

LAND TENURE DYNAMICS AND FOOD PRODUCTION IN ANIOCHA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF DELTA STATE

Victor N. Igweonwu

Abstract

The definition of a farmer in African culture is indeed difficult just as it is difficult to classify the various causes of mobility. Since almost everybody engages to some extent in the growing of subsistence crop, the tenant farmers found in Aniocha North LGA of Delta State whose primary occupation is farming are the target of this write up. The presence of large arable land in Aniocha North Local Government Area and the variation in its ownership from one community to another limit the farm size of tenant farmers. Although these tenant farmers encounter some difficulties in acquisition of farmlands in their destinations due to harsh rules and regulations under which tenancy operates their bumper harvests compensate for the difficulties. The study indicates that the tenant farmer alone cannot provide sufficient food for the teeming population of the study area. The influx of the tenant farmers to the study area is of great economic advantage to the communities where they settled because their rents provide revenue to such villages.

Rural – rural migration has been a neglected aspect of population studies in Nigeria (Udo, 1975). A good proportion of these rural-rural migrants are tenant farmers. Tenant farmers are those farmers who cultivate farmland leased to them for at least one crop year and those who obtained lease to harvest a defined area of palm-forest for a specified period (Udo, 1975). The shortage of farmland is most acute in parts of South - Eastern Nigeria and for several decades, farmers from these areas migrated to locate farmlands in areas along the lower Niger valley. Today, a great number of migrants from Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Anambra states go to distant farm lands in Aniocha North LGA of Delta State. A number of tenant farmers from Edo State and even from within Delta States are equally found in the area.

Although it is true that majority of the internal movements in Nigeria are rural-urban, a considerable proportion of people leaving certain rural areas end up settling in other rural areas. This group of migrants is what this study concentrates on. The gap created in literature is that the factors of time, space, organization and physical environment as argued by Gould and Prothero (1975) among other writers do not change only in favour of urban places, so that migration to such urban places is induced. It still can be in favour of rural places like the communities in Aniocha North LGA that have attracted many migrant tenant farmers.

The attractiveness of communities in Aniocha North LGA to migrant tenant farmers can be traced to the existence of large areas of unutilized arable land, its availability on a large scale, and the fact that it offers better opportunities for bush-fallowing than the source areas, of the migrants.

In Nigeria where land is not much a marketable commodity in most rural areas, farm tenancy exists because many people (or rather villages and hamlets) own more land than they can farm, given the available human resources and the equipment at their disposal. On the other hand, many others have very little or no land to cultivate and are therefore obliged to migrate to rent land. This is the case with the Ibos across the Niger from the South - Eastern States who are found in camps, in most communities in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State.

At this juncture, it becomes imperative that land availability, ownership, cost and tenural practices in the study area be discussed to justify the migration of tenant farmers to Aniocha North Local Government Area.

Land Tenure

Okafor (2005) described land as not just a resource but also as a symbol of the social integrity of a family and that if a man has no piece of land of his own, his existence on earth has no base. This is one good reason for the quest for individual land ownership in Aniocha North LGA as against the communal ownership previously practised. In the past in Aniocha North LGA, the houseland or compound land was individually owned while the farm land was communally owned because of abundant land. This factor also encouraged a dispersed pattern of camp settlements in the area. However, as a result of increase in population of the area both by natural increase and in migration by tenant farmers, parts of the farmland, which previously were communally owned, fell into residential use and thus owned by individuals. This greatly reduced the available land for farming. In return, new camps were restricted by host communities while the old ones expanded thus giving birth to nucleated camp as is found today in the study area.

Grossman (1969) opined that while the community is the ultimate owners of land in Northern Iboland, every family and every member of the family has definite rights to certain plots within the communal land. He stated further that these rights are mostly hereditary. This is true of the condition of tenural procedure in Aniocha North LGA. Here land that had been held and used by a particular family for many years is considered as family land. Thus, apart from the host community being regarded as communal in terms of ownership of land in the study area, various quarters called 'Ogbe' equally own land within the community. This is why many camps are found within a community in different locations. Apart from Anioma and Ogodor Communities, tenant farmers are completely strangers to the area of study and have no claim to land ownership. They could be ejected completely by their host communities if the need arises. Thus, tenancy conditions are determined in the areas by landlords who are indigenes.

Initially land lease to tenants was based on as much land the tenant and his household could cultivate with no cash rents, although some communities accepted rents in kind. Today, in most parts of the study areas, farmlands are measured for tenants and prices fixed in cash for a 'standard' measure. Additional land to the standard if accepted attracts extra payment.

In addition to cash rents, tenants still make payment in kind or gifts. This is however restricted to yams and other farm products. The period of tenancy renewal varies from one community to another. For example, in Ugboodu it is annually, in Anioma, Ogodor and Issele-Azagba, it is at the beginning of the farming season.

In all the communities, forms for tenancy conditions and personal bio-data are provided by landlords to each adult leaser (tenant) which the latter fills and attaches recent passport photographs. Some of the rules governing leases include; prohibition to the erection of permanent structure (i.e using blocks and corrugated iron roofs), planting of permanent trees (crops), and permission must be sought from the landlords before a new adult male is admitted into the system from the source region. In some communities however, permanent trees are allowed to be planted by tenant farmers but the fruits could be harvested by anybody who so desires to eat out of it. In such communities, when the tenant farmer moves out of the farmland to another, that plant no longer belongs to him but rather it belongs to the whole village. Land leased out to migrant farmers in Aniocha North LGA is usually the one owned by the communities or quarters. However, in recent times, some migrant farmers mostly those from neighbouring Ika lands and other land locked communities within Delta State who reside outside the camps are now acquiring farmlands from individuals who give out their personal plots. In such situations rents are paid to such individual landlords.

Despite the dominance of cash payment for rent in the study area since the 1980s, payment in kind has not been totally wiped out. Investigation revealed that in Ubulubu, Anioma and Issele Azagba where rents are paid at the commencement of a new farming season, beer, palmwine, yams

Land Tenure Dynamics and Food Production in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State

and kola nuts are presented before the cash. Also in Ugbodu, Ukwunzu and Idumuje, where payments are made at the end of the year, migrant tenant farmers carry with them gift items such as yam, fried cassava (garri), drinks and kola nuts to their landlords for payments. The major difference between the era of payment in kind and now is that at present the quantity of yam is not determined by the landlords rather the tenants use their discretion. Rent to be paid is agreed upon by both the landlords and the tenants (farmers) through collective bargaining. However, this bargain is guided by the market price of yam and/or cassava. When there is an increase in the market price of these products, the landlords use such an opportunity to also increase rent. From the investigation carried out, there is no community in Aniocha North LGA where tenant farmers pay rent of up to N10,000 (Ten thousand naira) per annum or farming season. The rent paid ranges from N5,000 to N9,000 (five-nine thousand naira) per tenant farmer.

The farmers collectively through the heads of their camps and two or three other delegates bring the rents with the aforementioned gifts to the village heads (landlords). The migrant tenants interviewed preferred the cash payment to the payment in kind. According to them, it is more convenient and cheap. Some tenant farmers maintained that with the money realized from pepper alone in a good harvest, they can pay their rents for three years in advance. By this, it simply means that the proceeds from the major crops of yam, cassava and maize (a crop they cultivate two or three times a year) are all profit to them.

In Aniocha North LGA, tenant farmers at various locations have varying advantages in terms of farm size. While those in the areas with abundant forest such as Idumuje-Ugboko, Idumije-unor, Anioma, Ubulubu, Ugbodu and Ogodor operate on 'as much as you can farm', others farm on measured farmlands (usually less than 1 hectare) because of the limited farmland, since much of their land has been taken up by development (e.g. residential quarters, road construction, etc) and erosion problem. Issele Azagba, Ukwunzu and Obomkpa are examples of communities that measure farmland to tenant farmers.

No matter the advantages or disadvantages in size of farmlands acquired by the tenant farmers, one thing is common and universal and that is that the lands are used for food production.

Food Production

Among the tenant farmers and the natives, cultivation of root crops predominates with yams and cassava ranking highest. Despite the fact that yam and cassava have almost equal number of hectares devoted to their cultivation, the significance of yam in traditional customs and its higher value in local markets may account for the fact that it is regarded as the main crop or 'man crop' (Udo, 1975). Other crops grown by migrant tenant farmers in Aniocha North LGA are mazie, cocoyam, native beans 'ukpaka', okra, pepper, melon, groundnuts, cowpea, pumpkins, tomatoes, and other vegetables. Some of these crops are peculiar to some camps. Groundnut, for example, is mostly cultivated in farms owned by Nsukka and Abakaliki tenant farmers. Cowpeas and castor beans are common in farms owned by tenants from Ebenebe and Omor both in Anambra State. Yam cultivation is known for its high demand for labour when compared with other crops such as cassava, cocoyam, maize, etc.

The demand of labour in the communities of Aniocha North LGA is not evenly spread throughout the year. The greatest demand is for weeding, but this work is done over a long period, and help from family members mostly women is readily available. The work of clearing and making heaps and ridges is harder and more concentrated, this is the reason why farmers pay large sums of money for assistance in this type of work. Based on the answer to questions asked by the researcher in his interview with some tenant farmers, it can be said that payments to hired labourers are the largest single cash expenditure incurred by those tenants farmers. In some camps visited, the tenants claimed that co-operation amongst themselves helps to reduce the cost of labour. This co-operation is in the form of a farmer cooperative. For example, tenant farmers in some camps like "Ogwa" in Ugbodu, "Agbaja" in Ubulubu work on each member's farm in turn mostly during clearing or brushing of the bush, staking of yams and during harvest of yams. Here the only cost on the host is the food he prepares for the group. Most of the items used in preparing the meal are got freely from their farms (e.g. yam, cassava, pepper, melon and in some cases bush meat).

Data on the size of African farms are available only in the form of estimates because of the custom of plot fragmentation and the irregular shapes of the plots themselves (Grossman, 1969). In the study area, the practice of inter-cropping adds to the difficulty of measuring crop yields per unit of land. Observation from the field suggests that in 2005, the average tenant farmer in Aniocha North LGA produced three to five full stacks of seed yams containing about 4000 seed yams each. On the basis of the estimate that a full stack contains about one ton of yams, the full harvest size can be taken to be three to five tones of seed yams. In addition to seed yams, more than one ton of food yams were also produced. It was also reported by the tenant farmers themselves that favourable climatic conditions (adequate rainfall and sunshine) such as was the case in 2005 enhanced their harvest.

Conclusion

The influx of migrants from other areas to Aniocha North LGA has extremely increased the population of the place and consequently a higher demand for food. The population according to 2006 census figures for the study area increased by 58.6% when compared with the 1991 census result. Thus, the population of Aniocha North LGA rose from 61,000 to 104,062 inhabitants. A close survey of the study area revealed that most affluent indigenes as well as some politicians are putting up gigantic structures as their personal residences on large expanses of land which they purchased for small amounts. Thus, the farmers now go far to search for lands for agricultural practices since agricultural lands are being taken up for other land uses. Although migrant farmers' input has increased food production in the study area, there still exists great shortfalls because demand for food outweighs its supply. Other factors affecting insufficient food production in the study area even with the increased number of tenant farmers are;

- Distance travelled or covered before fertile farmlands are reached
- Poor access roads to the farms which affect the rate of evacuation of food from the remote areas or food surplus areas to the urban centres or areas of food scarcity.
- The recent upsurge of commercial motor cycle riders (Okada) a non-farm activity has gulped a reasonable percentage of adult males to the detriment of food production.

We should always note that any nation that cannot feed its population is definitely not a secured nation. Nigeria with all the abundant fertile land and high population ought not be deficient in food supply.

The governments should increase their allocations to agriculture in their budgets, improve upon the poor conditions of roads and try to make farming more attractive. Thus, with more hands employed, food scarcity will be a thing of the past in the study area and similar places where tenant farming exists. No wonder Edokpa and Okafor (2009) in their submission conclude that a consistent agricultural policy that seeks to reduce poverty, increase food production and improve rural living standard is required if food security is to be achieved in Nigeria.

References

- Agboola, S.A. (1977). *migration processes in eastern cocoa zone of south western Nigeria*. Ile-Ife Press.
- Badiane, O. & Deigado, C.L. (1995). *A 2020 Vision for food, Agriculture and the Environment in Sub-Saharan Agrica*. Washington, D.C. IFPRI
- Brink, R.A. et al (1977). Soil deterioration and the growing world demand for food. *Science*, 192, 625-630.
- Brown, L.R. (1970). Human food production as a process in the biosphere *Scientific America*. 223, 166-170.
- Chokor, B.A. (1994). *Rural poverty, social – economic pressure and environmental resource use in Ethiopie east area, Delta State*. Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team – NEST.

Land Tenure Dynamics and Food Production in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State

- Echols, J.R. (1976). Population Vs environment. a crisis of too many people, *American Scientist*, 64, 165-173.
- Edokpa, D. A. & Okafor, F.C. (2009). Rural development: A link to food security in Nigeria, *Benin Journal of Social Sciences*. 17(1), 258-272.
- Fields, G.S. (1989). Changes in poverty and inequality in developing countries, *World Bank Research Observer*, 4(2), Washington, July.
- Gould, W. & Prothero, R.M. (1975). Space and time in African population mobility in *People on the Move* (ed) L. Kosinski & R.M. Prothero, London: Mathuen.
- Grossman, D. (1969). *Migratory tenant farming in Northern Iboland in relation to resource uses*. Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc.
- Igben, M.S. (1983), Population growth, land tenure and food production in I.O. Orubuloye & O.Y. Oyeneye (eds.) *Population and Development in Nigeria*. Ibadan: N.I.S.E.R.
- Igweonwu, V.N. (2005). *Migratory tenant farmers and food supply in Aniocha North LGA, Delta State, Nigeria*. An unpublished Master of Science Project, Department of Geography, University of Benin.
- Kennedy, E.& Boris, H. (1992), *Linkages Between Agriculture and Nutrition: Implication for policy and research*, Washington, D.C; IFPRI.
- Kingsley, Davis & Bernstam, M.S. (1991). *Resources, environment and population: present knowledge, future options*. New York! Oxford University Press.
- Maxwell, D. & Wiebe, K. (1998), Land tenure and food security: A review of concepts, evidence, methods. *Land Tenure Centre, Research Paper* Vol. 129, Madison: LTC.
- Mellor, J.W. (1999), *Pro-Poor growth – the relationship between growth and agriculture and poverty reduction*. Manuscripts Bethesda, MD Abt. Associate Inc.
- National Population Commission (1991), *Population census of the federal republic of Nigeria*. Abuja: NPC
- National Population Commission (2006), *Population census of the federal republic of Nigeria*. Abuja: NPC
- Okafor, F.C. (1987). Population pressure and land resource depletion in south eastern Nigeria. *Applied Geography*, 7 (3), 243 – 256.
- Okafor, F.C. (2005), *Vicious circle of poverty: The rural poor on toss*. 79th Inaugural lecture, University of Benin, Benin City.
- Udo, R. K. (1975). *Migrant tenant farmers of Nigeria*, Lagos: African University Press.