

1. Introduction

Food and nutritional insecurity remains a global challenge, with sub-Saharan Africa bearing a large share of this burden¹. Despite much policy attention, it remains unclear whether the goal of eradicating worldwide food and nutritional insecurity will be achieved. There is considerable evidence that the issue of women's land rights is central in this discourse, and this is especially relevant in the urban and periurban zone, where residents continue to face challenges in accessing land to produce food for their households. The role of women in maintaining household food security is crucial².

3. Results & discussion

Women in the northern region of Ghana are expected to provide their households with soup (usually consisting of vegetables such as okra - *Abelmoschus esculentus* or roselle - *Hibiscus sabdariffa*) to accompany starch based dishes (mostly maize – *Zea mays*, pearl millet - *Pennisetum glaucum* and sorghum - *Sorghum bicolor*). However, they do not own land.

In many cases women were given by their husbands less than 0.5 acres of land at the fringes of the farmland to produce these vegetables. Women also rely on trees like the dawa dawa (*Parkia biglobosa*) and sheanut trees (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) to help provide nutritious soups and generate income for basic household needs. These important trees grow on land owned by men, whose permission is needed for access. The dilemma of women worsens if their spouse dies and they are left with the responsibility of providing food for the family, whilst not having land. As a coping strategy, they borrow land from male relatives for cultivation of staple food crops and also engage in gleaned and trading of food stuffs to improve their livelihood. Women's innovative methods help to provide soup to their households.

Sorting dry okra



Highlights

Although women do not own land in northern Ghana, they play a critical role in providing nutritious and diverse diets for their families.

Manual processing of shea butter



2. Materials & methods

A mixed-methods study, including focus group discussions and interviews was carried out between October 2013 and November 2014 in urban and periurban Tamale, Northern Ghana, to understand the dynamic and recursive links between gender, access to land and access to nutritious food under the communal land tenure system pertaining in northern Ghana.

Case study: Women negotiating access to land

Nina* is a widow in the periurban village of Jimle. She lives with her aged mother and children and borrowed land from her brother. Nina complains that this land is infertile. She would like to borrow more productive land from elderly men who have fields and cannot afford to cultivate them, but she has not succeeded in this. She exercises her resource gathering rights by picking sheanut and dawa dawa fruits from communal holdings. She processes these into oil and spice, used for domestic consumption and as a source of income. Nina's brother allows her to cut down neem trees found on his land, which she sells as firewood. Nina argues that borrowed land is secured if you maintain a good relationship with the owner. This involves giving them some crops, gifts or other basic commodities like salt after every harvest. Developing such good personal relationships is a starting point for women to negotiate secure tenure.

* Name has been changed

4. Conclusion

Women's innovative methods of food provisioning such as vegetable production should be recognised and supported in agricultural and food policy. Women's land tenure rights need to be put on the policy agenda.

Reference:

¹FAO, IFAD, and WFP. 2015. The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015. Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: taking stock of uneven progress. Rome, Italy: FAO.

²Bread for the World Institute. 2014. When women flourish... We can end hunger: Bread for the World Institute 2015 hunger report. Bread for the World Institute Report 230: Bread for the World Institute.

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