities defines their land access. As revealed from the Focus Group Discussion and interviews with the Tendana, women in the community have access to land on request by their husbands and other landlords. According to the Tendana, land in the Chansa community is seen as a free gift of nature. It is therefore not sold or bought neither do they engage in the practice of sharecropping. Consequently, for someone to obtain a parcel of land, items such as kola nuts and some token of money are sent to the landlord to make the proposal. This is not different from what was obtained during the literature review where it was revealed that, land in some parts of the Upper West Region was not sold. The Tendana added that, upon the receipt of the items mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the contract is initiated and the request is thus granted. Also, a woman seeking to use a piece of land outside the control of her husband has to inform the husband who intends initiates the process.

It is observed from the above that, marriage plays a very crucial role in women land access in the Chansa community as one respondent puts it, "if you are not married and no one also likes you, you may not get land".

2.6.1. Women access to farmland, land allocation and management

The ability of an individual to own land makes it possible for that individual to undertake permanent development projects without the fear of losing the title rights of such land and property in the future. This will lead to increasing output. But in the Chansa community, women do not own land as evidenced from the data collected and presented in Table 9. This implies that a piece of land that a woman is working on can be collected back at any point in time irrespective of the benefits they derive from owning the land which are observed to include: farm produce, herbs, charcoal, dawadawa, sheabutter etc. Unfortunately all the respondents including women confirmed that women do not own land. However, the Tendana was quick to add that, women from their family can own land and that, this right to ownership of land is forfeited when they marry. The Tendana's position was validated during FGD with women as thus:

- Women do not own or control land in the Chansa community
- Women have access to land for farming and other economic activities such as charcoal burning.
- Women can access land through a request from their husbands and other landlords.
- Women have control over economic trees such as shea and dawadawa trees which are found on their farmlands and which often serve to supplement their household incomes.

In trying to ascertain why in their view women do not own land, some of the responses were:

- Women become part of the family through marriage and as such are not allowed to own land since they are considered as a 'strangers'.
- Women are not heads of households as such do not have the right to own land.
- Women cannot pacify the earth goddess. Therefore, their ownership of land will invoke the wrath of the ancestors on the community.

Besides the field survey revealed that, women do not have any role in the allocation, and management of family land. The Magazia added that, the trend was changing now since she is invited to some meetings on land issues which hitherto was not the case. Also in the customary opinion of the Tendana, land in the Chansa community belongs to the family heads (men) and since women are not heads of households, they have no say in the allocation, sharing and management of land; a practice that has been inherited.

2.7. Challenges of women in farmland acquisition

Some respondents however, had problems with the practice where land had to be obtained through request from the Tendana and or elders of the community owing to the following problems associated with it:

- Spontaneous taking away of land by owner (s) since there is no binding agreement between the land owner and land user.
- Inability to obtain land of choice and size since on request one cannot decide the location, size of land needed as well as the appropriate time.
- Inadequate yields from some of the lands that are given to women for crop production.
- Difficulty in permanently investing in the land since land it is not legally owned by the potential investor.
- Excessive fragmentation of family lands in polygamous households due to the fact that, most men marry more than one wife in the Chansa community.

Owing to the above, some respondents were of the view that, these problems could be remedied through outright purchase of land, a written contractual agreement detailing the terms of offer, acceptance and consideration paid; formation of women groups and the revision of cultural beliefs on women land ownership and control.

2.8. Reasons why women are not included in land allocation and management

In trying to identify some of the reasons why women did not own land and as well take part in the allocation and management of family land in the Chansa community, some male respondents gave the following reasons:

- Men marry women sometimes from both far and near and one should not expect that a woman should come from somewhere to own land.
- It was also the view of the male respondents that if women were allowed to own land, they would challenge the position of men.
- It was also argued that, traditionally, it is a taboo for women to sacrifice to the earth goddess and that provides an indication that by extension they should not own land.

2.9. Women land access and poverty

Respondents and the key informants indicated that women in the Chansa community have access to land for their economic activities. However, they have no ownership and control right to the land they use.

It was generally acknowledged that land is a key factor of production in the community that contributes significantly to livelihood assets. However, the lack of ownership, control and full access to land by women in the Chansa community makes it difficult for them to cultivate food crops and invest in other projects that could alleviate their poverty levels. As observed from the study, women who ventured into farming were often given infertile portions of farmlands to cultivate and given that the community is mainly a polygenous one, farm lands allocated to women are fragmented and do not support large-scale production. Another significant observation made is that women become landless and hence poorer immediately their husbands die and they do not have grown up sons to inherit their fathers' farmlands. This is so because per the dictates of their culture, when a husband dies the ownership and management of the deceased's farmlands reverses to his immediate family other than his sons who may be too young to manage the farmlands. This development has impacted negatively on their income levels and consequently makes them poorer.

3. Conclusions

The women respondents have clearly demonstrated a clear link between land access and their poverty levels. The fact that women do not own land in the Chansa community but have to ask for land through their husbands implies that there is a problem which should be addressed.

The views of women from the FGD were in tandem with those of the individual respondents who indicated that women in the Chansa community do not and cannot own land due to cultural reasons. A significant number of women in the Chansa community are engaged in agricultural production for their livelihood and this makes it necessary to introduce deliberate supportive mechanisms through the dissemination of appropriate agricultural extension services to improve their farming methods. The ability of women in the Chansa community to own land coupled with the application of improved agricultural technologies has positive implications for increased production which will go a long way to reduce their poverty levels.

With women's invaluable contributions of 70% towards national food security (Duncan B.A 2004), factors which serve as an affronts to sustainable land ownership of women should be removed in order to escape food security crisis in Ghana and in the Chansa community in particular.

4. Recommendations

The study sought to ascertain the relationship between women's land access and poverty level in the Chansa community. Therefore on the basis of the findings made from the study, the following are being put forward for consideration in policy discourse.

- As part of the land tenure reform, customary laws of access to land and inheritance which do not support the cause of women, should be reformed. This can be achieved if the Regional House of Chiefs and the Chansa Traditional Council muster the necessary will to support women empowerment.

- Furthermore, the modes of land acquisition in the community should make it possible for outright purchase of land through leasing devoid of sex preference. This can confer ownership rights on the women so that they can use the land at their own free will without any fear.
- The traditional authorities of the Chansa community should ensure that, in achieving equity in access to and control of land, the Land Administration Programme (LAP) becomes an integral component of customary land administration. This can be done through sensitization of land owners (men) on the need to allow women to own and use land.
- It is also recommended that women in the Chansa community should form advocacy groups. The group formation will be better undertaken if women are empowered through capacity building programmes. This will make it easy for them to press for their rights and be in a better position to access credit from financial institutions for their farming and other income generating activities.

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Other Resources

The 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana