



## ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNAL INFLUENCE ON LAND ACCESSIBILITY AMONG RURAL LAND-USERS IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA



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**Abstract:** The paper assessed communal influence on land accessibility among rural farmers in Osun State. It specifically described socio-economic characteristics of land users; determined the level of land accessibility; and examined influence of community (roles of traditional authorities, community beliefs and cultural taboos) on land accessibility. A multistage stage sampling procedure was used to select the respondents. Data were collected from 260 respondents using structured interview schedule and key informant interview which were validated and pre-tested. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical tool such as frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation while correlation analysis was used to make deduction. Results showed that majority (82.7% and 86.2%) were male and married, respectively. The mean year of residence was  $43.08 \pm 18.33$  years. Majority gained access to land through inheritance while more than half had moderate access to land. Settlement of land dispute and withdrawal of use rights of defaulting tenants were the major roles of traditional authorities, while most popular community beliefs among the respondents is that non-indigenes in their communities can have access to land for farming. Further results showed that roles of traditional authorities ( $r = 0.329$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ ) had positive and significant relationship with land accessibility. The study recommended that traditional and community leaders should be adequately recognised in making any policy decision on land matters, particularly in rural communities, so as to enhance meaningful agricultural development and rural enterprises.

**Keywords:** land, community belief, traditional authority, land-users, accessibility

### Introduction

Land lies at the heart of social, political and economic life of most African countries including Nigeria. Along with other resources, it is a key factor for economic growth and development of every nation. Land in Africa has historical, cultural, social and spiritual significant to the communities and to individual holders. Even the orthodox religions insist that it is taboo to tamper with monuments that mark land boundaries (Ukaejiofo, 2007). Land issues are therefore sensitive, demanding careful handling to avoid social and or political conflicts. Land is a cohesive force that unites people together since land is believed to be communally owned. In fact, land is regarded as a heritage or legacy bequeathed by ancestors to future generations. In Nigeria, land is not just a factor of production but a major determinant of the people's livelihoods. It is an important vehicle that provides access to economic opportunities, accumulation of wealth, and transferring of this wealth from one generation to another especially in the rural areas (Baye, 2010).

Land tenure structures vary from one area to another in Nigeria because of differences in cultural heritages, ecological, social, economic and political factors. Under the customary land tenure system, which is still very much prevalent, the distribution of rights is based on socio-political system (the political history of the village and region from which the alliances and hierarchical relationships between lineages are derived) and family relationships (access to land and resources depending on one's social status within the family) (Berry, 1993; Umezulike, 2004). It is, also, worth noting that in most of these customary landholding systems, community level decisions about land are taken by chiefs or community heads on behalf of, and in trust for the clan or family. Chiefly authority is generally ascribed to a patriarchal lineage, and most major decisions are taken by men (Ntsebeza, 1999).

The customary tenure system gives room for a diminutive proportion of land made available for cultivation of food. It is characterized by a situation where several interests subsist on a small parcel of land. The Land Use Act (LUA) of 1978 which was introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria to salvage the situation has also been found wanting in

ensuring land availabing to users. In spite of this government intervention, customary tenure system is still predominating in most parts of the country especially Southwestern Nigeria (Arua and Okoriji, 1997; Ojo and Afolabi, 2003; Omotayo, 2003).

According to Onyido (2009), due to socio-cultural bond to land in Southwestern Nigeria, it is almost impossible to acquire or gain access to a large enough tract of land, even on a leasehold basis, to embark on large-scale farming. Similarly, in communities where lands are communally owned, the community leadership determines the types of crops (whether arable or perennial) that could be cultivated. Under such arrangement, the plight of the landusers especially non indigenes is at stake which consequently, may have negative effect on their level of production (Ojo and Afolabi, 2003). In some rural communities due to cultural issue attached to land, non indigenes are denied access to acquire land especially farmers.

Knowing fully that majority of livelihood activities of rural households are land based, increased agricultural production, other rural enterprises and poverty reduction cannot be achieved until adequate attention is given to issue of land accessibility. Hence, there is need to access communal influence on land accessibility among land users in rural areas of Osun State, Nigeria.

### Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Osun State of Nigeria. Osun state is a heterogenous state with four major sub-ethnic groups namely the Igbomina, the Ife, the Ijesa and the Oyo. The Igbomina occupies two Local Government Areas (LGAs) while the Ife, the Ijesa and the Oyo sub-ethnic groups occupy four, six and eighteen LGAs, respectively. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select the respondents. At the first stage, one rural LGA was purposively selected from each sub-ethnic group. The selected LGAs were Ifedayo, Ife East, Obokun and Ayedire from Igbomina, Ife, Ijesa and Oyo sub-ethnic group, respectively. At the second stage, 4, 7, 8 and 11 communities were proportionately selected Ifedayo, Obokun, Ife East and Ayedire LGAs, respectively. At the final stage, 0.65 percent of the respondents were randomly selected from

each of the communities. In all, a total of two hundred and sixty (260) respondents were selected for the study. Duly pretested and validated interview schedule was used to collect quantitative data from the respondents while qualitative data was elicited through Key Informant Interview sessions (KII). Validated and pre-tested interview schedule was used to elicit information on socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, land accessibility and community-related factors. The data was summarized using descriptive statistics while Correlation analysis was used to make inferences.

**Measurement of variables**

The dependent variable was conceptualized as level of accessibility to land by the farmers. The dependent variable was measured by calculating total land accessibility score of each respondent from indicators arising 8 methods of gaining access to land. The reaction was against a 3-point scale of accessibility ranging from never accessible (0) point, rarely accessible (1) point and always accessible (2) points as used by Akinbile. The maximum score for each respondent was 16 while the minimum score for each respondent was 0. The total score per respondent was further classified into three categories as follows: low, moderate and high level of land accessibility using mean of total land accessibility score plus/minus standard deviation. Roles of traditional authorities was determined by asking the respondent to indicate the extent to which traditional authorities perform ten identified roles in relation to land accessibility for rural enterprises using 3 points rating scale: 3 for often performed, 2 occasionally performed and 1 never performed. The maximum score was 30 and minimum score was 10. While community beliefs was measured by asking the respondents to indicate as the beliefs of people in their communities on land and each identified belief was scored one point.

**Results and Discussions**

Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents  
 Results in Table 1 show that majority (82.7%) were male while 17.3 percent were female. The results indicate that there were more men; dominating land-based rural economic activities such as farming than women. About 86.5 percent were married; this suggests that marital status seem to be an important social factor often considered for gaining access to land among farmers in the study area. Also, vast majority (92.3%) were from Yoruba ethnic group. This implies that Yorubas were the predominant inhabitants of the study area and ethnic background can determine accessibility to factors of production, especially land. Almost three-quarter (71.5%) were indigenes. It implies that they might have better and easy access to land because being an indigene of community favours land accessibility. Majority (70%) of the respondents were permanent residence while 30 percent resided temporarily. Permanent dwellers are likely to benefit from rights associated with nativity, such as easier access to landholdings and may not suffer from alien-ship. The mean year of residence was 43.08 ± 18.33 years. This implies that majority of the respondents had spent long years in their communities of residence. However, this does not necessarily mean that they were indigenes of the communities where they resided. A resident that had spent long years in a particular community may likely have easy access to community land and other factors of production. Results further show that majority (66.9%) indicated farming as their primary occupation. The result give credence to the submission of Ekong (2010) which reported that majority of rural dwellers engage in farming. However, the finding also suggests that rural dwellers also engaged in varieties of occupations other than farming.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to socio-economic characteristics (n=260)**

Variables	Freq.	%	Mean	SD
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	215	82.7		
Female	45	17.3		
<b>Marital status</b>				
Single	18	6.9		
Married	226	86.5		
Divorced	2	0.8		
Widowed/widower	15	5.8		
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Yoruba	240	92.3		
Hausa	3	1.2		
Ibo	9	3.5		
Others	8	3.0		
<b>Primary occupation</b>				
Farming	174	66.9		
Processing	30	11.5		
Trading	28	10.8		
Civil service	10	3.8		
Artisan	18	6.9		
<b>Indigenous status</b>				
Indigenes	186	71.5		
Non-indigenes	74	28.5		
<b>Nature of residence</b>				
Permanent	182	70		
Temporary	78	30		
<b>Years of residence</b>				
1-30	68	36.2		
31-60	155	59.6	43.08	±18.32
Above 60	37	14.2		

Source: Field survey, 2015; SD = Standard deviation

**Land accessibility**

Results in Table 2 reveal that the commonest form of land accessibility in the study area was through inheritance (mean = 1.49); followed by rent and leasehold land (mean = 1.13); purchased land (mean = 0.94), communal land (mean = 0.76), sharecropping (mean = 0.53), borrowed land (mean = 0.41), gift land (mean = 0.32) and government land (mean = 0.00). This result agrees with the positions of Adamu (2014) and Bamire (2010) which reported that majority of rural dwellers in Nigeria gain access to land through inheritance. The implication is that majority of the land-users in the study area obtained land through customary tenure arrangement, whereby land is handed over from one generation to other. This arrangement often leads to fragmentation and small scattered plots of farmland per individual which does not encourage large scale cultivation of crops. This could have negative implication for agricultural production food security and other rural enterprises. This finding give credence to the submissions of Arua and Okoriji (1997), Ojo and Afolabi (2003) and Omotayo (2003) which reported that customary tenure system still predominate in most parts of the country, especially Southwestern Nigeria.

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents by land accessibility (n=260)**

Methods of land accessibility	NA Freq	R A Freq	A A Freq	Ranked Mean
Inheritance	31	72	157	1.49
Rent/leasehold	41	99	120	1.13
Purchase land	92	55	113	0.94
Communal	110	67	83	0.76
Sharecropping	145	70	45	0.53
Borrowed land	166	84	30	0.41
Gift	192	48	24	0.32
Government land	260	0	0	0.00

Source: Field survey, 2015; NA= Not accessible; RA= rarely Accessible; AA= Always accessible

**Level of land accessibility**

Results in Table 3 show that more than half (58.1%) of the respondents had moderate access to land while less than one-quarter (20 % and 21.9 %) of the respondents had low and high access to land, respectively. This observation could be as a result of communal influence on land accessibility in the study area.

**Table 3: Distribution of respondent according to level of land accessibility (n=260)**

Accessibility score	Level of accessibility	Freq.	%
Less than 3.8	Low	52	20.0
Between 3.8 & 6.94	Medium	151	58.1
Above 6.94	High	57	21.9

Source: Field survey, 2015; Mean = 5.11, Standard deviation = 1.83

**Communal influence**

Roles of traditional authorities in land matters

Results in Table 4 show that settling of land dispute (mean= 1.67) ranked highest among the roles performed by traditional authorities in land accessibility for agricultural use, followed by withdrawing of use-rights from defaulting tenant farmers (mean = 1.59), strengthening security of tenure of farmers in the community (mean = 1.37), holding land in the community in trust for the people (mean = 1.35), allocating communal land to community members (mean = 1.33), sharing land of deceased among his members to avoid bitterness (mean =1.78), making decision on how land in the community should be used (mean=0.79), putting restriction on the use of land (mean = 0.45) and encouraging their members to sell land to non indigenes (mean = 0.40). The highest role mean score for settling of land dispute may be an indication that people in the study area still recognized the traditional leaders' role of maintaining peace and order in rural areas which can influence land accessibility for agricultural activities and other rural enterprises.

**Table 4: Distribution of respondents by their ranked mean scores of traditional authorities roles towards land accessibility (n=260)**

Roles	Ranked mean scores
Settling of land dispute	1.67
Withdrawing use-right from defaulting tenants	1.59
Strengthening security of tenure of land-users in the community	1.37
Holding land in the community in trust for the people	1.35
Allocating communal land to members	1.33
Sharing properties (land) of the deceased among his family members	1.18
Granting lease to stranger/ non indigenes	1.10
Making decision on how land should be used in the community	0.80
Putting restriction on the use of communal land in the community	0.45
Encouraging selling of land to tenants	0.40

Grand mean score = 1.12, Standard deviation = 2.43

Source: Field survey, 2015

**Table 5: Distribution of respondents by community beliefs on land (n=260)**

*Community beliefs	Frequency	%
Non indigene can acquire land for rural enterprises	249	95.8
Land belongs to their forefathers and coming generation; therefore, is wrong to give land to just anybody	233	89.6
Land is cultural heritage and symbol of identity in the community that should be preserved	229	88.1
Land is their birthrights and not given to strangers	193	73.8
Land is a symbol of prestige, power and wealth therefore only indigenes can have access to it	191	73.5
Women and men have equal rights to acquire land for economic purposes	166	63.8
Land belong to kings who dictate who to get land	150	57.7
Only male can gain access to land	76	36.5
It is forbidden to sell in this community	46	17.7

Source: Field survey, 2015; \*Multiple responses

**Community beliefs on land**

Results in Table 5 show that most popular community beliefs among the respondents is that non-indigenes in their communities can have access to land for rural enterprises (95.8%), followed by the belief that land belong to their forefathers and generation to come therefore it was wrong to just give it to anybody for whatever purpose (89.6%), land was a cultural heritage and symbol of identity in the

community which should be preserved for the next generation (88.1%), land is their birthright and not to be given to strangers (73.8%), land is a symbol of prestige, power and wealth therefore only indigene could have access to it (73.5%), male and female farmers have equal right to land for farming (63.8%), land belong to traditional authorities who dictate who could have access to it (57.7%), only male

children can inherit their father’s land (36.5%) and it is a taboo to sell land to non-indigenes (17.7%). The result shows that beliefs on land vary from one community to another. Although majority of the respondents believed that land is a cultural heritage and symbol of identity in the community that should be preserved, nonetheless, beliefs that favour non indigenes accessibility to land and sales of land are still prevalent in the study area. The study further reveals that the traditional customs that forbids sales of land in rural communities of Southwestern Nigerian is gradually fading away. The above observations would encourage interested land users to gain access to land for productive agriculture and other economic activities.

**Cultural taboo**

Results in Table 6 show that majority (93.5%) of the respondents indicated the tradition/custom of their communities did not forbid easy access to land and about two-third (62.7%) also indicated that the culture of their communities encourage sales of land. The following Key Informant Interview (KII) excerpts conducted support the above finding that no culture forbids access to land in study areas.

*There is no tradition nor taboo here that forbid access to land or selling of land but it depends on land owner, although we believed that land is a birthright that need to be kept for future generation, even with this belief people are still selling their land.*

(Community Head of Iyanfoworogi, Ife East LGA)

*Although no culture forbids sales of land, people in my community rarely sell their land but rather lease them out for use but anybody wants land for farming he can get.*

(A family Head from Iponda, Obokun LGA)

*We sells land here to whoever wants because no culture forbids us and no taboo forbid giving land to anybody.*

(Community head of Idi-Ogun, Ayedire LGA)

*Our culture is not a barrier to anybody who wants to buy land or gain access to land, people sells their land depending on their wishes.*

(Community head of Oyi-Ajgunle, Ifedayo LGA)

**Table 6: Distribution of respondents by cultural taboo on land accessibility n=260**

Cultural taboo	Frequency	Percentage
Custom of this community forbids easy access to land		
Yes	17	6.5
No	243	93.5
Culture of this community encourages selling their land		
Yes	163	62.7
No	97	37.3

Source: Field survey, 2015

**Table 7: Result of correlation analyses of the relationship between land accessibility and communal influence (n=260)**

Variables	r	r <sup>2</sup>	p-value	Decision
Roles of traditional authorities	0.329*	0.108	0.015	S
Cultural taboo	-0.011	0.000	0.067	NS
Community beliefs	0.012	0.000	0.189	NS

Source: Field survey, 2015; \*significant at p≤0.05

**Relationship between land accessibility and communal influence**

Results in Table 7 show that at p≤0.05, roles of traditional authorities (r =0.329) had positive and significant relationships with land accessibility. It implies that the more the traditional authorities perform their roles on land issues, the more accessible land become to farmers.

**Conclusions**

Based on the results, the study concluded that majority of the land-users still accessed land through customary land tenure arrangement where inheritance and rent/lease were predominant. Also more than half of the respondents had moderate access to land, while majority of the respondents believed that traditional authorities still played prominent roles in land accessibility for farming and that non-indigenes can acquire land for rural enterprises. It is therefore recommended that the Land Use Acts (LUA) should be modified to become culturally acceptable among the rural dwellers in order to facilitate easy land accessibility for productive agricultural purposes. Finally, traditional and community leaders should be adequately recognised in making any policy decision on land matters, particularly in rural communities, so as to enhance meaningful agricultural development and other rural enterprises.

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