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of Bo District, Sierra Leone**

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List of Abbreviations

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

FPE- Feminist Political Ecology

SLYIC - Sierra Leone Youth in Crisis

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization

SDG - Sustainable Development Goal

EU – European Commission

GAD – Gender and Development

FPE - Feminist political ecology

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship and interactions between gender, socio-economic status and land rights in the Bo District of Sierra Leone. The study is based on the interpretivism philosophical paradigm and the deductive approach. The case study strategy was used to conduct the study in the Bo District in Sierra Leone. The study used primary and secondary approaches to data gathering. A sample of 12 women was obtained from a women's group that is supported by Action Plus through education and training on land rights issues. The sample of 12 interviewees was generated using the critical case sampling method. The sample of women was made up of women who received training in Action Plus's women empowerment programme. The women that were included in the study were aged between 18 and 60 and they were from different ethnicities such as the Mende, Kone and Temne and socio-economic classes such as income and education levels. Primary data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Insightful findings emerged from a gender roles analysis and application of the theory of access to the findings. The rights-based mechanism of access was found to work against the access of land by women because it is guided by customary laws which dictate that land should be controlled by male family heads even though women have access to and farm these lands. Relational and structural access mechanisms of the access that emerged from the study included marriage and support from male family heads. Regarding the influence of socio-economic factors on women's access to and control over land, was that ethnicity did not have an implication on land access and control rights of the participants. This is because the customary norms of men being household heads and men owning and controlling the family land runs across different ethnicities. The factors of income level, educational level, marriage, household leadership were found to influence the extent to which women could access and control land. For instance, higher income level can enable a woman to purchase private land outside community or family owned land. Married women could get access to their husband's land of family land but they may not have full control over the land as decisions are made by the male leaders in the family. Because of the male succession of land, women cannot have adequate access to and control over land that belonged to their husbands or families regardless of their age or income status without support of male relatives. Regarding age, while older women are given respect and may be considered heads of extended family in cases where the patriarch (male head) is dead, their right to access land is increasingly dependent on support of the adult male members of the family. As revealed in this study, women have devised many strategies for fighting for their access to and control of land. These strategies include engaging local government agencies, working with NGOs, reporting to traditional courts, joining women support groups. Many women do not report to formal courts because the land involved is usually community owned or family owned. The effectiveness of these strategies is increasingly undermined by strong patriarchal customary laws, lack of adequate government involvement and women's low political power.

Relevance to development studies

Resources on the land are essential for rural lives. For many smallholder and subsistence farmers who lack the legal authority to own, transfer, or cultivate land, access to land is frequently governed by intricate interpretations of regional customary laws, traditional norms, and values. In general, women experience larger barriers to accessing resources for arable land than do males and further aggravates gender inequality. Women will be more able to contribute significantly to economic growth and development if there is equality in land rights.

Key words

Land rights, access, women, control, customary tenure, Bo District

Chapter one: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

To form the background of this study, a story about a chief in Sierra Leone will be used as an illustration. Chief Mandura (not his real name), like most traditional rulers in Africa, was born into a ruling family. For five generations now, the Manduras have served in Kpatobu, a small village in the Southeast of Sierra Leone. Unlike his siblings, he had the opportunity to attend senior secondary school and later gain formal employment in the ministry house in Bo. Since mining was the most lucrative business at the time, he later returned home to manage the family mining fields. When his father (Chief F.D) passed away, the staff went to his cousins since he had an interest in the mines which was a lucrative venture.

He married in a customary tradition 5 wives and gave birth to 13 children, my dad being the second child. When the war started in 1991, Kpatubu was a target for the rebels due to the mining operations in the village. The family houses were burnt down, diamonds looted, and six family members were killed, with the youngest son taken as a child soldier. The family had to relocate to Freetown (The Capital city) as refugees until the war ended. Returning home after the war was difficult for Chief Mandura since he had to start life all over again with an extended family to care for. After the death of his cousin, he then contested for the throne, which he won and served as chief from 2004 to 11 December 2018, when he transcended to the afterlife.

Like his father, he inherited all the properties and served as a custodian until his death. In most societies in Sierra Leone (polygamous families), the wives engage in agricultural activities on the land inherited by the husband until death. They are given a choice to indirectly marry the brother or cousin of the same family to have access to family resources. Women, especially daughters, have little or no access, especially when considering that they will not carry the family legacy (Family name). When Chief Mandura passed away, his second son instantly became the head of the family and custodian of all the lands due to his status in society (as he was educated more and well-to-do than his elder brother). This son lives in Freetown with no interest in settling down in the village or engaging in agricultural activities since he is well-established in the city. However, his decisions affect the rest of the family, including his mothers. Any activity to be carried out on any land needs his approval, including what should be done with the harvests.

As a grandson, I was astonished by this because I fully know that by law my mother becomes the next of kin at the demise of my dad, including any other wives he might have had. However, this is not the case under the customary tenure system, which is mostly practiced in the

provinces of Sierra Leone. The widows, including the daughters, will have to be at the mercy of my dad if ever they should benefit from the property left.

It happens the same way for most women in Sierra Leone's rural areas. Rural women in Sierra Leone face a daily struggle to access land, given the persistence of customary land tenure systems. Power relations in a highly patriarchal society remain uneven, and land rights are often the reserve of community authorities and male household leaders. Inspired by the above personal family story and context, this study examines the dynamics and complexity of women's land rights under customary tenure systems.

1.2 Context of Study

Equal access to land is necessary for ensuring human rights to appropriate food, housing, non-discrimination, and equity, as well as other fundamental human rights. Gender disparity in land ownership continues to be a challenge across the world, especially in developing nations. Men outnumber women among landowners in 28 of the 33 nations from Asian, Latin America, and African regions studied by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2018). As a result, while male landowners do not always exceed female landowners, this is by far the most common occurrence. Indeed, men account for over 65 percent of landowners in twelve of the thirty-three surveyed nations. Hence, global inequities in land ownership are visible. On the African continent, women make up 70% of household farming. However, a mere 20% of these women get free access to land for farming. Although land produces between 70 and 90% of the wealth found in Africa, women do not own more than 10 percent of that wealth (World Economic Forum, 2018:1). Sierra Leone has not escaped this reality as men who own land are twice the percentage of women (FAO, 2018).

The ability of women to get land is important for them to be economically empowered because it plays a role in producing food and generating income and it also plays the role of supplying credit and women can make their savings there as well (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). Owning and using land enables women to develop their capabilities, enhance their power to negotiate, and enhance their ability to handle vulnerability (European Commission, 2019). Land ownership increases women's access to extension services and loans and also their motivation to start and expand into other businesses. As a result, fulfilling the economic dimension of gender equality requires women to own or govern land (FAO, 2018). Furthermore, according to FAO (2011) and Namubiru-Mwaura (2014), poverty and food insecurity would decrease dramatically across the world if women had equal access to land.

Recognizing the significance of gender equity in land ownership rights, various conventions, programs and policies have been designed to enhance the land ownership assurance of women. For instance, the goal for the first indicator of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 regarding gender equity in possession or obtaining rights for arable land is “to make reforms to provide women with the same rights as men to economic resources, and get possession and take charge of land and other types of wealth, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, by state laws” (FAO, n.d). In Sierra Leone, various civil society and indigenous people’s organizations are involved in fighting for equality of land rights. Such organizations include the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone, the Women’s Solidarity Support Group (WSSG) and Women’s Action for Human Dignity (WAHD). Despite the conventions, programs, policies, and initiatives driving the achievement of women’s land ownership rights, there has been slow progress, making it imperative to examine and understand the factors that constrain the land rights and tenure security of women across different contexts to develop more relevant and appropriate interventions.

1.3 Case study area

1.3.1 Bo District

Bo District is located in Sierra Leone's Southern Province. It is one of Sierra Leone's sixteen districts. Sierra Leone's Bo District is the country's second-most populous area. As of 2015, the population of the district consisted of 197,395 men and 205,787 women (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2015). Agriculture is the main livelihood in the district as 49.4% depend on it. Just like in other rural areas in Bo District, Customary law coexists with statutory law, although customary law tends to triumph in rural areas where statutory justice services are scarce (Johnson, 2011). The application of customary laws in this district often denies women the right to own or lease land ownership (Millar, 2015: Ryan, 2018).

Life in Bo District is characterized by a traditional way of doing things and poverty is rife among the rural farmers. Women are mostly housewives but they also engage in low-scale traditional farming. Other common economic activities in the district include trading and mining. Due to high poverty levels, there is severe food insecurity. Society is largely conservative with the traditional setup dominating most homesteads. The man is considered the head of the family with women playing the role of the helper and home maker. Most of their responsibilities revolve around children rearing and looking after the family.

1.3.2 Action Plus Sierra Leone

Action Plus Sierra Leone is a local humanitarian organization that cooperates with poor and oppressed women to provide a just and favorable change via empowerment partnership and accountable action. This organization is committed to bringing rural development to the most deprived communities in Sierra Leone, bridging the development and inequality gap between urban and rural settlements.

Action Plus was established on 1st July 2002 as the Sierra Leone Youth in Crisis (SLYIC) and was later rebranded as Action Plus. The organization was established immediately when the civil war ended in Sierra Leone. The main initiative was to engage youths in other productive activities as they lay down arms and were reintroduced into society. After 4 years of service, the organization was rebranded to Action Plus with women at the centre of the organization's projects. The war atrocities left the rural areas of Sierra Leone more divided and an increase in gender-based violence. Above all, the unequal distribution of communal resources is what has led them in the fight for radical inclusion, calling on local leaders and the central government to abolish the Provincial Act and a clear definition of the customary land tenure, protecting and creating equal access to land. The name Action Plus denotes unlimited action, one that perfectly fits its current mission. Action Plus is committed to responding to the needs of three vulnerable groups: women, children and youth. The philosophy behind this approach is that Action Plus wishes to tackle the true source of the problem of abuse and poverty and view social and economic injustice and marginalization as contributory factors to poverty.

For over 20 years, Action Plus has undertaken a number of surveys and inquiries into women's rights. A number of such empirical studies have been on the following topical issues:

- Baseline Survey of a project on Violence Against Women and property rights
- Baseline survey in HIV/AIDS and Preventing Mother-to-Child Transmission
- Women's livelihood as part of the organization's livelihood and food security programme
- Perception survey on the part played by women in local governance.
- Women's property and land rights as part of the organization's livelihood and food security programme

The mission of Action Plus is to build a fair and balanced society by supporting the welfare of poor and vulnerable groups and communities for the realization of rights and life in dignity. In pursuit of this mission, Action Plus utilizes the following strategies: empowerment of beneficiaries; rights-based approach; advocacy to influence policy implementation, networking and collaboration.

As a researcher, I have been fortunate to work with the organization for 3 years and I will be using them as key informants for primary and secondary data. Again, some of the women I interacted with, we've had a history together on the organization's livelihood and property right project. I strongly believe that their voice matters as I take an objective position in this research. I do not have a personal relationship with the organization but I was introduced to it by an accomplice who knew about it. My positionality as a person of the black race whose origin is on the African continent gave me an advantage because I was easily received by the officials of the organization and granted the support I needed to conduct the study. Furthermore, I am a citizen of Sierra Leone and that also endeared me to the locals and Action plus members. Being a male also gave me an advantage because women felt it was important to discuss their gender issues with a male because fellow women already understood their plight.

Two officials from the organization helped me to identify the women who ended up participating in this study. The support of the organization was very important because it helped to identify those women who had been in the area for a long time and were involved in farming. Such women fit well with the inclusion criteria of the study. The study was focused on those women who have the most profound experiences of being denied access to land yet they are farmers who have been farming for several years.

1.4 The scope of the study

This study seeks to examine the issues surrounding gender and land Rights in the Bo District of Sierra Leone. Therefore, the scope of the study includes an investigation of the challenges that women in Bo District involved in the farming face due to the country's customary land tenure systems. The study focuses on the inequalities experienced in accessing and controlling land. Its scope includes the causes of unequal gendered access to land, effects of unequal gendered land rights; the extent to which females face land rights challenges differ based on their age, the status of marriage, ethnicity, household composition, and social status and the strategies women use to address land rights contestation challenges.

1.5 Problem Statement

Recognizing the significance and need for ensuring gender equity in land ownership has not propelled the much-needed change in nations that heavily rely on customary land laws, such as Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, Religious and cultural traditions which are strongly based on patriarchal values show if women will get land in the various areas which are controlled by the customary land tenure system. These traditions normally result in segregation against women

in accessing and controlling land (Yengoh & Armah, 2015; Millar, 2015). The report of FAO (2018) shows that as of 2018, only 9.5% of people who possess or get rights over land for farming are women compared to the 22.70 percent who are men in Sierra Leone.

In Sierra Leone's rural areas, customary law governs more than 95% of the land (Open Society Initiative for West Africa, 2018). This means that for the vast majority of the population, tribes or communities' unwritten customary laws and norms decide who is allowed to own, utilize, or change land possession. In several respects, the implementation of customary laws in everyday life has tended to disadvantage women more than men. Women are frequently considered minors when it comes to major matters requiring the intervention of a man. They are treated as personal property in the worst-case situation (Burgess, 2018).

According to the World Bank (2022) assessments, the legal framework for Sierra Leone's land sector does not effectively address the rights of women to land ownership or use and is not in line with modern land administration concepts or new technology. When women attempt to fight for their land rights, they are faced with challenges because the male inheritance of family land continues to be supported by culture and traditions. It also highlights the fact that women are underrepresented in land-related institutions (Millar, 2015). Furthermore, under communal ownership, women's rights are not specified, permitting men to sell family land without consulting women.

Women's land possession is significant for the attainment of the economic dimension of gender equity as it leads to a rout of benefits through a rise of their bargaining power within the economy and within the household. For that matter, preventing women from owning and using land hinders their success. Furthermore, this refusal is associated with poverty in women in Sub-Saharan Africa (McFerson, 2010). In a bid to contribute to studies about the interface between gender and land rights, the current study will investigate the challenges facing initiatives and actions meant to ensure the security of women's land use and ownership rights in Bo District, Sierra Leone.

1.6 Justification and relevance of the study

To reinforce the land rights of women as called for in national and international agendas, it is necessary to re-examine the dimensions of women's rights to land and the numerous factors that promote or hinder their land access and tenure security in different contexts. The present study will examine and analyze the factors inhibiting the efforts meant to realize women's land ownership rights in the context of Sierra Leone. Hence its findings will elucidate the current situation of women in Bo District regarding the status of their land rights issues and create a

comprehension of the types of women's tenure security in the district. By doing so, the study will provide useful empirical data that will assist the development of informed and relevant interventions by policy makers, organizations and other groups working to promote women's land tenure security. It is hoped that the present research will produce useful findings for the growing field of studies on strategies, programs and policies meant to strengthen the land tenure security of women.

1.7 Research Objective and Questions

The main goal of this study is to examine the challenges that socially differentiated women in rural Sierra Leone face in light of the country's customary land tenure systems. It aims to examine gendered experiences and responses to inequalities in land access and control.

1.7.1 Research question

This research seeks to provide answers to the main research question: How do differences in socio-economic characteristics affect women's access to and control over land in Bo District and how do the women counter unequal access to and control over land?

Sub-questions:

1. How and to what extent do age and socio-economic characteristics (marital status, ethnicity, and income status) influence women's access to and control over land?
2. How do women in Bo District resist and struggle to address gendered inequalities over access to and control over land?

2.0 Chapter two: Literature Review

This section explores the tenure structure of Sierra Leone by describing the land tenure categories, where they are applied and who applies them. The customary land practices in the provinces are discussed in terms of who makes decisions regarding access and land cultivation as well as how these decisions are made.

2.1 Sierra Leone's land tenure structure

In Sierra Leone, there is a dual land tenure system. It includes the statutory and customary land systems. In statutory tenure, the government owns the land but in the customary land tenure system, the land is owned by a specific family within the community (Renner-Thomas, 2010). In Sierra Leone, there is freehold tenure for land in the Western parts and customary ownership for land in the provinces (The World Bank, 2022). Land within the Western Area where the Creoles originally settled who had been freed from slavery after arriving in the country is owned based on the English concept of freehold interests (Unruh, & Turray, 2006). The acquisition of this land was done by the English through negotiations with the natives before being handed over to the settlers.

In the other parts of the country or the provinces, the land ownership is communal based on customary tenure, and it is under the control of traditional rulers who are administering it on behalf of the members of their communities in line with customary use and principles. This has resulted in a dichotomy between tradition and modernization (Turay & Dinye, 2021). Within the Western Area, it is possible to assign interests in the land without much difficulty, but according to Bankolay & Romanus (2021) within the provinces, it is not easy for the traditional administrators to accept assigning interests in land which can act as a connotation for any likelihood of perpetual alienation including freehold interest because this can deny future generations of their ancestral heritage.

2.1.1 Land tenure structure in the Western Area

In the Western Area, the history of land tenure dates back to the colonial days (Asiama, 2003). This area became a Colony of the British Empire being governed by the British at a time when the other parts of the country were declared to be a protectorate. The socio-political situation within the Colony formed a perfect ground for the present land tenure system. First, the freed slaves were not members of a single ethnic group because ethnicity did not apply to them (Omotunde, 2011). Most of them were the second and later generations of slaves who were connected by religion and the fact that they had a heritage of slavery. Since the settlers had been living in England and they had experienced how the English lived their lives and how

they governed themselves, it was easy for them to live like the British and this also implied their land tenure relations.

Furthermore, the British encouraged them to live like the British because that would be easier for them. These factors led to certain socio-political conditions which facilitated the introduction of British concepts of land tenure relations within the Colony (Unruh & Turray, 2006). This was unavoidable because the liberated slaves did not know any other way apart from these tenure concepts. Furthermore, they lacked structures for any other land ownership system. In addition, Turay, & Dinye, (2021) note that based on the British principles of expansion of territory, the land upon which the liberated slaves were re-settled was acquired in the name of the British monarch. This created a situation where those who owned land had extra land and were able to engage in land speculation.

2.1.2 Land tenure structure in the provinces

In the provinces, the land is held communally under customary tenure. Although there exist slight disparities in the different ethnic tribes, the overall flow is that land is deemed to be a divine possession where the spirits of dead relatives should be spared and given over to posterity (Asiama, 2003). The reason for this is that land is considered to be the property of a big family that comprises the ancestors, those who are alive, and those generations that will come in the future. The land is a heritage that has been entrusted to the living and the entire community is responsible for preserving it so that it can be enjoyed by future generations.

However, Omotunde (2011) states that a community is an entity that is not properly defined, and it ranges from a family of a few people to a whole tribe. It seems that the source of the total interest in land comprises a society and is responsible for making sure that their descendants perpetually enjoy it.

A distinction must be made between land owned by the community and family land. Beyond this, it is possible to think of partitions under the family level. Chiefdoms are organized into sections that are led by administrative heads or section chiefs controlling several villages (Johnson, 2011). The villages possess territorial limits. In the villages, the land is also subdivided into various sections and family properties (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). It is not easy to define the family because both maternal and paternal associations qualify certain people to have rights on land in many village territories.

2.2 Customary land practices in Sierra Leone's provinces

The great majority of the population lives in the provinces, where customary practices determine land access. Only in the Western area can the land be freehold. In the Provinces, possession of land is usually found in the chiefdoms, and can only be leased. The customary

land ownership system in Sierra Leone is structured on the individual, family, and communal ownership. Generally, individuals in any family possess the right of occupying and making use of any part of the land belonging to their family (Asiama, 2003). When a member of a family desires to plant perennial crops on the land belonging to the family, that member must be granted permission by the head of the family who allocates land for such purposes (Unruh & Turray, 2006). However, in certain societies, especially among the Temme people, the person must pay money called ‘cola’ to the head of the family as a way of acknowledging the grant (Renner-Thomas, 2010). The grant does not imply a transfer of ownership but the right to cultivate the land which is called a usufructuary estate.

As stated by Omotunde (2011), the absolute interest in matters of land rests in families. Therefore, it is the family that owns land that makes dealings in land. The paramount chief is considered to be the custodian of the land, controlling it on behalf of the whole chiefdom but any decision about land is made by the head of each landowning family (Unruh & Turray, 2006). When it comes to land transaction income distribution, the relationship between the families that own land and the paramount chiefs is not formal (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). Furthermore, some paramount chiefs consider themselves to be the landowners, and the families that own land are only considered to be caretakers of the land for them.

According to Johnson (2011), the absolute interest in land was acquired by; an individual who was a brave warrior with the experience of leading people and later sharing the plunder with members of the community, a well-off trader who bought large tracts of land, or a person who was given land as a gift for an act of benevolence and it was later handed down to his descendants. In all the above cases, it is important to consider that the land is owned communally (Ryan (2018). The one who administers the interest of the community is the leader of the household that owns the lands and administers with the support of a council of elders (Asiama, 2003; Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). A vital outcome of the practice of having an absolute interest in the land placed in the family is that it gives any household member a right to occupy and utilize any portion of that land owned by the family.

In the provinces, the land is still held communally based on customary tenure. The reason for this is that land is considered to be the property of a big family that comprises the ancestors, those who are alive, and those generations that will come in the future. The land is a heritage that has been entrusted to the living and the entire community is responsible for preserving it so that it can be enjoyed by future generations.

However, Omotunde (2011) states that a community is an entity that is not distinctively defined, and it ranges from a family of a few people to a whole tribe. It seems that the source

of the total interest in land comprises a tribe and is responsible for making sure that their descendants perpetually enjoy the land and its benefits. A distinction had to be made between land owned by the community and family land. Beyond this, it is possible to think of partitions under the family level. Chiefdoms are organized into sections that are led by administrative heads or section chiefs controlling several villages (Johnson, 2011). The villages possess territorial limits. In the villages, the land is also partitioned into smaller sections and family plots (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). It is not easy to define the family because both maternal and paternal associations qualify certain people to have rights on land in many village territories.

In places where people practice shifting cultivation, the land used for agriculture is normally shared by the family leader when the farming season is starting all every family member. However, this may be different in areas where perennial crops are cultivated (Renner-Thomas, 2010). Based on customary law, family members are not allowed to sell any land to a stranger. This is based on the understanding that traditionally people in Sierra Leone believed that land is a sacred trust of the ancestors. Within the townlands, in case a family member needs land to build a house to live in or other developments, the stipulated procedure is for that member to obtain permission from the leader of his family (Asiama, 2003). The family member will then have some land assigned to him from the land belonging to his family but without paying for it. The person receives the individual usufruct title after which he enjoys using that land forever. The property becomes his indefinitely and he can use it for any purpose apart from selling it to a person who is not a member of the family (Unruh & Turray, 2006). Upon his death, the property is inherited by his children and family.

When an individual member of the family needs land to farm, he approaches the head of his family to get land when the planting season begins. However, Turay & Dinye, (2021) note that the allocation only lasts for that one season and later it is taken back by the family pool. The head of the family then allocates it to another member of the family who needs it for the coming farming season. Asiama (2003) explains that for a family member who wants to engage in the cultivation of perennial crops, which will remain on the farm for a long time, he must ask to be given land by the family head, and then the land is provided.

Chapter three: Conceptual framework

3.1 Gender and Development Approach (GAD) and women's land rights

The current paper adopts a gender and development approach in investigating the land rights issues of women in rural Sierra Leone. As Bloom et al. (2014) explain, the gender and development approach (GAD) to research is concerned with the social differences between the two genders (men and women), the creation and impacts of class differences on development, and the importance of questioning prevalent gender relations and roles. The proponents of this approach argue that social relationships between men and women have resulted in the systemic subordination of women (Muyoyeta, 2007). Unlike the women in development approach that focuses on challenges faced by women in different contexts, gender and development examine these challenges in the broader system of gender relations. The gender and development approach emphasizes thinking of women not as the important target group in the development discourse, rather, it encourages the exploration of how women and men are socially constructed and the consequences of that construction. The approach mainly focuses on the gendered division of labour and gender in relation to power entrenched in social institutions. Therefore, the approach considers two main frameworks namely social relations analysis and gender roles (Muyoyeta, 2007). Social relations analysis examines the social dimensions of ordered power relations entrenched in social institutions and the decisive influence on the comparative position of women and men in a given context. Gender roles, on the other hand, look at how identities are socially constructed in a family in connection to how each gender is able to access resources.

Wilson (2015) suggests that the complex spectrum of land use and exchange value breeds conflict between various classes, races, ethnicities, genders, and other social groupings that struggle for possession of and authority over land. Additionally, the multiple races, genders, and ethnic groups in each society have been forced to contend with complex and divergent understandings and values about land use and control, together with the proper institutional and legal framework for land administration (Amanor-Wilks, 2015). Such complexities arise due to a century of shifting state colonial ideologies, land control systems, and legislation spanning various political discourses. In this context, the marginalized position of women in terms of accessing and controlling land, alongside the mechanisms that maintain this status, has emerged as a contentious issue in development studies and policy analysis (Moyo, 1995; Wilson, 2015). Using a gender and development approach in exploring land rights would result in a shift in gender power relations and ultimately ensure that all individuals notwithstanding

their gender, are empowered by, and benefit from, development policies concerning land rights. The reason for this is that there is a direct link between women's land rights, economic empowerment, poverty reduction, and food security among other important development aspects.

The GAD framework that is applied in this study is the gender roles framework. Particularly, this study adopts the Harvard Gender Roles Framework developed by the Harvard Institute for International Development in collaboration with the Women in Development office of USAID. The framework's premise, known as the efficiency approach, was that it makes economic sense for development aid initiatives to provide resources to both men and women in order to improve development (March et al., 1999). It outlines who performs each task, who has access to and authority over resources, and the factors that affect gender roles- Fig. 1.

Figure 1: Harvard Gender Roles Framework

Tool	The activity profile	The access and control profile	Influencing factors
Tool description/role	Inquiries about who does what for all relevant farm, home, and community tasks.	Clarifies and documents who has access to resources and who controls their use in relation to the tasks identified in the Activity Profile.	Identifies factors that shape differences between men and women
Questions	Who does what? When? Where?	1. Who has access to and control over resources (for example, land, labour)? 2. Who has access to and control over benefits (education or health services)?	1. What are political, economic, or cultural factors affecting the gender differences identified in the above two profiles? 2. What are the past and present influences? What are the opportunities and constraints?

Source: Adapted from March et al. (1999)

The gender roles framework relates strongly to the topic of gender and land rights in this study. The concept of tools of 'The access and control profile' and the 'influencing factors' were used to understand the connection between gender and land resources and their relation to development. Through the two last tools of the Harvard Gender Roles Framework, the study is

able to show that men have more access to land than women, why this exists and how that skews the development of both genders in Bo District. Based on the understanding of the factors influencing unequal access to land it becomes useful to study the strategies used by women to counter the challenge of unequal access to land and to investigate the actors involved in trying to bring about land rights for women in Bo District.

3.2 Feminist political ecology of resource access and control and the theory of access

The field of Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) further mainstreams gender power relations in the issue of resource access and control (Vercillo, 2021). For instance, Elmhirst (2015) explains how FPE opens up questions around the who, what, how, when, and when determining who has access to resources. Elmhirst (2015) looks at the availability of land and its control and related resources in relation to communities and intrahousehold dynamics. Other FPE studies have examined the gender division of labour and availability of rural resources, including land and labour in the global South (Rocheleau et al., 1996; Carney 2004; Harris, 2009; Behrman et al. 2012; Wisborg 2014; Dery, 2015). These studies look at how land issues lead to gender conflict within households as well as communities. They point to four different domains that make up gendered resource tenure including both rights and obligations. Resource control is the first domain. The second is resource access, which might involve exclusive and shared rights, de facto and de jure rights, direct and indirect rights, or any combination of these. The third one is the gendered utilization of resources for subsistence and commercial reasons, which involve inputs, outputs, and other assets. The fourth is gendered obligations to obtain or manage resources for use by families and communities.

The possession and utilization of rights to land, water resources, forests, and other resources in the villages have been the subject of much of the FPE work on gendered resource rights in development studies (Moyo, 1995; Dery, 2015; Khalid et al., 2015; Garcia-Morán & Yates, 2022). Competing people making claims at many levels, including men and women, families of various categories, various communities, various tribal groups, and local and national governments, frequently contest these resources. The basic concepts of property and resources, which are so frequently taken to be immutable, actually differ from one category to another, locations, and change across time periods. Resource values and claims on them shift in accordance with people's requirements, aptitudes, know-how, and capacities (Rees 1990; Rocheleau et al. 1996; Omara-Ojunga 1992). Additionally, the claims upon natural resources change in accordance with power relations based on gender, race, class, ethnicity, locale, and citizenship. For instance, the colonial government's and the post-independent state's

implementation of Kenya's land tenure change barred women from land resources that they had previously had access to through their customary permission of utilization and admittance (Wangari, 1990).

Men and women have gender-differentiated interests in natural resources such as land due to their unique roles, obligations, and knowledge in the household divisions of labour. The ability to benefit from resources depends on gendered social interactions that either prevent or permit the realization of such benefits, defining gender power relations in households (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Agarwal (2003) notes that in a large portion of South Asia, tiered social customs and traditions related to sexual relations put women in a position of reliance on men, who serve as a core channel for accessing resources like land, creating gender-specific vulnerabilities for widows or women going through a divorce. Furthermore, recognizing the position of patriarchy in customary law, Tinker (2015) acknowledges the obstinacy of gender-based power relationships within households, families, and society in general. Households do not operate as a single unit and the patriarchal power relations between male and female members of a household determine their access to land. Kameri-Mbote (2005) proposes that land ownership is rooted in patriarchy in many African nations' legal systems.

Theory of access by Ribot and Peluso

A relevant theory in the FPE strand of resource access and control is the theory of access developed by Ribot and Peluso. This theory can be used alongside the social relations approach in evaluating local institutions and gendered access to agricultural resources. Gender studies have described the term "access" as the opportunity to use a resource whereas control is described as the power to decide who has access to a resource and how it is used (March et al., 1999). This description is expounded on by Ribot and Pelusi (2003) who describe access as the ability to benefit from a resource. With this definition and employing the theory of access in general, this study seeks to investigate how women in Sierra Leone with no formal ownership of land can enhance their welfare. Ribot and Pelusi (2003) explain that access is about using all possible means to benefit from resources. Access theory provides women's right-based mechanisms and also considers strategies that happen in a wider collection of institutions, social, and political-economic relations. It also considers broad strategies that influence benefit flows (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). The theory provides three main mechanisms of access namely: rights-based, relational, and structural (Ribot and Peluso, 2003; Peluso, 1996). Rights-based access covers aspects sanctioned by convention, custom, or law. Customary laws are oral, non-

codified rules that have evolved from social norms and traditions (Knight, 2010). Statutory laws are written laws found in compilations of statutes or codified laws in a formal legal system. Structural access mechanisms entail technologies like fences or granaries as well as more complicated technologies like mobile phones and other communication infrastructures that expedite market access (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Relational mechanisms are those that need inter-personal relationships and include access to authority, family or community members, informants, extension services, workers, and shared social identities.

When analysing local institutions and gendered access to land resources, the theory of access supports the social relations approach. As determined by gender studies, access can be described as the chance to use a resource whereas control is described as the authority to determine who has access to a certain resource and how to use it (March et al., 1999). Another broader definition of access is the ability to benefit from resources (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). The current study utilizes access theory in analysing alternative strategies that women in Bo District of Sierra Leone can use in their challenges as subsistence farmers with no formal ownership of land. Ribot and Peluso explain that access should be attained by any means possible. Other than the women's rights-based mechanisms, access theory also focuses on strategies that happen in a wider array of institutions, political-economic and social relations and discursive strategies that influence flow of benefits (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Theory of access has three main mechanisms of access namely relational, structural, and rights-based (Ribot and Peluso, 2003; Peluso, 1996). Structural mechanisms include technologies like fences and granaries as well as more complicated technologies like mobile phones which enable market access (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Customary laws are unwritten oral regulations that have evolved from social norms and traditions (Knight, 2010). Rights-based access entail those sanctioned by custom, law, or convention. Statutory laws are written laws found in statute compilations as codified laws in a formal legal system. Relational mechanisms need inter-personal relationships like access to authority, community or familial members, informants, workers, and shared social identities.

Building on the FPE strand of resource access and control my study uses the propositions of the theory of access to examine the structures and factors that influence women's access and control over land, in Bo District, Sierra Leone. Furthermore, in this study, the theory of access is important in understanding mechanisms of access to resources since the study investigates the way women handle issues related to lack of access to land resources.

Chapter four: Research methodology

This chapter discusses the research processes and methods followed and used to collect and analyze data. The research onion (figure 2) proposed by Saunders et al. (2007) will be the basis for discussion in this methodology section. Based on the research onion below, this section begins with the research philosophy, followed by the research approach and then the methodological choice. Next is the research strategy, followed by the time horizon and data collection methods. Finally, a discussion of the ethical considerations for the proposed study will be presented.

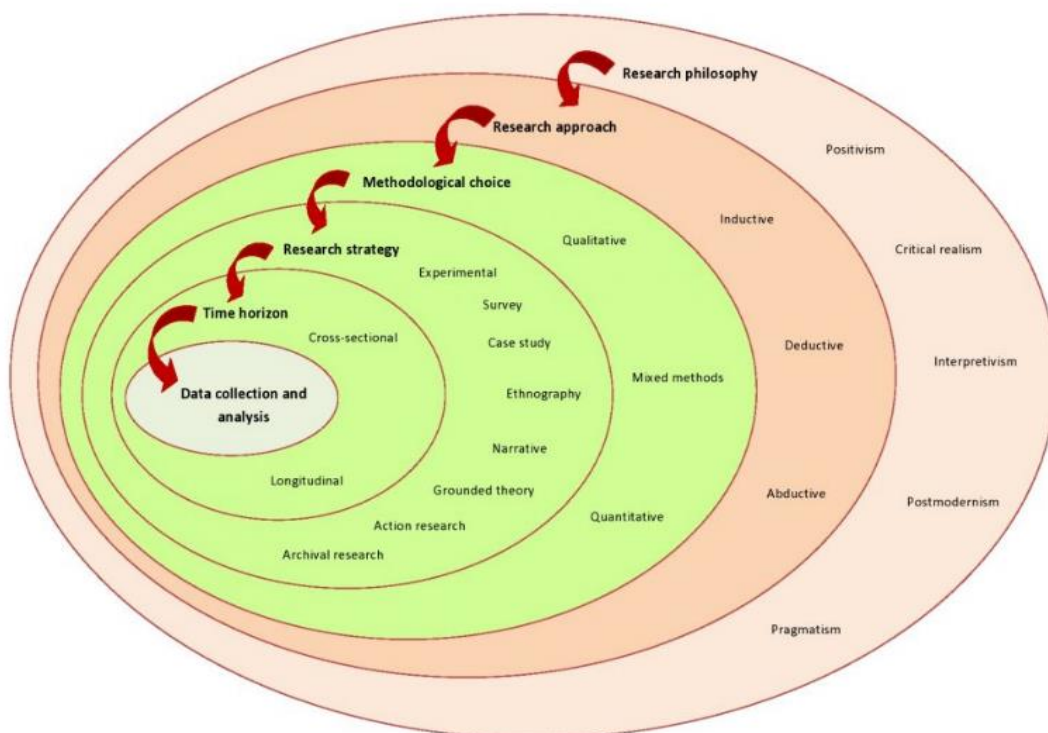


Fig. 2: Research onion

Source: Saunders et al., (2007)

4.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy, as defined by Mkansi (2012), refers to a belief system and assumptions regarding the development of knowledge. It simply means what the researcher does after embarking on a research study, which is the generation of knowledge in a given field. The research philosophical paradigm is located in the outmost ring of the research onion. As stated by Saunders et al. (2007), this layer represents the opinions and assumptions held by individuals about the knowledge of a given aspect under investigation. Based on its qualities, interpretivism was the appropriate philosophical paradigm for this study since interpretivism

admits that their research problems exist within a social context which is a human construction with many attributes that researchers cannot observe or measure quantitatively (Idowu, 2016). In this study, the research problem of gender power relations and land rights exists within a social context that is constructed by individuals and most of its qualities are not measurable quantitatively (Hürlimann, 2019). According to Mkansi (2012), the interpretive approach to social research is usually suitable for more qualitative methods. This aligns with the data collection method in the proposed study, which will be semi-structured interviews. According to interpretivism, to get the meaning of data on a given phenomenon, it is important to understand the reasoning, motivations and beliefs of people in a social situation (Mkansi 2012). In this study, interpretivism was necessary to understand how the female farmers' reasons, beliefs and motivations for seeking to have more access and control of land.

4.2 Research approach

Researchers can use either deductive or inductive methods of research. According to Thomas (2010) when research is conducted deductively, the literature is used to identify the theories required for testing by the researcher on the basis of the information gathered. Contrarily, via the inductive approach, the researcher can perform the development of theory and not make use of already available ones as is the case with the deductive approach (Mkansi, 2012). The inductive approach encompasses data collection and the development of theory based on the outcome of data analysis. Since this study used already available theories it was conducted using the deductive approach. The researcher set out to study what other researchers have done in the area of gender and land rights including the concepts of gender and development and feminist political ecology and eventually evaluated the hypotheses emerging from those theories.

4.3 Methodological Choice

On the research onion, the methodology section appears in the fourth layer. As stated by Saunders et al., (2007), the two key methodological approaches used in research are the quantitative and qualitative approaches. These two may be used separately or in combination (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). In qualitative research, the data collected is normally descriptive and not numerical. The proposed methodological approach for this research is the qualitative method. This means that the study collected only descriptive data. The choice of this method was based on the advantage that it afforded the researcher a deeper comprehension of the topic of gender and land rights in the Bo district of Sierra Leone. Qualitative research is appropriate

for behavioural studies as well as social research especially because human interactions are complex (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Therefore, the qualitative approach was suitable for this study because of the complexity of the gender-related interactions between men and women on matters of land access and control. Qualitative research also involves studies conducted with small samples given that the sample for this study is only 20 people. To add to this, the researcher also has the freedom to deeply investigate and obtain a large amount of useful descriptive data through the use of semi-structured interviews.

The study adopted a descriptive research design because it seeks to answer the how and what questions concerning the right to own land by women in Sierra Leone. This design was selected because it would enable the collection of a large amount of data for detailed analysis (Shorten & Smith, 2017). The study adopted a qualitative research approach based on qualitative data to answer the research questions and discuss the findings of the study with other studies in drawing meaningful contributions.

4.4 Research strategy

As stated by Shorten & Smith (2017), research strategy is the technique the researcher uses in conducting a research study. In any particular study, different strategies such as questionnaires, case studies, interviews, and systematic reviews may be used. Interviews have a higher level of flexibility, especially when compared to questionnaires (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2017). This is appropriate when interviews are applied in the collection of deep information or sensitive data. In this research, the case study method was chosen to complete the research. According to Crowe et al. (2011), a case study is a detailed study of an individual, a group of individuals, a unit or even a community in a systematic manner. In this study, the case study focused on the women in Bo district of Sierra Leone.

According to Rashid et al., (2019), the case study enables the researcher to choose a wide and complex study or phenomenon and condense it into a manageable research question. For the proposed study, the case study method was selected because it was possible for the researcher to undertake an in-depth investigation of the chosen topic. The topic of gender and land rights may be broad but using the case study approach, the focus was narrowed down to female farmers found in the Bo District of Sierra Leone. Using the case study approach, the researcher collected huge quantities of information from the interview respondents (Lund, 2014). However, case studies may have certain limitations that the researcher must lessen. In this study, the huge volume of information collected was challenging when it came to the analysis

and organization of the data. Therefore, the researcher had to think seriously about different integration methods. The researcher also took care to avoid veering off the topic because that is a possibility in case studies such as this.

4.5 Time Horizon

For this study, the data collection process through interviews was done in only two days and not within a long time period. The collection of data was completed in 2 days in order to reduce the expenses that would be incurred if it took many days. Prior to this study, the researcher did not know the NGO but knowledge about the same was acquired through the internet and recommendations by people who understood its activities well. All this happened only one month from the time of data collection.

4.7 Data collection

The procedures and techniques for data collection are placed in the innermost ring of the research onion and this is a crucial part of the study because it is important for determining the rationality and credibility of the investigation. The innermost layer covers the data collection methods, the research data, and the analysis procedure (Saunders et al., 2007). It also includes the sources of data, sample size and the procedure for the generation of the sample, the ethical considerations, the study limitations, and how to mitigate them (Melkinovas, 2018). Data may be collected through primary or secondary methods. Primary data is obtained from the source, but this is different from secondary data gathered from existing sources. The study used primary and secondary approaches to data gathering. Primary data was advantageous for this study because the researcher obtained first-hand data which provided more relevant insights into the topic of gender and land rights. Primary data is also up-to-date and credible and it provided the benefit of better accuracy. The study also benefited from secondary data which was useful for providing background information about the study topic, defining certain concepts, establishing, and informing a suitable methodology, and discussing the findings (Brod et al., 2009). In the present study, secondary data brought in the advantage of reduction of time taken and the costs incurred in collecting the data. The secondary data collected was about the structure of land tenure in Sierra Leone both in the provinces and the western area, customary land practices in Sierra Leone's provinces, gender and Development Approach (GDA) and women's land rights and Feminist political ecology of resource access and control. Primary data focused on the demographics of the participants, the causes of unequal gendered access to land, the effects of unequal gendered land rights, and the extent to which female land rights challenges differ based on their age, the status of marriage, ethnicity, household

composition, and social status. The data also included the strategies women use to address land rights contestation challenges.

4.7.1 Sampling Process

For purposes of sample development, the researcher obtained a sample of 12 women from a women's group that is supported by Action Plus through education and training on land rights issues. The 12 women were those who accepted to take part in the study and their approval to participate in the study was also based on the fact that they were residents of the area for more than 20 years because that proves that have been there for enough time to understand what happens in families on matters of land control and access for men and women.

Action Plus is a non-profit organization that works to ensure gender equality in politics and social issues through women empowerment. The choice of Action Plus was made based on the organization's relentless efforts and volume of activities in supporting women and fighting for their empowerment. Compared to other organizations involved with women in the area, Action Plus has made the greatest contribution over the longest time period.

The sample of 12 interviewees selected was generated using the critical case sampling method. (Taherdoost, 2016). In exploratory qualitative research such as the current one, the purposive sampling method known as "critical case sampling" is extremely effective (Etikan et al., 2016). Critical case sampling is expected to enable the researcher to make the most from a comparatively tiny population of interest and arrive at valuable research outcomes that are relevant to the context of Bo District, Sierra Leone.

The sample of women was made up of women who received training in Action Plus's women empowerment programme. The women that were included in the study were aged between 18 and 60 and they were from different ethnicities (Mende, Kone and Temne) and socio-economic classes (income and education levels). Also, the study included women from male-headed households and women-led families. The diversity in the age, class and ethnicity of the respondents allowed for diversity in the responses. Such diversity is important for this study as it is expected that females from different classes and ethnicities could have varied experiences and viewpoints on women's land rights issues.

4.7.2 Data collection tools

Primary data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The interviews were recorded on digital devices and afterwards transcribed and analysed for purposes of identifying the themes that will be found to be relevant to the study questions. The choice of semi-structured interviews was appropriate because such data is collected in its original state, and the data

improved the control of the researcher over the collected information and the whole data collection process. Where the researcher has control, there is the freedom of engaging in data operation which improves the likelihood of attaining the objectives of the study (Husband, 2020). By using interviews for data collection, the researcher enjoyed flexibility which is obtained through interviews (Majid et al., 2017). Furthermore, interviews have a higher rate of response than other data collection methods such as questionnaires, and those who are unable to read and write can still participate in the study (Braun et al., 2021). In addition, the researcher was able to judge the non-verbal communication the interviewees were making.

4.7.3 Data collection process

Community entry

Since the researcher was not able to travel to Sierra Leone, I employed the services of a research assistant in the data collection process. The research assistant is an assistant programme officer at Action Plus. He has worked with the organization for three years and is involved in its efforts in advocating for women's land tenure security. The research assistant acted as a gatekeeper by making the initial introduction of my project to the women group and making the initial contact with prospective respondents. The prospective respondents were first briefed about the intention of the research and then were voluntarily allowed to take part in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and no form of payment was made to the participants. However, they benefited from their concerns and issues being illuminated through the study so that those concerned can address them. After the acceptance to participate in the study, the prospective respondents signed an informed consent form.

Interviews

The research assistant obtained the contacts of respondents who agreed to take part in the study, and the interviews were conducted online. To prepare the interview guide, the researcher wrote down what information he needed to answer the study's research questions. The researcher first introduced himself, got comfortable with the interviewee, and explained the purpose of the interview. This included presenting topics or themes that would be covered during the interview. The interviews took place for 40 minutes. The researcher recorded the interviews with the consent of the respondents and also took notes of the insights from the responses.

4.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis process for the study was done via thematic analysis. Qualitative thematic analysis was fitting for this study due to various factors. Braun et al. (2021) state that thematic

analysis provides theoretical freedom and a type of flexibility that is easy to modify so that it fits the study and provides an intricate, thorough and rich account of data. Thematic analysis is also easily grasped and easily undertaken because its prescriptions and procedures are not many (Ibrahim, 2012). Thematic analysis was also suitable for the proposed study because it would help to study the points of view of different participants, identify the similarities and disparities and also generate unexpected insights. Thematic analysis was important for summarizing crucial features in the big data set expected (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The data analysis process followed six key steps including familiarizing oneself with the data, generation of codes, generation of themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and lastly, writing up.

Familiarization with the data

This stage is used to become acclimatized with the data. To achieve this, the researcher read the transcripts several times and listened to the videos several times as well. The researcher got immersed in the data through note-making (Ibrahim, 2012). This was important for getting the breadth and depth of the data. The researcher made notes about coding ideas that would be required in later stages.

Generation of initial codes

This step was important for code development, a process that the researcher will use for reflecting upon and interacting with the data. To accomplish this process, Nowell et al, (2017) advice that the researcher must identify crucial sections within the data and attach labels for indexing depending on the relationship they have with the theme or issue in the data.

Searching for Themes

This step started after all the data has been coded and a list of the different codes was compiled. The researcher sorted and collated all the possibly critical codes of data for theme development. The codes included unequal gendered access to land, females' land rights challenges, and challenges in securing land rights. As stated by Braun et al, (2021) theme identification was accomplished through the combination of components and fragments of the ideas and experiences that do not mean a lot when considered separately.

Reviewing Themes

The beginning point of this step was the point at which the themes will have been made and need to be refined (Nowell et al, 2017). The researcher reviewed the coded data for each theme and the validity of particular themes were considered to see if they had a reflection of the meanings appearing in the data.

Defining and naming themes

In this stage, it was necessary for the researcher to determine the elements of data that would be captured in every theme and everything of value in it and the reason for that. As stated by Namey et al., (2008), the process of defining themes entailed articulating precisely what each theme means and determining how it aids in the comprehension of the data.

Producing the report

Finally, this step began at a time when the researcher had fully established the themes and was ready to begin the final analysis and compiling of the report. The writing up was done in a manner that helps to provide a clear, brief, coherent, and logical account of the data within and across the themes. It also included the analysis of the themes identified in this study with related conceptual frameworks and findings of previously conducted studies on the same topic.

4.9 Research ethics

For a research study to be effective and acceptable, the researcher must strongly consider the stipulated ethical principles guiding the research. With this in mind, it was incumbent upon the researcher of the proposed study to consider the ethical implications of qualitative primary research and specifically, data collection through interviews. In line with Fouka & Mantzorou, (2011), the researcher first got informed consent from the potential participants before having them participate in the study. To achieve this requirement, the would-be participants were briefed on how the study was to be done, the purpose of the study, and their role in the process. They were also assured of no harm coming to them as a result of their participation. Their participation in the study would bring them the benefit of having a platform based on which they can air their concerns and grievances and hope that the same would reach those concerned. The researcher also allowed them to withdraw from the study at any time they wished to and this was clearly communicated to them through the informed consent.

The process of obtaining informed consent was important for meeting the ethical principle of helping the potential participants to comprehend the aim of the research and how the information collected from them will be used before they make the ultimate decision of participating in the study (Hürlimann, 2019). The researcher issued a consent form to the respondents through which they were expected to make known their willingness to participate in the study after understanding all the information provided in the form that relates to the study. The respondents were also informed about their freedom to withdraw from the study if they so wish.

As discussed by Dilmi (2012) academic research demands that the investigator observes all the laid down ethical rules and for this reason, it was necessary for the researcher to protect the interviewees from any possible harm by making sure that they are confidential. Therefore, the researcher maintained high confidence levels in managing the data obtained through primary research. To make sure that the identity of the participants was not revealed, the rule of anonymity was observed. As a way of avoiding bringing harm to participants, it was prudent for the interviewer to maintain anonymity by avoiding collection of any identifying information that is personal to the respondents such as their addresses and names but instead, focusing on what helps answer the research question. The researcher did not allow third parties to access the data.

Chapter five: Findings and Discussions

5.1 Research Participants Background Information

This section provides background information about research participants, which includes their demographic characteristics. The table below shows the respondents' age, marital status, level of education, ethnicity, occupation, and status in the household.

Table 1: Characteristics of research participants

Respondents	Age (years)	Head of the household	Marital status	Type of marriage	Level of education	Ethnicity	Occupation	Relation ship to the chief	Land ownership
1	18-35	Female	Widowed	Traditional	No formal education	Mende	Farmer/trader	None	Household head
2	18-35	Male	Married	Religion	Primary school	Mende	Farmer	Neighbor	Extended family
3	36 and above	Male	Widowed	Traditional	No formal education	Mende	Farmer	None	Extended family
4	36 and above	Female	Divorced	Religion	Primary school	Mende	Trader	None	Household head
5	18-35	Male	Widowed	Traditional	No formal education	Mende	Farmer	Neighbor	Communal
6	18-35	Female	Married	Traditional	High school	Mende	Trader/farmer	None	Household head
7	36 and above	Male	Widowed	Religion	High school	Mende	Farmer	None	Extended family
8	18-35	Male	Married	Traditional	High school	Kono	Farmer	Uncle	Extended family
9	18-35	Male	Married	-	High school	Temene	Trader/farmer	None	Family
10	36 and above	Female	Widowed	Traditional	No formal education	Mende	No job	None	Extended family
11	18-35	Male	Divorced	Traditional	Primary school	Temene	Farmer	None	Extended family
12	36 and above	Female	Single	Religion	No formal education	Mende	Trader/farmer	None	Household head

The data for this study was collected from 12 respondents (n=12) who formed the sample for the study. As shown in the table above the majority of the respondents (n=7) are between 18 and 35 years. The rest (n=5) are more than 36 years of age. Four respondents are married, five

are widowed, two are divorced and one is unmarried. Five of the respondents had no formal education, four had secondary/high school education and three had primary education. Those without formal education had not attended any formal school and therefore, they can be termed illiterate. Only three ethnic groups were represented in the study. The majority of the respondents (n=9) were from the Mende ethnic group, two were from the Temene tribe and one was from Kono.

The respondents had different occupations as seven of them (n=7) are farmers, three do both farming and trade, and one is unemployed. Farming is the main livelihood for people in the study area and that is why a majority of them engage in farming. Trade is done on a low scale by those who feel that they need to supplement what they get from their farms. Most of the families of the respondents (n=8) were headed by males, with only three (n=3) coming from female-headed households.

For 7 respondents, the land is owned and controlled by the extended family. The extended family in this case include grandparents, uncles, parents, brothers, and sisters.

Out of 12, four respondents have their land owned by the household head and one respondent has their land owned by the community. Community ownership is not common because ownership of most of the land is at the family level. The respondents stated that they have different levels of monthly income. Half of the respondents (n=6) earn more than 500,000 Sierra Leonean Leones and an equal number (n=6) stated that they earn 500,000 Sierra Leonean Leones or less. This income comes from farming, but in some cases, farming is combined with business and the collective income used by the family.

5.2 Extent to which females' land rights challenges differ based on age and socio-economic characteristics

Age

All of the participants said that age does not make any difference because all women younger and older suffer discrimination in matters of property and land rights.

“I don't think it is a matter of age. I believe once you're a woman your influence is limited especially with regards to land or property ownership.”

The women agreed that although older women are given respect in the community, they are not allowed to have the right to land ownership and their access to and control over land usage is heavily influenced by the decisions of the male members of the family.

“Older women are well respected in our society but have less influence with regard to land rights. The same can be said for younger women”

The findings indicate that whether young or old, women’s land rights challenges are similar because all of them have little say in matters of land usage and inheritance, unless when they are supported by a male.

Education

Limited access to education also emerged as an important factor that affects women who have access to and control over land.

Eleven of the interviewees agreed that education empowers women to become influential so that they can earn their own wealth and buy land elsewhere if they are denied control over family-owned land. However, 1 interviewee objected by saying that education does not give women any rights on the land.

“Education gives exposure and access to so many things. But here is the case even in education women are left out.....”

Education and socioeconomic power can help women acquire land in the cities but many women in the provinces, like those interviewed in this study, do not have a formal or tertiary level of education that would enable them to gain higher income to buy land. As a means of livelihood, they engage in low-income activities such as subsistence farming and trading of small goods.

Income status

The respondents also discussed their opinions on the influence of income status on women’s land rights. Seven of the respondents said that higher economic status gives women influence and power over access to land as they can purchase land on their own. However, when buying land the women, especially unmarried women may experience resistance especially if it is in the province. A respondent explained

“Even with money sometimes it becomes difficult for a woman to acquire land. Approaching community leaders or families in order to purchase land as a woman will lead to refusal. A male presence is important if a woman is to do such transactions.”

Generally, socioeconomic status does not help women to obtain rights to land in the community but only in the cities. In the community, they need to be supported by males or belong to influential families.

Three respondents stated that they do not have access to or control of land due to their inability to purchase it. Unemployment, lack of resources, and limited purchasing power were blamed for the inability of some respondents to access land.

“In this country, the rates of poverty and unemployment for us women are very high and that ensures that we cannot have money to purchase our own lands. We only have to depend on our fathers and spouses.”

Ethnicity

All the respondents concurred that ethnicity does not affect women’s land rights issues. The respondents explained that most women in the provinces face similar challenges of being denied land ownership. One participant said,

“This has nothing to do with ethnicity as it is a common practice among all the tribes in Sierra Leone once you live in the provinces.”

Another respondent reported,

“I think we are all treated the same because all the tribes in Sierra Leone are centered around customary law.”

The responses show that women in all ethnic groups have no rights to land all across the nation especially in the provinces.

Marriage

Marriage status is important because married women get the support of their husbands to access land. Nine respondents agreed that women who have husbands benefit by getting access through the support of their husbands and extended families. This land is the land owned by the husband’s family and the women who marry into that family are allowed to use the land for subsistence farming. One participant said,

“Married women are respected in society and it is possible to benefit from using family land with the support of their husbands.”

Those without husbands have male support therefore they are often denied any right to own and control family-owned land. The same applies to widows because once the husband is dead, their right to land is ‘lost’. A participant explained

“..... unmarried women will have to compete with their male siblings and for us the widows we have no influence in society with land rights.”

One of the respondents who divorced her husband explained that she had contributed to purchasing land with her husband when they were married. The husband’s name was the only one on the title deed as the ‘head of the family’. When she decided to divorce him, her husband denied her access to the land. Since there was no evidence of her contribution to the land and the view that land is often owned by the man in the family, the court upheld the husband’s ownership of the land and she completely lost access.

These responses show that marital status gives access to land especially when their husbands are alive.

Despite the ability of women to access farms with the support of their husbands (land owned by the husband's family), control over land usage is not guaranteed because decisions are decided by their husbands and adult male members of the family. For instance, one of the participants explained

“ While my husband and his family allow me to farm on the family land they really control what I can do and when I can do it. For example, last year I wanted to plant cassava on part of the land because I love them and my children also do but they refused saying they are not as profitable as cocoyam so I should plant cocoyam instead”

Another respondent narrated

“One of my children did not have school fees when joining college and I asked my husband to sell part of our land to raise the school fees but he refused. He said his decision was final since he was the leader. I even tried to tell his father to talk to him but he did not listen.”

Polygamy was also cited by 3 respondents as one of the factors that hinder women from controlling land usage despite their marital status. One of the respondents explained

“Polygamy is a major factor for me as my husband had 3 wives including myself, therefore making it difficult for all of us to have control over the land we farm on.”

Household composition, structure, and leadership status

All respondents stated that household leadership status influences women's land rights. Ten participants stated that contrary to female-headed households, in male-headed households, women are facilitated to have access to land by their husbands. A respondent reported,

“Most of the households are headed by men. In a case like these women can access land through their husband's land or the husband's family's land.”

Four respondents also discussed inheritance-related factors such as the patrilineal inheritance system, and a male succession of inheritance as a hindrance to them accessing or owning land.

One of the participants said

“The male inheritance system is a major factor that we face on a daily basis and this is reinforced by gender bias in land inheritance and distribution which denies girls and women land.”

The four participants who owned land as they were heads of their households had more control over their land and could make decisions on what to be done with their land as they wish.

As for the land owned communally, the decisions about access and control are made by the village chiefs and male family heads of different clans.

Discussion: Gender roles and access theory analyses of the findings

Gender roles analysis

Gender roles analysis of the factors influencing women’s access to land control in Bo-District using the access and control profile and influencing factors tools of the Harvard Gender Roles Framework. A gender analysis of this study’s findings demonstrates that differences in household leadership status, marital status and income status influence the inequalities in women’s access and control over land- Table 1

Table 2: Harvard Gender Roles Analysis of the Bo District case study

Tool	The access and control profile		Influencing factors tools	
Questions	1. Who has access to and control over land?	2. Who has access to and control over benefits of the land?	1. What are political, socio-economic, or cultural factors affecting the gender differences identified in the above two profiles?	2. What are the past and present influences? and What are the opportunities and constraints?
Answers	4 Women out of the 12 had ownership 7 women did not have ownership, but they had partial access and control over land (controlled by extended family and community)	The 4 women with land ownership had more control over the benefits of their land unlike the other 7 women who did not have ownership of the land Women who were married have a higher degree of access to land with the support of their husbands and families. However, despite the access to land, they had little control over the land	Political 1. Customary land tenure Socio-economic 1. Education 2. Income levels Cultural 1. Marital status 2. Household leadership	Opportunities 1. Legal support for women to claim land rights in court 2. Empowering women groups to train women on fighting their lands rights Constraints 1. Communal land ownership norms

A gender roles analysis of the case study using the access and control tool as well as the influencing factors tool reveals several interesting findings. While women who have higher income and higher education can access land through buying, customary land norms results into the sellers demanding that the women should come with their husbands to buy the land and may even refuse to sell the land to the women. Furthermore, the male land inheritance custom also limits women from accessing land despite their age or educational level or income level.

Furthermore, while married women can access land owned by husband or husband’s families, they have led control as decisions are often made by the male household leader or family heads.

Analysing the findings of the gender roles analysis using the theory of access

According to the rights-based mechanism of the theory of access, rights defined by law, convention, and customs are mechanisms that influence who controls and who has access

(Ribot and Peluso, 2003). From the perspective of the rights-based mechanism, the findings of this study show that customary laws do not provide women with the full legal right to access and control land. Land is still owned communally because people still believe that since they buried their relatives on that land they must preserve it for future generations. Due to these beliefs, people are still using communal ownership and family ownership which have become the greatest obstacle to the implementation of individual ownership of land. The findings are also consistent with Unruh & Turray, (2006) who argue that land is owned by a large family which includes the living, the ancestors, and posterity. Most of the people reside in the provinces where access and control of land fully depend on what is dictated by customary practices which are increasingly patriarchal.

Two divorced respondents also identified a lack of legal protection and the absence of a will or any legal documents as an important factor that affects their claim to family land. This means that even if women had access to land, they could not own it legally, and that limits their decision-making ability over the land. As a result of its patriarchal nature, customary land laws in Bo District and other provinces marginalizes women from decision-making processes that involve access and control over land.

Relational and structural access mechanisms of the access theory propose that the ability to benefit from resources is facilitated by limitations established by the specific cultural and political-economic frames within which access to resources is pursued (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Based on the findings of this study, a relevant structural mechanism of access to capital. Access to capital is a key factor affecting who will benefit from resources by maintaining or controlling access to them. It can be utilized for resource access control through the purchase of rights. Based on the findings of the current study, single women who had adequate capital and were able to buy land for themselves had easier access to and control over their land. The relevant relational access mechanisms of access according to the access theory include access through social identity, access through the negotiation of other social relations as well as access to authority. Access through social identity greatly impacts the distribution of benefits from things. Ribot and Peluso (2003) explain that access is usually facilitated by social membership or identity in a group setting or community. This may include groups based on age, ethnicity, gender, status, religion, place of birth, profession, education, and any other relevant attributes that make up social identity.

The mechanism of access through social identity in this study is seen through the marginalization of women from controlling lands that they farm on based on their gender unless they are heads of the household. The findings that household headship is of some assistance if the family leader is male (and of no help if the leader is female) because women can access land through their male household head are consistent with Agarwal (2003) who notes that tiered social customs and traditions related to sexual relations put women in a position of reliance on men, who serve as a core channel for access to resources like land and creating gender-specific vulnerabilities for widows or women going through a divorce. The same situation can also be accounted for by the intersectionality approach which shows that the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as gender creates overlapping and inter-reliant systems of discrimination such as the one experienced by women in Sierra Leone. These findings are congruent with the explanation by Renner-Thomas, (2010) that customary laws and norms guide the access to and control over family and communal land in Sierra Leone's provinces. Therefore, regardless of their age, level of education, ethnicity, and marital status, women are increasingly hindered based on their traditions and customs to access and own land without a male who can speak on their behalf.

Access through the negotiation of other social relations of friendship, patronage, reciprocity, trust, dependence, inheritance, and obligation form crucial strands in access webs (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). In this study, the findings revealed that married women have a higher propensity for accessing land belonging to their husbands, land owned by their husband's family or communal land. For widowed women, access to land is highly dependent on the support and decision-making of the male adults of the household. Women with higher education levels and higher incomes have higher chances of owning land by buying it themselves. Single women's inheritance of land is hindered by customary laws. Hence, their access and control over family or communal land is limited as such lands are inherited by male members of the family.

Access to authority influences an person's ability to benefit from resources. Law partly influences access to capital, resources, labour, and markets. Privileged access to institutions or individuals with the authority to create and apply laws can significantly impact on who benefits from the particular resource (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). In the current study, access to authority emerged as a relevant theme in this study. One of the respondents who are related to the Chief mentioned even having the chief as her uncle did not enable her to gain more control over the extended family land when she asked for help. Despite having the authority to influence her

husband's decision, the chief (her uncle) believed that the man (her husband) should be the one to make the decisions on how the land should be used.

5.5 Strategies women use to address land rights contestation and emerging challenges

Ten participants explained that they have decided to find their own solutions by employing different strategies by which they hope to address land rights contestation challenges. This move has been occasioned by the frustration of trying to find solutions from family members without success.

Women support group

One of the strategies employed is being a member of a support group through which the affected women can voice their concerns, vent their anger, and share ideas on how to handle their situation from other women.

“For years now, I have relied on the help of my family members. I have attended so many family meetings where the two families meet to sort things out but no positive outcome. Now I've joined the women support group to voice out our anger get some solutions even if I don't benefit from this act, I hope someday my daughters will be safe and they can give access to unlimited opportunities.”

Traditional or customary court

Some of the participants had tried to contest for access and control of land at customary courts but they mentioned that this did not often work in their favor as the customary system heavily hinges on male leadership of the household and control of land. One of the respondents explained that

“I once went to the customary court to talk to the chief and the elders so that they could talk to my husband to allow me to farm on a larger piece of land than my co-wife because I have more children to feed but the chief told me to listen to my husband and that his decision is best for the entire household. This was after I had talked to my husband several times without any success. He still expects me to feed all my children from the produce I get as he only pays their school fees.”

Working with governmental agencies

Engaging the central government and local leaders through support and women's groups works better than when a woman tries to do it alone. Through this strategy, several women confessed that they are realizing progress but the process is not as fast as they would want it to be. One respondent mentioned

“Unity is very important in times like this. That is why I joined the women’s group in order to show solidarity and fight for our rights. We continue to have dialogues with local leaders and the local government agencies. The process is slow but progress is gradual.”

Working with Action Plus and similar organizations

Respondents also enlisted the support of organizations such as Action Plus which help them to advance their struggle against land injustices. Through such organizations, women can have their voices heard and they also get a suitable legal platform for expressing their grievances.

With regard to this, a participant said

“ Through the help of organizations like Action Plus, our stories are shared and advocating to the central government to look into the Protectorate Act. It has been a challenge but I continue to be an advocate for equal access to land and property inheritance.”

Another participant mentioned

“ Organizations like Action Plus continue to support us by sponsoring empowerment projects in order to build our skills and become financially independent which in the future will help us secure the land we want. They also ensure our voices are heard and give us the legal platform to express our grievances. Soon I know the bylaws will be passed and change will be made.”

Eight participants lauded the role played by NGOs in helping them to address the issues of land rights. Through the NGOs, women get fora such as workshops and awareness campaigns through which to voice their concerns as they wait for the government to make appropriate laws to address their problems. One participant explained that

“We have formed women, coalition groups, through the help of Action Plus in order to have one voice in our fight for equal rights. Awareness campaigns and workshops are constantly held as we wait on the central government to introduce a new bill.”

The NGOs also help the women to pile pressure on local leaders to change their attitude toward women and relax some of the traditions and customs that they use to oppress women in matters of land. The NGOs also help women to have those who violate their rights charged in court. A respondent mentioned that

“Before we were not protected as we were constantly abused, through the help of these NGOs offenders can now be charged and prosecuted. We cannot access these courts to report offenders on our own.”

Discussion

The findings in this section show that women rely on support groups and Non-governmental organizations to deal with the issues arising from the contestation of land rights denial. Their dependence on support groups and NGOs was not found in the literature because the studies reviewed in this dissertation did not find any information to that effect. However, some past studies (e.g., Hovorka, 2006) highlighted the need for laws and policies that can help address the land problem. NGOs such as Action Plus help women to pressurize the central government to make policies that would assist women in their quest for justice. Odeny (2013) explains that in order to ensure the attainment of land objectives such as increasing land productivity and promoting sustainable resource management, it is crucial to consider gender differences. There should be comprehensive land policy frameworks that exclusively target gender-inclusive access to land. Support groups and NGOs can help in the struggle for the creation of such frameworks.

A study by Khalid et al., (2015) found that in most sub-Saharan societies, there are still inadequate provisions for women to hold land rights independent of their male family members (husbands, sons, brothers, and other male relatives). A gender-based approach to land rights will ensure that the challenges faced by women are considered in policy formulation and enforcement. To achieve this, women need the central government to respond to their cries but their individual voices are inadequate to achieve that. By them seeking the support of groups and NGOs, their voices can easily reach the central government and their challenges resolved through policy formulation. The feminist political ecology of resource access and control exposes the power dynamics in the home which are unfavorable to women. The efforts of NGOs and women groups can also put pressure on local leaders to change the power balance in the family in favor of women.

Chapter six: Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to examine the land rights issues that socio-economically differentiated women in rural Sierra Leone face in light of the country's customary land tenure systems. It aimed to examine gendered experiences and responses to inequalities in land access and control. In analyzing the finding of the study, a gender roles and analysis and the theory of access were applied. The rights-based mechanism of access was found to work against the access of land by women because it is guided by customary laws which dictate that land should be controlled by male family heads even though women have access to and farm these lands. Relational and structural access mechanisms of the access that emerged from the study included marriage and support from male family heads.

The analysis of the findings revealed several interesting elements of the influences of intersecting socio-economic characteristics on land rights. For example, regarding the influence of socio-economic factors on women's access to and control over land, ethnicity was found to have no implication on land access and control rights of the participants. This is because the customary norms of men being household heads and men owning and controlling the family land runs across different ethnicities. The factors of income level, educational level, marriage, household leadership were found to influence the extent to which women could access and control land. For instance, higher income level can enable a woman to purchase private land outside community or family-owned land. Married women could get access to their husband's land of family land, but they may not have full control over the land as decisions are made by the male leaders in the family. Because of the male succession of land, women cannot have adequate access to and control over land that belonged to their husbands or families regardless of their age or income status without support of male relatives. Regarding age, while older women are given respect and may be considered heads of extended family in cases where the patriarch (male head) is dead, their right to access land is increasingly dependent on support of the adult male members of the family. Therefore, whether young or old, women's land rights challenges are similar because all of them have no right of inheritance and control of land, unless when they are supported by a male. Educated women with employment a higher income may have higher degree of land access through purchase land outside the community where they can control it. Some sellers however refuse to sell land to women without the presence of their husbands or other males of her family. This stems from the belief that men are the ones to own and control land on behalf of their families.

One of the strategies employed by women in the fight for their land rights is joining women development groups through which they can speak out, release their frustration, and exchange ideas with other women. The support of NGOs such as Action Plus which help women to advance their struggle against land injustices comes out as a vital strategy towards their empowerment. Such NGOs are specifically praised for helping women to address the issues of land rights. These NGOs create awareness about women's land rights and train them on how they can advocate for these rights through workshops and awareness campaigns. NGOs also women development groups to compel local leaders to review their stand on land rights for women and abandon the traditions they use to oppress women in matters of land. Some NGOs are also important in helping women to have those who violate their rights charged in court. All these strategies that women involved in farming are employing are geared towards the relaxation of the customs, traditions, and rules of the community on matters of land ownership and control. In view of the Gender and Development approach and based on the findings of this study, efforts in addressing gender imbalance in land access and control should be focused on reducing the social, economic and class differences between men and women and among different groups of women.

Challenges and limitations of the study

Since this is a qualitative study in which data was collected through interviews, it was not practical to collect all the data needed on all the aspects because that would consume a lot of time. In this regard, the researcher had to limit the scope of the study. The study was limited based on the small size of the sample. The study had a sample of only 12 people making it difficult to generalize the findings of the research to the larger population of female farmers in Bo District. Future studies should include larger sample sizes of women with different socio-economic characteristics in order to do a comprehensive comparative analysis of how such characteristics affect access and control over land.

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Appendix I

Interview Guide

Introduction

I am Joshua Senesie, a graduate student from the International Institute of Social Studies (Erasmus University Rotterdam) pursuing a Master of Arts in Development Studies. As a requirement for the partial fulfilment of the above award, I am undertaking a study on “*A feminist political ecology of women’s land rights: The case of Bo District, Sierra Leone*”. As a participant to this interview, your participation is voluntary, your identity shall be kept anonymous, all your responses shall be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes, your rights will be respected and accepted. Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Section I: Background information

1. Age
 - a) 18 -35 years
 - b) 36 years and above
2. Status of marriage
 - a) Married
 - b) Divorced
 - c) Widowed
3. Level of education
 - a) Tertiary (college or university)
 - b) Secondary/high school
 - c) Primary school
 - d) No formal education
4. Occupation/livelihood activity
.....
5. Ethnicity
.....
6. Number and sex of people in household

7. Household composition
 - a) Female-headed
 - b) Male-headed household

8. Household socio economic status
 - a) Daily consumption or income

.....
 - b) The household access to limited-standard drinking water
Yes/No
 - c) The household access to limited-standard sanitation
Yes/No
 - d) The household access to electricity
Yes/No
9. Individual monthly income
 - a) 500,000 Sierra Leonean Leones or less
 - b) More than 500,000 Sierra Leonean Leones
10. Land ownership band control status
 - a) Owned and controlled by community
 - b) Owned and controlled by extended family
 - c) Owned and controlled by nuclear family
 - d) Owned and controlled by household head

Section II: Causes of denial of land rights

1. What gender-specific factors or challenges reinforce the difficulty in your access to and control over land?

Section III: Effects of denial of land rights

1. How have gender-specific challenges affected your use of land for agriculture or any other purposes?

Section IV: Extent to which female's land rights challenges differ based on their age, status of marriage, ethnicity, household composition and social status

1. What is your opinion on the influence of age on women's land rights? (Probe for differences between older and younger women)
2. What is your opinion on the influence of education status on women's land rights? (Probe for differences between educated and uneducated women)

3. What is your opinion on the influence of socio-economic status on women's land rights? (Probe for differences between low-income and high-income women)
4. What is your opinion on the influence of ethnicity on women's land rights? (Probe for differences between different ethnicities)
5. What is your opinion on the influence of marriage status on women's land rights? (Probe for differences between married and unmarried and widowed women)
6. What is your opinion on the influence of household leadership status on women's land rights? (Probe for differences between female-led household and male-led households)

Section V: What challenges do women face in efforts of securing land rights?

- 1) Have you contested land rights issues in court or outside court?
- 2) What challenges did you face in your contestation?

Section VI: Strategies women use to address land rights contestation challenges

1. What strategies have you adopted in dealing with challenges facing your efforts to secure your land rights? (Probe for formation of women groups to exchange ideas or consultation of groups and organizations such as Action Plus or any other actions)