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**Peace through Equity: The
Political Economy of Gender
Discrimination in Land
Property Rights in Enugu
State, Nigeria**



Jonathan C. MADU *

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Résumé

Les conflits fonciers ont continué à être sévères en Afrique du fait de la rareté de la terre dans un contexte de croissance démographique, de changement climatique et de sa commodification accélérée. In another dimension, gender construction impacts differently on men's and women's access to land resource in most Nigerian traditional institutions, resulting to serious (gendered) social conflicts because this determines their opportunities for livelihoods or their impoverishment. This, on the other hand, poses serious development challenges to the country and African continent. This paper aims to investigate the persisting conflicts resulting from gender discrimination in land property rights of women in rural areas of Enugu State of Nigeria, and the roles of the state in the situation to entrench socio-economic development in the country.

Mots clefs: conflit, foncier, Enugu, igbo, genre

Abstract

Conflicts over land in Africa have continued to be severe because of their scarcity in context of population growth, climatic change and as they are increasingly being commoditized. In another dimension, gender construction impacts differently on men's and women's access to land resource in most Nigerian traditional institutions, resulting to serious (gendered) social conflicts because this determines their opportunities for livelihoods or their impoverishment. This, on the other hand, poses serious development challenges to the country and African continent. This paper aims to investigate the persisting conflicts resulting from gender discrimination in land property rights of women in rural areas of Enugu State of Nigeria, and the roles of the state in the situation to entrench socio-economic development in the country.

Keywords: conflict, land, Enugu, igbo, gender

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INTRODUCTION

“A society’s ability to define and, within a broad system of the rule of law, establish institutions that can enforce property rights to land as well as other assets is a critical precondition for social and economic development” (Deininger, 2003:8). African woman is faced with different forms of traumatic experience and discrimination that results to conflicts not only in her low perceived status but also in the denial of her rights of property. Beijing Declaration that “protection from violence is not just something that would be nice for women to have” but as “their right and an obligation for the state” , becomes imperative. Hence, “resource-based conflicts should be seen and analyzed within a policy and governance context” (Leory, 2009: 51). This research paper, emerging from my PhD work, aims to study the political economy of gender discrimination with respect to land property rights of women in rural areas of Enugu State of Nigeria and to discover how to resolve the resulting conflicts constructively in order to achieve sustainable peace and development.

There are many writings expressing the patriarchal oppression of women, discrimination and gender inequality in Nigeria (Uchem, 2001; Akiyode-Afolabi, 2003; Women’s Aid Collective, 2004; Umoren; 2005; etc). Their works were also corroborated by authors like Madu, 2009: 63-70; Oluwafunmilay, 2006: 409-421; and Timothy and Adeoti, 2006: 428-443, who point out that such gender discrimination would lead to poverty and reduction in economic growth. The issues pertaining to a particular pathetic segment of the population, the widows, have also featured very prominently in the writings of many African and international authors like Iwobi, 2008: 37-86; Nwadinobi, 2003 and 2007; Ewelukwa, 2002; Twining 2004: 12-30; Fasorati and Aruna, 2003: 53-73; Korieh, 1996; Nwabueze, 2002: 186-192; etc., who regret the lack of adequate protection of this vulnerable group of women by Nigerian legal system. Korieh carried out a study of “widowhood practices among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria”; Okoye’s (2001) did a similar study in Enugu State, while Edemikpong (2005: 34-35) discusses the harmful effects of widowhood rituals and Tobi (2002: 73) proffers solutions for them. However, study-gap still exists in respect of the conflicts associated with the denial of women’s land property rights and how to resolve or transform them nonviolently.

Galtung (1990: 291-305) points out that while deliberate policies and structures that cause human suffering, death and harm are what cause structural violence, cultural violence is using beliefs to legitimize and justify structural violence. “Male-dominated tradition and values dictate that real property belongs to husbands and fathers and are to be inherited by their

sons” (WIN News, Autumn 1999, issue). The situation, thus, is as Izumi (2007: 1-25) describes it: “property grabbing by men is a new form of violence against women... which threatens their security”. Therefore, the recommendation by the Economic Commission for Africa (2007:25) for research, to “identify the obsolete cultural values and customs that subjugate women” and discriminate against them in Africa is an important invitation for this type of research.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Gender as socially constructed roles that men and women are expected to perform in a given society differ from sex as biological condition of being male or female. The traditional gender roles are usually maintained by a system of patriarchy which, according to Uchem (2002: 12), sees men as pre-eminent human beings and women as secondary, whose roles are meant to complement those of men. Gender-based violence reflects the extent to which women’s human rights are threatened thereby leading to the voiceless of women in many issues concerning and affecting their lives. Nigerian feminists claim that this practice is not only confined within traditional institutions but still wide-spread . Therefore, the recommendation of the Economic Commission for Africa (2007:25) for this type of research, to identify the obsolete cultural values and customs that subjugate women and discriminate against them in Africa, is important.

A social conflict exists when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives (Kreisberg 1988, quoted in ACCORD 2005: 2). Many localities are experiencing growing nature of this social conflict with respect to land in Nigeria. There is incompatibility of men’s interests to those of women on land ownership and accessibility. Hence, the disinheritance or denial of women their land property rights results to serious conflicts. Peace cannot exist where some people’s rights and their basic needs are violated, for peace is life and action devoid of violence with commitment to personal and social justice. Conflict energy can be channeled into non-violent, constructive rather than destructive directions. This is the importance of this study.

For Geoff Harris and Neryl Lewis (1999: 29-36), structural violence describes the structures which maintain the dominance of one group (of the centre) over another group (often a majority) at the periphery; hence, low wages, landlessness, illiteracy, poor health, limited or non-existence of political control over much of their lives may be the result. It is worthy of note that there are religious and ethnic variations in the pattern of discrimination and subjugation of women in Nigeria (accessibility to land

and right to inherit spousal property inclusive). O. O. Fasoranti and J. O. Aruna (2003) made a cross-cultural comparative study of widowhood experience among the Igbos and Yoruba in Nigeria. Women Aid Collective (2004) x-rayed the subjugation of women's right and freedom among the Northern Moslems (mainly the Hausas and Fulani ethnic groups). These four ethnic groups (Igbos, Yoruba, Hausas and Fulani) dominantly populated Nigeria (over 70% of Nigerian people). The concern of this paper is the practice among narrowed Igbos of Enugu State.

Violence, harming others in the pursuit of one's own interests, can take different forms and can be categorized in different ways (Kent 1993: 381). Broadly, violence refers to insults to basic human interests in survival, sustenance and well-being, freedom, and a sense of meaning (Galtung, 2004: 2, 3). The exploitation neglects and excludes, which are features of structural violence and, by comparison with direct violent, kills slowly vastly more people. Cultural violence is quite different. The root causes of gender discrimination in land rights in Nigeria are culture and tradition, as in some other parts of Africa (Uchem, 2005: 12; Thomas, 2008: 73; Madu, 2009: 63-70). The prevention of direct or physical violence on Nigerian women may bring negative peace (Geoff Harris 2003:15), but that does not assure contentment. Passive acquiescence to structural violence is no real peace (Sharp (2003:14). Real peace involves justice and contentment. The opposite of structural violence is positive peace, which involves the building of structures, processes and procedures, which provide economic, social and political justice for all. For Galtung (2000), therefore, 'peace is another word for equality, equity, equal rights/dignity...'

While various cultures have their own share of crime against women (UNICEF 2000), discrimination and subordination of women in Nigeria take several forms: assigning secondary status, sexual harassment, women trafficking, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, disinheritance, lack of participation in decision making and leadership, lack of property rights, etc. (Uchem, 2001: 12; Akiyode-Afolabi, 2003: 23; WACOL, 2004: 33; Umoren, 2005: 57 and Madu 2009: 63-70).

WOMEN'S LAND PROPERTY RIGHTS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

Land is a basic natural and economic resource, which ownership is very important for economic and social needs. It requires good policy to promote rural development and guarantee social justice and peaceful co-existence. The Igbos of Nigeria also understand land as the only means of maintaining link with their ancestors and the generation yet unborn (Korieh, 1996: 41). More of what land means to Igbos would be better appreciated by

considering the myth, spiritual, cultural and economic values attached to land.

Property rights over land in contemporary Nigeria are the rights to access, use or own land through inheritance, purchase, free gift or government allocation. Land property is regulated by different pieces of legislation and institutions - statutory law, customary laws of many ethnic groups, Islamic law, etc. In most traditional Nigerian societies, women are denied land property rights. Traditional laws co-exist with statutory law in Nigeria but, because of its patriarchal bias and fluid character, customary law compromises women's rights to land property. Whilst in principle, statutory law enshrines the principle of equality in property matters (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Section 43), in practice it has failed to address the problem of women and their vulnerability regarding land ownership and accessibility (Akiyode-Afolabi 2003: 23). In fact, in the traditional society, a woman is the property of her husband. Legally speaking, this makes a wife an indentured servant of the man who literally owns her. This is dehumanization leading to major conflict. When divorced or widowed, the woman is typically thrown out of her home to which she has no right. This appears worse among the Igbo ethnic group.

As Obiora F. Ike and Nnoli (2001: 49) correctly noted, central to the entire existence of the Igbo is the soil – Ala, which concept is mythological believed to originate from Chukwu (Supreme God) himself, even though she is the wife of Igwe (the sky), a son of Chukwu. Igbos hold land to be very sacred. This is well understood from Cyril Daryll Forde's (1950: 250) anthropological research:

Ala, earth spirit is the most prominent deity and is regarded as the queen of the underworld and the owner of man whether dead or alive. She is source and judge of human morality and accordingly exercises the main ritual sanctions in disputes and offences... The priests of Ala are guardian of public morality... Ala is in fact the unseen president of the community, and no group is complete without a shrine of Ala. (Ike and Nnoli, 2001: 49, 52).

To the Igbos, life without land is miserable. They also believe that land links the ancestors and the generations yet unborn and should not be dissipated to 'foreign people' where women are married to. This has a lot of implications for women and widows (who are not contented with the situation) especially since control of land and its use fall outside the authority of women in Igbo society. Apart from the sacredness of land to the Igbos, understanding the Igbo concept of property would clarify reasons

further. Earlier in their work, Ike and NnoliEdozien (2001: 24) succinctly explained land ownership in traditional Igbo society:

The harmonious balance between the community and individual was perhaps most manifesting in the concept of communal ownership, which made every member of the clan a stakeholder. Thus, an individual could own private property but because of the intrinsic ties between the individual, the family and ultimately the community, ownership of property remained essentially communal. Whatever property was acquired by the individual was based on the individual's right of access and use, in a proximate but ultimate sense. In modern Igboland, the ownership of property has retained its social function and continues to be understood as a social mortgage, in line with ancient African thought: "it belongs to me but I belong to the community."

In the past, when the population was small, land was seldom sold but with civilization and population explosion, people began to fight for land, compete for its ownership, speculate and trade it for profits. It has become a costly commodity. Compared to the past, attitude towards land today is unimaginable. Erosion and adverse environmental factors added to the intensity of competition to get smaller portions of land and to accumulate it for future generations. Nothing else has cost conflicts and dispute among individuals and communities as the issue of land ownership because it has become a costly commodity as well as a major means of livelihood. The pains and consequences of being excluded from ownership of land are therefore very great for women, who are treated so because of their gender.

To make land available to all for development and removing discrimination, Nigerian land reform was first promulgated as the Land Use Decree (Decree No.6) on 29 March 1978 by the Military Government and later adopted and enshrined in the country's constitution, as the Land Use Act, after the political reform of 1979 (James 1987: 1, Tobi 1997: 23; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1990). However, it has failed because there are still bias, inconsistencies, problems of leadership and honest implementation (Achebe, 2009; Akiyode-Afolabi, 2003:58). The present administration of Nigeria has listed land reform as part of his seven-point development agenda to address the ambiguities and bottle-necks. The question, however, still remains getting the reform to be gender-sensitive.

Another effort to check women's subordination and suppression was through a bill on 'Violence Against Women' by Federal House of Representatives (2002), being sponsored by Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA). Yet, further steps were taken to solve the problems in Enugu State (2001) by enacting the Prohibition of Infringement of a Widow's and Widower's Fundamental Rights Law.

Nonetheless, these measures are not effective in the rural villages, as in the case of Mrs Anthonia Onoh vs Mrs Gabriel Onoh and Chukwuma Onoh, documented by the Ministry of Gender and Social Development of Enugu State which is intervening in a case where the defendants disinherited the widow of her late husband's land.

It is Vatican's opinion that insecure access to land is one of the principal causes of rural poverty (Holy See, 2006). Poverty has been identified to have a woman face (DFID 2000: 14; ICSW, 2006: 6). Seventy per cent of more than 2 billion people in the world living in poverty are women, most of who are in Africa. Women have less access to paid employment than men in most of the developing world. Poverty or lack of well-being, may take the form of physical isolation, vulnerability and powerlessness as well as lack of income and assets.

In Africa, greater population of the people live in the rural areas and have agriculture as their main occupation. This requires access to land. Rural sector, therefore, is very vital to the developing African economies. But women who are the backbone of the rural economy are discriminated against in land ownership. According to the United Nations, 'women form the main agricultural labour force in Africa and many other parts of the world. Yet, most of them are still denied the right to credit, land ownership and inheritance. Studies have proved that there is no development strategy more beneficial to society as a whole than one which involves women as central players (White 2000:183).'

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: STUDY OF TWO RURAL COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

Joanna Hoare (2007: 1) stresses the need to identify specifically 'gender-sensitive' ways of carrying out conflict research and how such research would contribute towards development practice that benefits both women and men, and promotes gender equality. Catherine Farnsworth' (2007: 271) is of the view that if respondents go on to participate in devising development strategies based on the findings of a shared research process, this can play an integral role in assisting respondents to work towards achieving improvements in their own quality of life.

Data collection methods comprised group discussions, in-depth personal interviews and Transcend (problem-solving) workshop, a process which Burns (2000: 149) terms 'data triangulation.' In this way we sought to capture the whole idea, their practices and force behind them. The availability of rigorous methods of qualitative inquiry created ways to understanding different aspects of the research topic and to gain insights

into the perspectives and experiences of the sample of rural men and women who participated in this study.

Quantitative method was applied in measuring the impacts of the workshop on the participants (the conflict parties). Data collection and data analysis took the form of a triangulated approach in that we employed different data collection methods and adopted different approaches to analyzing the data which were then combined. In analyzing the data, we combined methods of discourse analysis and content analysis, termed 'methodological triangulation' (Burns, 2000). The combination of multiple methodological practices in a single study, according to Burns (ibid) ensures reliability and validity of the information collected, and according to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry, which is consistent with the interpretive paradigm used.

From the two zoned areas of Enugu State were chosen Obollo Community (from the north) and Akwuke Community (from the South) for the study. Two categories of people, younger generations (from Obollo) and older generations (from Akwuke) selected for better comparison of trends and attitudes as regards the gendered land in the State. While details of the three pieces of analyses carried out for the doctoral study come in different volumes, this paper discusses summary of the findings.

Table 1. Land titles of participants (farmers) of 4 group interviews in rural communities, Akwuke and Obollo.

Age	Akwuke Community		Obollo Community		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
31-40	2	1	1	5	9
41-50	0	1	4	1	6
51-60	2	0	1	0	3
61-70	1	3	0	0	4
71-80	1	1	0	0	2
Total	6	6	6	6	24
With land title %	100%	0%	100%	0%	

Source: J.C. Madu, Field research of April and October 2009

Table 2. Marital status and land titles of participants of individual interviews carried out in rural communities of Akwuke and Obollo.

	Number	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Single	Land titled	Land titled (%)
Men	30	25	1	1	3	30 men	100% of men
Women	30	12	-	15	3	1 woman	3.3% of women
Total	60	37	1	16	6	31	

Source: J.C. Madu, Field research

Table 3:Participants (conflict parties) of Workshop A (Obollo Community)

	Number	Age	Marital Status			
			Married	Divorced	Widowed	Single
MEN	15	25-55	12	-	1	2
WOMEN	15	26-50	6	-	5	4
TO TAL	30		18		6	6

Source: J.C. Madu

Table 4:Participants (conflict parties) of Workshop B (Akwuke Community)

	Number	Age	Marital Status			
			Married	Divorced	Widowed	Single
MEN	15	30-74	13	-	1	1
WOMEN	15	40-73	6	1	6	2
TOTAL	30		19	1	7	3

Source: J.C. Madu

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main aim of this research was to study the political economy of gender discrimination with respect to land property rights of women in rural areas of Enugu State of Nigeria and to discover how to resolve the resulting conflicts constructively in order to achieve sustainable peace and development. The literature suggests that the underlying causes of gender discrimination, women subordination and marginalization are culture and tradition. Men have power and lord it over women. As a result of the same culture and traditions, most of the treatment of women considered as dehumanizing are not perceived as such by men. Those treatment include domestic violence, assigning secondary status to women, sexual violence, restriction on employment and public life, female genital mutilation, harmful widowhood rites. On the basis of their gender, women face discrimination and are not accorded the respect and treatment due to them as human beings, and these have resulted to negative socio-economic consequences.

There is no doubt that significant changes have taken place in recent decades concerning the treatment of women, and especially widows in respect of status and property rights. These changes have resulted from religious influence and practices, modernization and education, enlightenment and education of women to stand for their rights of property and advocacy by the non-governmental organisations condemning dehumanizing of widowhood rites. The powerful influence of religion over the customary practices was testified to by many respondents. Religious groups have modified traditional ways of mourning the dead and have also succeeded in standing against hard measures taken against widows, especially when one of their own is involved. It is hoped that many of the inhuman treatment of women and widows in Enugu State and Nigeria will die out, but for this to happen without interventions might take centuries; hence, there is need for intervention by the government through laws and policy reforms, as well as using effective methods of conflict resolution and transformation.

Though not popular among the younger generations, some women see their subordinate positions and treatment as a result of natural designs which should not be challenged. In Fowale's (2010) view, such women subscribe to the view of Jean Jacques Rousseau that "nature has given men dominion over women and children". However, the bad aspects of widowhood rites are decried and abhorred by all. Overall, Africa women continue to experience discrimination due to unequal power structures that govern their relationship with men. Men, on other hand, cannot see reasons why women should assert their rights for land ownership.

The problem studied here not only involves abuses and discriminatory treatment of Nigerian women but also the economic violence against them and the resulting social conflict requiring peaceful transformation. Peaceful conflict transformation, which involves developing perspectives, using dialogues with all parties at many levels, was proposed as having potential to change the way men and women think about womanhood or widowhood and resulting in positive peace.

Land is a crucial and basic need in the lives of the people of Enugu State, but the issue of land ownership across genders is not equitably addressed. Access to land in the state has remained a major form of economic domination and has left rural women, particularly widows highly vulnerable. Field research made a discovery that though traditionally women do not own land, they passionately desire to have it and addressing the situation with justice and fairness can bring positive peace. The Nigerian Land Use Act has been found to be ambiguous and its implementation has been faulty and abused by those in power for selfish purposes and political interests. The recommended amendment of this Act by the present government of Nigeria should be carried out and made gender-sensitive in order to bring about positive peace.

Efforts made so far to bring about gender equity and justice in respect of land rights in Nigeria are not adequate. The situation is complicated by a multi-tiered legal structure which functions simultaneously with very significant informal social controls based on gender, ethnicity and religion, affecting the status of women. The legal pluralism in Nigeria has been to the disadvantage of women and widows, as the provisions of the law are only mostly in principle and not in practice. The existing laws with regard to intestacy of persons married under the Marriage Act are hardly enforced. The position in practice in most Igbo-speaking states of Eastern Region is that when a man dies intestate, all his estate – really and personally – is subjected to customary laws of intestate succession, which significantly disadvantages women.

To achieve social change in respect of gender equity, changing from long held beliefs and customs needs dialogue involving all stakeholders. This is a better option than the continued use of violence. The potential of Transcend approach and similar dialogues for resolution of gendered land resource conflicts was spelled out and Transcend workshops were held in two rural communities. The workshops revealed that the various parties to land ownership disputes involving women were eager to participate in this research, to air their views, argue their case and seek for change using dialogue. In group interviews, we saw the groups suggesting that government supervises traditional institutions. Traditional institutions

remain relevant in African states, but each state should have laws that are gender-sensitive and help to harmonize activities in the rural communities with those of formal state's institutions.

While the group and individual interviews helped to explore and discover the problems of the conflicts which results from discrimination against women in land property rights, the Transcend method provided the parties the opportunity to deal with their own problems, search for solutions, resolve and transform the conflicts. They owned the process and became committed to finding acceptable outcomes to all. The Transcend method is about conflict transformation. It is getting the conflict parties together to identify their problems and working towards solving it together. That allows them to transcend existing agendas and devise previously unimagined ways forward. Structured dialogue between the parties to a dispute has several important benefits: it generates a range of options which the parties were probably not aware of previously, it builds respect for opponents and it can transform the relationships/reconcile former enemies/parties.

Many ethnic and religious conflicts that have been resistant to legislations and isolated rules would be better addressed using this method of openness, mutual respect, participation and win-win objective. Personal and group interviews of this study suggest that there is poor knowledge of the existing laws operating in Nigeria by the rural people. Over 80 per cent of those interviewed, especially the women did not know the existence of the Land Use Act (LUA) and its provisions. Hence, the LUA is operational in the cities but not in the rural communities of south-eastern Nigeria. The majority of the participants do not know how the statutory law affects their lives and rights. Most of the key informants who knew about the Land Use Act found it frustrating and ambiguous. There are, therefore, conflicts and disputes over land resources, even when all land is "vested in the state to be held in trust by governors for the common benefit of all Nigerians". As "an ordinance for the common good, which seeks the benefit of the community as a whole and being promulgated by the competent authority", laws should be made known to those they govern.

WAY FORWARD

Studying conflict situations is not enough. There is need "to transcend conflict" as an institution and "to transform the underlying structures and cultural pathologies which legitimate and reinforce conflict and violence at all levels of society" (Galtung. 2004). Dialogue is highly recommended by this research to address the gendered land resource conflicts in Nigeria. The Beijing Declaration (1995, paragraph 4) recognizes that the status of women has advanced but that inequalities and obstacles remain. This work

has been to explore one aspect of those obstacles to women's full emancipation, equality and dignity - the denial of their land property rights and the consequential conflicts.

All the participants and respondents for this research were of the view that there have been some improvement from the past, but women aver that a lot still need to be done to improve their status and rights, especially in aspect of property ownership, inheritance rights and their participation in governance. Women's empowerment through education is very critical for this. Section 18 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution provides for equal educational opportunities at all levels for every citizen. Section 42 provides for non-discrimination on the bases of sex or gender. The National Gender Policy (2007), which replaced National Policy on Women (2000), provides that women require basic education to enjoy the full benefits of contemporary living and to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country. However, the implementation of these laudable policies and government objectives for education in Nigeria has been inadequate.

To ensure effective implementation of the National Gender Policy (and other policies), there must be clear and well defined monitoring and evaluation guidelines for achieving measurable targets and enhancing accountability. Hence, there should be continuous data collection and implementation of analysis process while assessing a project (a programme or policy) and which should be compared with the expected performance. Importantly also, evaluation needs to be concomitantly carried out, as a systematic and objective measurement of the results achieved by a project, a programme or a policy, in order to assess its relevance, its coherence, the efficiency of its implementation, its effectiveness and its impact, as well as the sustainability.

Traditional institutions are still relevant in African states as these exist along-side the formal state systems. The activities of these traditional institutions and customary laws are yet to be properly harmonized with the formal state system to be gender-sensitive. Indigenous systems circumscribe participation through gender inequality and therefore undermine the genuine communal ownership of governance processes which are vital for development. Given the dominance of the patriarchal tradition among the Africans, transforming attitudes to ensure greater gender parity could emerge through a system that brings the parties together for meaningful dialogue and empathy.

Conflict transformation must provide those who experience conflict or violence with appropriate and innovative methods and approaches, and assistance to address its causes without recourse to violence. Problem-solving workshop was therefore, found useful tool for government to provide

meaningful dialogue between the conflict parties since it has proved potential of changing their perspectives, transforming their relationships and resolving the conflicts.

CONCLUSION

Land is important social and economic resource, “crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in decision-making” (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2008), providing a place for shelter, economic and social activity and serves as collateral for credit and services. Women’s land rights, therefore, are critical for their economic wellbeing, status and empowerment. Enhancing the dignity of women and empowering them with respect to land will positively reflect on the social and economic development of Nigeria, especially the rural sector of the economy. Moreover, a purposive democratic leadership should ensure that development planning is fundamentally anchored at the lowest tiers of governance through decentralisation and community-driven participation. Recognising and overseeing the roles of traditional rulers who govern communities through local state councils is therefore important. This strategy ensures that women’s perspectives are incorporated into development projects.

The inequality and discrimination that women experience in Nigerian societies stem from dominant male understanding of gender roles, but “all conflict transformations have to address the issue of social change to bring about social justice” (Garcia, 2006: 40), the lack of which underlies protracted social conflicts. Hence, promotion of human rights, inclusive governance and sustainable development are imperative. Here lies the importance of the Transcend approach in promoting dialogues for the resolution of gender-based land resource conflicts in Nigeria. It is by the institution of a culture of nonviolence and respect for the fundamental rights of women and men on the basis of equality that positive peace will occur.

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