

Women, and Land and Property Rights in Benin City, Nigeria

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Abstract

The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions states that women's rights to land and property are systematically denied, and that over one billion women worldwide have been affected by this trend. In Nigeria, although the constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination against women, land and property rights are still determined by the principle of male primogeniture. This paper discusses the consequences of gender discrimination on women and their households in relation to land and property rights. A qualitative approach was adopted in this study. Twenty women who constituted the sample participated in the semi-structured interviews. For the focus groups discussion, the researcher selected 10 of these participants, who were divided into two focus groups. The research tools were a semi-structured interview schedule and a focus group discussion guide. The researcher analysed the data generated using thematic content analysis. The prominent findings of this paper are that housing and food insecurity, the lack of access to matrimonial property, disinheritance, and poverty are among the consequences of gender discrimination on women and their households in relation to land and property rights.

Keywords: gender; land and property rights; developmental social work

Introduction

Gender discrimination in land and property rights in Benin City, Nigeria, started in the precolonial era, and has persisted until this present moment. The problem exists because of the entrenched patriarchal norms and values in the society. This paper explores gender discrimination in land and property rights and its implication for social work practice in Benin City, Nigeria. The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE 2004, 7) maintains that, “women’s rights to land and property are systematically denied and over one billion women worldwide have been affected”. Under both statutory law and customary law, a greater percentage of women in Benin City, Nigeria, irrespective of their marital status, cannot own or inherit land or other property in their own right.

In Benin City, Nigeria, inheritance is by male primogeniture. The first surviving son inherits all the property of the deceased father. Usually, women do not have an equal share with men in the transference of family properties because after marriage, women leave their natal families to settle with their marital families. It is generally believed that female children rob their natal families of their inheritance to the advantage of their marital families (Ehiakhamen 2011).

Nigeria is a patriarchal society, and the majority of the ethnic groups place a higher premium on male children than female children as far as land and property rights are concerned (Aluko and Amidu 2006). From a legal point of view, section 6(6) paragraph (c) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Nigeria 1999) ousted the jurisdiction of the law courts in adjudicating on any matter pertaining to gender discrimination in land and property rights.

Attempts to redress the problem of gender discrimination in land and property rights in Benin City, Nigeria, have not been very successful. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Nigeria 1999) prohibits all forms of discrimination against women. Nigeria is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, gender discrimination in land and property rights have continued unabated.

There are legislative enactments in support of gender discrimination in land and property rights such as the Wills law and the Administration of Estate law. The negative effects of these laws are that women and their innocent girl children are deprived of property rights. Such deprivation might lead to a cycle of intergenerational poverty which is a phenomenon that is not easy to rectify.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate the experiences of women in Benin City, southern Nigeria, in relation to land and property rights. This article starts with a review of the theoretical framework informing the study. It further discusses the literature review applying a deductive approach in terms of trends related to the title. The research approach, data analysis, ethical issues and the findings are also discussed.

Theoretical Framework

Discrimination against women in the ownership of land and property can be explained by recourse to the feminist theory, postcolonial theory and black feminist theory.

Feminist Theory

According to Bryson (2003, 1), the feminist theory seeks to determine why in every society “men appear to have more power and privileges than women”. The feminist theory also seeks to understand the discrimination experienced by women and how this can be redressed. The term “feminist” refers to any theory that views the relationship between the sexes in a society as one of inequality and subordination (Bryson 2003).

Feminist movements around the world such as the liberal feminists and radical feminists agree they must join forces to defeat the patriarchal super-structure in any society. The capitalist mode of production supports patriarchal values and norms. This has led to the exploitation of women in all facets of society (Thobejane 2014).

In order for patriarchy to continue, female marginalisation by men must be sustained. Women have been dehumanised and reduced to mere objects of procreation. Added to this, men see themselves as superior to women, and they must continue to lord it over women in the society (Thobejane 2014). In every known human society, men and women are treated differently. Masculinity and femininity are highly political, and often determine who should remain perpetually subservient in society (Makama 2013).

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theorists argue that intellectuals in the former colonial states often do a disservice to marginalised and oppressed groups because they – the intellectuals – claim they can always speak for or represent them. Intellectuals do not live the experiences of marginalised or oppressed groups and consequently, may distort reality. Therefore, all stakeholders in former colonial states should allow oppressed groups to stand up and speak for themselves (Appelrouth and Edles 2007).

Mekgwe (2006) argues that postcolonial theory recognises that there is a common struggle among African men to end discriminatory and exploitative western colonial influences. Mekgwe (2006, 19) succinctly describes it as “every woman and every man should be a feminist”. African productive resources, especially land, are for the benefit of all Africans.

Black Feminist Theory

The black feminist theory recognises the interlocking nature of oppressions. This constitutes a paradigm shift in feminist understanding. Women worldwide should not be excluded in the analysis of female subordination and oppression. The reason is that women as a group are affected by power imbalances all over the world (Bryson 2003).

The black feminist theory explores how women in the hitherto colonised territories have been affected by colonialism and neo-colonialism. This theory is mainly identified with the struggles of the feminists in the former colonies (Mishra 2013).

Mohanty (1991) cited in Mishra (2013, 132) in support of the black feminist theory, criticised western feminism on the grounds that “it is ethnocentric and does not pay attention to the unique experiences of women residing in postcolonial nations”. Western feminism sees all women as a homogeneous group with the same experience.

Mohanty is of the opinion that postcolonial women are not necessarily ignorant, poor, tradition-bound and domesticated. But rather, women in former colonial nations have been victims of colonisation and patriarchy (Mishra 2013). The relationship between the sexes in relation to the sharing of family land and property has always been that of inequality and subordination. Worse still, the ruling class has not been able to bring about any radical change in the “inherited” colonial land and property legislative enactments.

Literature Review

From a human rights perspective, housing, land and property (HLP) rights can be used interchangeably. The HLP rights are to ensure that housing, land and property are treated as the human rights issues all over the world (UN 2012). According to FAO (2006) land rights are rules regulating people’s relationship to land and housing. And property rights are the rights one has over physical objects such as a house or arable land.

The CEDAW (UN 1999, Article 1) defines gender discrimination as:

... any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which as the effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women and men, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civic or any other field.

Customary laws are unwritten and based on the traditional beliefs of the people in society. Under the customary laws of most African societies, women whether married or not cannot own or inherit land. Added to this, women’s access to land depends on their relationship with their husbands or male relatives. Another aspect of land ownership in Africa is the registration of title to land in the husband’s name. The implication of this is that often women have no legal title to the land. After the death of the husband, the family property is normally divided among the deceased husband’s children (Udoh 2012).

Doss et al. (2013) observe that the mean percentage of women landholders in eight countries in Africa is 23.8 per cent as Table 1 represents:

Table 1: Women landholders across eight countries in Africa as at 2002

<i>Country (Year)</i>		<i>Percentage of landholders who are women</i>
1	Botswana (2004)	43.7
2	Cape Verde (2004)	50.2
3	Comoros (2004)	32.6
4	Ethiopia (2001–2002)	18.7
5	Gambia (2001–2002)	8.3
6	Madagascar (2004–2005)	15.3
7	Mali (2004–2005)	3.1
8	Tanzania (2007–2008)	27.0
Mean		23.8

Source: FAO (2010).

From the table above, it can be deduced that across all eight countries, women own less than one-quarter of available lands. This implies that women are discriminated against in the context of ownership of land.

In many sub-Saharan African countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, and Nigeria, issues pertaining to inheritance are determined by customary law (Cooper 2010). Additionally, inheritance, marriage, and family law matters are excluded from non-discriminatory clauses in the national constitutions of the six countries mentioned above (Cooper 2010). The implication of exclusion of inheritance-related issues from non-discriminatory clauses in national constitutions is that no citizen can go to the law court to successfully seek redress in inheritance-related issues.

According to the Huairou Commission (HC 2013, 3), in sub-Saharan Africa,

... traditionally, land was communally owned. Although decisions about land were largely made by male leaders such as chiefs, and both women and men benefitted equally. The colonial era introduced the commodification of land. Land became an asset to buy and sell and individual ownership over land replaced communal ownership ... the colonial powers helped to concretise the concept that land should be in the hands of men. Of course, this was a concept completely in line with the patrilineal view of land held by most traditional communities.

Throughout Africa, the vast majority of women who depend on land for their livelihood are either landless or have limited rights to land (Odeny 2013). The inability of most women to have secured access to land is an obstacle to sustainable socio-economic development. Women should have secured land rights in order to achieve food security, and overcome poverty.

The plight of women in relation to land ownership can be attributed to numerous factors. These include expropriation of land by colonial masters, the introduction of tenure systems alien to Africa, mining activities, the introduction of land markets, large-scale agriculture, and bio-fuel plantations (Odeny 2013).

Research Approach and Methods

The overall research question of this article is: What are the experiences of women in Benin City, southern Nigeria, in relation to land and property rights? A qualitative approach was adopted in this study to explore and describe the lived experiences of the participants within their context. The qualitative approach was more economical because the sample size is not overly large (Matthews and Ross 2010).

The study population consisted of members of the Widows Group of Saint Mathews Catholic Church, First East Circular Road, Benin City. Matthews and Ross (2010, 142) say that “qualitative research methods are primarily concerned with stories and accounts including subjective understandings, feelings, opinions, and beliefs”. This study was exploratory because little is known about this phenomenon in Nigeria from a social work perspective.

This study was divided into two phases with a separate sample for each phase. According to Matthews and Ross (2010, 167), purposive sampling is “a non-probability sample associated with small and in-depth studies”. For the first phase, (face-to-face interviews), 20 women were interviewed. The participants for the first phase were selected based on the judgement of the researcher regarding the characteristics of participants who would best provide the data needed to answer the study’s research question. The criteria for purposive sampling were age, marital status, and personal experiences of the research participants.

The sample for the second phase (focus group discussions (FGDs)) consisted of two groups of five women each, ten in total. They were chosen from the first sample because they spoke with confidence during the face-to-face interviews. The FGDs were conducted to supplement the data acquired through the interviews.

Data saturation was reached after the fifteenth face-to-face interview; there were no new data or themes emerging. Researchers agree that data saturation is reached if it is no longer possible to generate new data or themes from the study sample (Fusch and Ness 2015). Nevertheless, the researcher continued data collection with an additional five women to confirm that there were no more new themes or data emerging.

Key informants (social workers), five in total, were also selected from social welfare agencies involved in women’s rights issues in Benin City, Nigeria. They were selected because they are conversant with women’s rights matters, and have worked in their various agencies for at least three years.

The researcher analysed the data generated using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). In analysing the data, the researcher familiarised himself with the data, generated codes, searched for themes, reviewed themes, defined and named themes, and finally, transcribed the verbal data.

The research ethics committee (non-medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand granted ethical clearance [Ethics approval number: R14/49 (15 June 2015)] before the study was conducted. The researcher ensured that none of the research participants suffered any form of harm or discomfort during the data collection. For instance, participants were informed that should they experience any form of discomfort – like remembering a bitter feeling of the past, such as the way and manner they were denied their inheritance (land and housing) – they would be given free counselling by the Guidance and Counselling Unit of the University of Benin, Benin City.

Findings and Discussion

From the data collected from the participants, it was evident that 10 participants were between the ages 60–70 years, six between 50–60 years, and four between 40–50 years. Twelve of the participants had a primary education, six attended secondary school, and two had tertiary education. The majority of the participants were either petty traders or unemployed.

A solid understanding of the consequences of gender discrimination in land and property rights on women and their households is fundamental to our perception of the marginalisation of women in Nigeria. The following consistent themes emerged from interviews and FGDs: housing insecurity; food insecurity; the lack of access to matrimonial property; disinheritance of widows; disinheritance of female children; poverty; and vulnerability to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Housing Insecurity

Cutts et al. (2011) define housing insecurity as the high cost of housing in relation to income, poor housing accommodation, multiple moves from one house to another for a variety of reasons, overcrowding, and homelessness. Housing insecurity is one of the primary consequences of gender discrimination in land and property rights against women and their households in Benin City, Nigeria. The participants expressed their views on how housing insecurity has affected them and their households. For example, participant 4 noted:

My husband died testate. He made out a will concerning his two houses and three other undeveloped parcels of land. The will states that all his estates are for his male children alone. None of his estates was bequeathed to my female children and me. My husband's family sold one of the houses left behind by my late husband, and kept the second one for my male children. They also sold his three parcels of land, and said that the proceeds from all the properties will be used to further the education of my children. My female

children and I are now staying in a rented apartment but not so sure of where the money to renew the rent will come from.

Participants from the FGDs also expressed their views about housing insecurity.

According to a participant in FGD A:

For most women, litigation of any kind in Nigeria is very expensive which was why when I felt discriminated against in the devolution of my late husband's land and housing, I did not see any reason to go to the law court to seek redress. As a matter of fact, I was asked to pack my things and leave the house.

A participant in FGD B reported:

I am dissatisfied over the way and manner my late husband's only house was divided up among his siblings, to the exclusion my female children and me. I initiated a legal action against my late husband's family to recover the house. The court ruled that following the Benin/Edo customs and tradition, I did not have the locus standi to institute an action against the family.

Housing insecurity is one of the major consequences of gender discrimination in land and property rights suffered by women and their households. Most participants noted that after the demise of their husbands, they became housing insecure. For some participants and their households, housing insecurity manifested in the form of high cost of house rents in relation to income.

Food Insecurity

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2006), households are deemed food insecure when the quantity of food available to them is limited or uncertain. Participants also expressed their views on how discrimination in the ownership of land and property has had serious implications for the quantity and quality of food available to them and their households.

Participant 18 said:

As a daughter, I knew what it meant for a home not to be food secure, especially after the demise of my father. Now as a widow, I also know what it means for a home not to be food secure. For my children, not having a balanced diet or enough food to eat at home manifested in the form of low immune system because they started to fall sick too often. In addition, their performances in school dropped.

Participant 20 highlighted the following:

It is generally believed that financial independence for a woman would translate to mean lack of respect for the husband ultimately. But this portends serious danger for a woman and her household in relation to food security, especially when the marriage comes to

an end either through the death of the husband or divorce. For instance, after the demise of my husband, providing enough food for members of my household became a very serious problem. Worse still, my late husband's family members became more interested in his estate than in our own welfare.

A participant in FGD A reported that:

My late husband's surviving male relatives said that I can no longer grow food crops or benefit from the rents accruing from my late husband's inherited family land. We now buy virtually all our food items despite persistent increases in general prices. This development has led to a reduction in the quantity and quality of food available to me and members of household.

Similarly, another participant in FGD B argued:

For me and my household, food security has been a major problem since the demise of my husband as the proceeds from the crops cultivated on family land has dropped significantly. The reason is that my late husband's male relatives divided up the family land amongst themselves. We no longer have access to sufficient family land to cultivate food crops to meet our household needs.

Closely linked to the problem of housing insecurity as a consequence of gender discrimination in land and property rights was food insecurity. Participants noted after the demise of their husbands, the quantity of food available to them and their households became much more limited and uncertain. For some, food insecurity was particularly severe because the heads of the households had passed on, and those left behind had no independent means of livelihood.

Lack of Access to Matrimonial Property

Matrimonial property is the property acquired by the husband and his wife during their marriage (Adekile 2017). The intention is that there should be continuing provision for the parties to the marriage and their children. Matrimonial property is usually for the benefit of the family as whole. The concept of "matrimonial property" does not exist in any of the systems of law in Nigeria. The participants expressed their views on how discrimination in the ownership of land and property has affected them in relation to their matrimonial property. For example, participant 15 said:

For me as an individual, I feel discriminated against in relation to matrimonial property. The reason is that my late husband and I agreed that he should be channelling his income/savings towards the payment of our children school fees and the building of our family home. My late husband and I also agreed that I should be channelling my own income/savings towards the provision of food for the household and clothing for the children. After the death of my husband, my late husband's family members argued that in line with the Benin/Edo customs and tradition that I do not have any right of possession or to dispose of the house and reinvest the proceeds.

Similarly, Participant 16 observed:

Although my husband and I pooled our resources together to erect our family house, I never had the privilege to benefit from the sharing of any part of my deceased husband's house or to benefit in whatever form. As a matter of fact, my husband's family people were not comfortable with my continued stay in their late brother's house because they see it as their house as well. I have to on my own leave the house to a rented apartment, pending when I am able to erect my own house.

Another consequence of gender discrimination in land and property rights discussed by the participants was the lack of access to matrimonial property. Most participants said they were not entitled to any share of matrimonial property regardless of their contribution. In addition, they said that with impunity, their late husbands' male relatives grabbed their matrimonial property and deprived them of their inheritance.

Disinheritance of Widows

Adekile (2017, 17) says, "with regard to a widow of customary law marriage, on the intestacy of the husband, she is disinherited completely under the various customary laws in the country despite any contributions she might have made to the man's success".

Widows are not privileged to take part in the sharing of family land and housing after the demise of their husbands. The participants expressed their views on how discrimination in the ownership of family land and housing has affected them.

Participant 14 remarked:

My late husband willed his land and housing to all his male children. He wrote in his will that I should take care of his children and be allowed to reside in house for the remainder of my life. I was not given the right to possess/own or sell his land or housing.

Participant 15 had a similar experience and noted:

As a widow, I was not privileged to partake or benefit from the devolution of my late husband's land and housing. My late husband's family argued that under the Edo/Benin customs and tradition, I was a stranger or non-permanent member of my husband's family. Therefore I was not entitled to inherit any or part of my late husband's estate.

Similarly, a participant in FGD A contended:

My late husband's male relatives insisted that as a widow I was not entitled to partake in the devolution of the family estate, especially land and housing. This is a cultural provision or injunction that I do not have any control over. I have accepted it as the way it is.

Corroborating this view, another participant in FGD B stated:

Among the Benin or Edo speaking people of Edo State, Nigeria, land and housing rights are regarded as the exclusive preserve of the male gender. Regardless of the financial contribution I made towards acquiring our family land and housing, after the demise of my husband, the family did not allow me to partake in the sharing of my husband's estate.

The participants also discussed the issue of disinheritance of widows as one of the consequences of gender discrimination in land and property rights. The participants agreed that under the Benin native law and custom, widows are not privileged to take part in sharing their demised husbands' land and property. Often the widows are disempowered economically regardless of whether or not they might have laboured for many years with their husbands.

Disinheritance of Female Children

A woman married under Ibo customary law in south-eastern Nigeria is discriminated against in relation to land and property rights. For instance, she cannot inherit her father's estate because a man's estate is the exclusive preserve of the male children (Adekile 2017).

The participants also expressed their views on how they were denied inheritance in their families of origin. Participant 5 said:

As a daughter, I did not inherit any land and housing from either of my late parents or husband. After the demise of my father, his land and house devolved among his male children only.

Participant 9 had a similar experience and observed:

Although I am the first child of my father, after his demise, my younger brother said that I was old enough to get married and go and live with my husband. He argued that by tradition, the house belonged to him.

The participants in the FGDs also expressed their views on how discrimination in the ownership of land and property affected them as girl children.

For instance, a participant in FGD A remarked that:

I feel like I am a double-loser. This is true because in both my family of origin and family of procreation, I never had the opportunity to partake in the devolution of family land and housing.

Another participant in FGD B argued that:

Succession and inheritance among the people of my ethnic group is based on the principle of male primogeniture. As a daughter, I did not have any right of inheritance. I was disinherited completely in the sharing of both my late father and mother's estate.

The participants also discussed the issue of disinheritance of female children as one of the consequences of gender discrimination in land and property rights. The participants unanimously agreed that under the Benin native law and custom, a daughter (married or unmarried) could not inherit the family home or the principal house – the *Igiogbe* where the father lived and died. The reason is the family house was regarded the exclusive preserve of the male gender.

Poverty

Adekile (2017, 22) argues that “poverty is a necessary consequence of disinheritance and property rights restriction”. Therefore, the marginalisation of women in inheritance or land and property rights leads to the feminisation of poverty. The participants also expressed their views on how they have been impoverished as a result of their marginalisation because of non-ownership of family land and property.

Participant 17, for example said:

After the demise of my husband, the responsibility of taking care of the household fell on me alone. I have no source of income of my own as my late husband never allowed me do any other thing apart from taking care of the children. His death had serious implication for the family income. I resorted to doing all sorts of menial jobs to take care of my children. The money I was making was not enough to take care of our basic needs as a family.

Participant 18 concurred:

Life has been very tough for me and my household since the demise of my husband in relation to living above the poverty line. For instance, my children and I have experienced untold deprivation on a material level such as balanced diet, clothing, shelter and lack of income – ever since my husband passed on.

The participants in the FGDs also expressed their views on how discrimination in the ownership of land and property has impoverished them and their households.

For example, a participant in FDG A contended:

My late husband’s family members did not allow me and my daughters to benefit from the devolution of my late husband’s estate. They argued that by tradition, my late husband’s estate is for my first male child who was about nine years old. They said that they are saving the rents for my son for his future university education. I am therefore unable to use the rents accruing from my late husband’s land and housing to support my female children in school. I had to withdraw my daughters from private secondary schools to public secondary schools as I could no longer afford to pay their school fees, feed them and clothe them – all by myself.

Poverty or feminisation of poverty was identified by the participants as a strong consequence of gender discrimination in land and property rights. The majority of the

participants said marginalisation of women in land and property rights was the root cause of the feminisation of poverty. For some participants and their households, after the demise of their husbands, poverty came in the form of hunger, homelessness and inadequate healthcare.

Vulnerability to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic

The vulnerability of women and female children to the HIV/AIDS epidemic is another impact of gender discrimination in land and property rights. Ahmed (2011, 2) asserts, “the need to focus on the discrimination of women and girls in property law and inheritance has been recognised as a core issue in addressing the HIV epidemic by the United Nations”. The participants expressed their views on how gender discrimination in land and property rights has made them and their households vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Participant 16 remarked:

I was a full-time house wife and aged thirty-two when my husband passed on. I had to start petty trading in order to take care of myself and my children. But the money I was making from the trading was not enough to take care of myself and support my children in school. As a young widow and three years after my husband died, men started making overtures at me and asking for my hand in marriage. I was really not ready for a second marriage. I wanted to focus all my energy and time to bring up my children. With no help immediately coming from anywhere, I was under pressure to engage in transactional sex or prostitution in exchange for money to take care of myself and my household. But thank God I never succumbed to pressure until an NGO came to the rescue, and saved me and my household from the dilemma.

Similarly, participant 19 said:

After the demise of my husband, my children and I had to do all sorts of menial jobs to survive. For instance, my daughter and I started helping people to wash their clothes in their own homes in exchange for money or foodstuff. My daughter and I never really liked the idea of working in peoples’ homes as this made us vulnerable to sexual exploitation or rape with its attendant consequences.

The participants of the FGDs also expressed their views on how gender discrimination in land and property rights had made them and their households more vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

A participant from FGD A commented:

My husband’s relatives said that I was the one responsible for the death of my husband, and as such refused to render any form of assistance to me and my household. My children started street hawking and trading in order to contribute their own quota to the domestic economy. Unfortunately, one of my daughters was gang-raped by a group of

boys who pretended they wanted to buy from the wares or things she was hawking. My daughter lost her virginity to this ugly incident.

Similarly, a participant from FGD B added:

After the death of my husband, my husband's relatives decided to put the sharing of his estate on hold for reasons best known to them. Things became very tough for me and my household. My daughter had no other option but to agree to become a domestic staff or house help to one lady. Regrettably, my daughter was defiled by the first son of the lady she was working for. Although we reported the matter to the police, we decided not to press charges or prosecute the perpetrator because the mother agreed to continue to support my daughter in school.

Lastly, the participants also emphasised that gender discrimination in land and property rights made them vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Most participants noted that property grabbing and the inability to negotiate safe sex or to leave violent relationships made them vulnerable to HIV.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that under both customary and statutory law, women are still being discriminated against in their inheritance or land and property rights. The participants were unanimous in identifying family as the primary factor for the perpetuation of gender discrimination in land and property rights. This is in agreement with the feminist theory as Nigerian society continues to see men as superior to women in all aspects of life.

Another aspect of the participants' discussion was noted that women had more land and property rights in precolonial Nigeria than in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. The colonial government took over land in both rural and urban areas for commercial agriculture. The implication of this was the difficulty for most women to have vested interests in land. This is in agreement with the postcolonial theory; women as a group must stand up and speak for themselves in relation to the exploitative Western colonial influences.

Finally, the participants noted that the government has failed in its responsibility to create an enabling environment for the female gender to thrive optimally in relation to land and property rights. For instance, Nigerian women are not adequately represented in Government, and often their voices are not even heard before decisions on land and property rights are taken. Women in Nigeria are not necessarily ignorant, poor, tradition-bound and domesticated. Rather they are victims of colonisation and patriarchy (Mishra 2013). It was evident in the findings that women as a group are affected by power imbalances in Nigeria. The findings allude to the black feminist theory which recognises the interlocking nature of oppressions which constitute a

paradigm shift in feminist understanding. This means that women worldwide should not be excluded in the analysis of female subordination and oppression.

Implications for Social Work Practice

According to Anucha (2008), shifts are beginning to occur in the curriculum of social work education in Nigeria. Greater emphasis is now being placed on developmental social work in line with the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) definition of social work (<https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>):

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

Anucha (2008, 237) affirms that the shifts in the Nigerian curriculum of social work education became inevitable because the “challenges facing twenty-first century Nigeria, including large scale unemployment, poverty, the AIDS pandemic, lack of access to basic healthcare and structural threats to the equality of women demand a social developmental model for the education and training of social workers”. From the gathered discourses of the key informants, it is evident that social workers are beginning to deal with the effects of gender discrimination in land and property rights on women and their households.

For example, key informant 1 remarked:

At our NGO or social welfare agency, we ensure that women and girl children discriminated against in land and property rights get the attention they deserve. For instance, we ensure that they get free legal representation. As well, we assist in gathering relevant information from family members – that would enable lawyers to ensure that justice is done.

Similarly, key informant 2 noted that:

My agency provide women and girl children forcefully evicted from their homes as a result of disputes over the devolution of family land and housing with temporary accommodation facility until they are able to secure alternative homes. In addition, we render voluntary counselling services to women and girl children who may have suffered any form of psychological distress.

Finally, key informant 5 said that:

As social workers, we are currently collaborating with other human service professionals; lawyers and lawmakers to lobby for the passage of a bill or legislative enactment that would decree into existence developmental welfare. As well, we educate members of the public, especially women and girl children on the need to see land and property rights or inheritance as human rights issue.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends the adoption of a developmental approach to deal with the effects of gender discrimination in land and property rights on women and their households. A developmental approach is all inclusive and links economic development with social development (Dlangamandla 2010).

It is further recommended that traditional models of assistance be incorporated into social work practice in Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria be amended to incorporate developmental welfare, and the curricula of schools of social work in Nigeria be redesigned to teach students to be proactive and critically reflective practitioners.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the fact that gender discrimination in land and property rights in Nigeria remains a social problem. Social work, in line with its commitment to human rights, has a key role to play in dealing with these concerns.

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