

## Research Article

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# Poverty and land access in Igbo land Nigeria: implications for policy and Agroenterpreneurship development

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### Abstract

Household livelihood across Africa 50 years after independence have recorded lean improvements especially in terms of access to essential production inputs. Household rate of land access, means of access, Household rate of land access, means of access, welfare and investment capacities, land cost and the linkage between access to land and the above measured parameters were investigated using a set of questionnaires administered to urban and rural settlements. Descriptive results showed that poverty incidence was high (60%) especially in rural areas is distant from expectations of the MDGs. Lands were obtained majorly through land purchase indicative of growing land commercialization whose cost (per ha.) ranged from N500,000 to N1m. Access to land (in rural, urban settlements) had low positive correlations with age in both settlements (0.181, 0.163), with education (0.183, 0.25) and welfare capacity (0.25, 0.82). Similarly, regression line showed negative slopes, low but positive coefficients ( $R^2$ ) with welfare poverty ( $R^2=0.041$ ) and investment poverty ( $R^2=0.017$ ) indicating limiting influence of different poverty forms to livelihood and household productivity. Periodic review of land administration, unified land policy thrust along the lines of reviving interest especially among youths in agriculture through incentives (tuition-free agricultural disciplines), implementation synergy, capacity building and granting of loans as financial safety net are key achievable policy options.

**Keywords:** livelihood, poverty incidence, land commercialization, household productivity, land policy thrust, safety nets, implementation synergy

## INTRODUCTION

Land is not only an asset and a factor of production for man, it is a source of wealth, prestige and power. For these reasons, the link between access to land and development is quite visible and often multi-dimensional. In the light of this, issues relating to land policy is complex and cut across boundaries and institutions (de Janvry and Sadoulet, 2005). Experience has shown that land policies affect other sectoral policies, sometimes adversely (Deininger, 2004). Where this is so, such land policies need to be reviewed if desired development objectives will be achieved, for instance, improving the condition of the poor. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed lots of land policies at regional and national levels across Africa which need to be evaluated especially with increasing poverty, hunger, bad governance, food and wood deficits.

Poverty is not an African or rural-linked terminology. Poverty describes a phenomenon or condition of lack of assets, lack of access to infrastructure and services, education or other factors which independently or collectively tend to limit one's welfare and survival (McKenzie, 2004 Sociologists attribute poverty to imply the lack of power to make decisions that affect or improve one's wellbeing. Reardon and Vosti (1995) define the concept of investment poverty as the

(in) ability to make minimum investments in resource improvements to maintain or enhance the quantity and quality of a resource base. They distinguish this concept from welfare poverty which readily can be measured or perceived based on certain yardsticks which could be benchmark income or consumption levels or standards. From the foregoing, people who are not welfare poor may be investment poor and vice versa.

Land access describes the process by which people (individually or collectively) gain rights and opportunities to occupy and use land (for productive, economic or social purposes) whether on a temporal or permanent basis (Cotula *et al.*, 2006). These processes include participation in both formal and informal land markets, land access through kinship and social networks and land allocation by the State and other authorities with control over land. Put in another way, access to land is the opportunity or capacity to own, hold, use, manage or control land (Nichols *et al.*, 1999). The International Federation of Surveyors (2001) use the size of a parcel of land held, owned or managed as a quantitative method of estimating access to land. Document contained in de Janvry *et al.*, (2001) shows that access to land is one of the bases for empowerment in all production activities across the globe.

Agriculture is one major production-based sector in which two-thirds of the population in third world countries depend. Unfortunately food, fibre and wildlife production in most of these regions have been stagnant or declining. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) for instance is the one region in the world where average cereal yields and round wood production have not significantly increased and per capita food production has declined since the 1980s (Muchena *et al.*, 2005). Poverty and skewed land access have become major perennially observable constraints to development in many societies including SSA. About 41 percent of the population of SSA (more than 300 million people) lived on less than US\$1 per day in 2005 which is the highest poverty rate of any region of the world (World Bank, 2007).

Recent development programmes and initiatives as observed in some countries to reduce poverty and improve access to essential livelihood opportunities have increased the need to understand the linkage between household income base and their capacity to access land in order to formulate and implement agricultural, forestry and wildlife policies on different population groups appropriately. Many observers have hypothesized that a downward spiral of poverty and land access exists in developing countries. Past studies have shown that the relationships between these are complex, context specific and resource specific (IFAD, 2008).

In both urban and rural settlements, land transactions have largely been an involved social and economic issue favouring the rich at the expense of poor smallholder farming households. The empirical evidence of poverty in relation to land access is strikingly clear in African communities. In Nigeria, for instance, which has a population of over 140 million, statistics show that more than 60% of the population live in poverty and hence cannot access basic livelihood needs. There are evidences that farmers' agricultural production and livelihood strategies are rapidly changing across Nigeria in response to the economic situation (IFAD, 2008; Mendie *et al.*, 2010). There is a general lack of attention in both literature and policy to establish and/or appraise the relationship between accessibility to land resources and income base of farmers in several African communities (ECA, 2009).

Although many countries currently embark on laudable poverty reduction programmes and strategies, most of these plans provide scanty attention to improve land access to smallholder and/or land deficient households majority of whom are at the epicenter of production activities in both rural and urban areas (Jayne *et al.*, 2002). The growing inequality in land access across communities and households in Africa with a conservative total population estimate of about 1.03 billion is an important area to consider in poverty reduction strategy particularly for agrarian communities who constitute over 55% of her population. Establishment of evidence-based relationships between land access and poverty have been done in India where it has helped in developing and shaping a formidable policy that has enhanced the lot of smallholder farmers (Ravallion and Datt, 2002).

### **Review of land policies on agricultural enterprise development**

Land policy is any course of action relating to land use and land rights in a given area which is adopted and adhered to with the aim of balancing interests between the government and the duo land classes – the land-owner class and the landless class (Barlowe, 1985). The 1976 United Nations official policy on land specifies that unequalled and restricted land access is a principal instrument of uneven accumulation of wealth leading to social injustice; and differential dominance of a given sectoral land use over another. Acceptable land policy should be such that removes obstacle in the planning and implementation of even development schemes across regions, states, continents and the globe at large.

Africans before the colonial period were predominantly agriculturists who practised traditional landholding systems to access/own lands at their various household, communal and regional levels. Nigerian land policies have long enduring history in forms of traditional land tenure; statutory land laws (like the Northern Nigeria Land Tenure System, NLTS and the Southern Nigeria Land Tenure System, SLTS); the Land and Native Rights Proclamation and lastly the currently operational Land Use Act (LUA) of 1978 (Bashar, 2008). Although, the LUA has succeeded in unifying and streamlining land transactions across the country, it has done away with the various local and regional agriculturally-friendly land

laws that govern land tenure systems in Nigeria.

Agriculture since independence held the key to Nigeria's rapid economic growth, poverty alleviation, timber export, food security and employing about two-third of her labour force. Over time, the Nigerian agricultural sector had remained only a resilient sustainer of her economy at the microeconomic level and has struggled to perform the above tasks in spite of weak policy attention since the 1980s. Growth performance in the agricultural sector has dropped progressively particularly between 1998 (4.1%) to 2008 (3%) and has remained stagnant. Entrepreneurship in agriculture, however, received attention around 2004 during which period, in growth terms, was only second to telecommunication sector (Azih, 2008).

The four successive National Development Plans (1962-1968, 1970-1974, 1975-1980, 1981-1985) and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of 1986 in Nigeria provided lofty policy package for the agricultural sector appear to be competitive and remunerative for practitioners. Issues bordering of the limiting influence of land access to medium and large scale prospective agricultural investors and entrepreneurs was distant from past national discourses (UN Commission on Sustainable Development, 1997). As such, some major policy outputs during the above development plans like National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), National Forestry Action Plan (NFAP), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS) etc have been criticized by some experts as locking focus (Adeyoju, 1995; Sanyal and Babu, 2010; Eze *et al.*, 2010).

Land policy in Nigeria is intricately tied to government needs and development and has therefore been criticized to be bedevilled by injustice, loss of land markets, lack of transparency and inaccessibility of land to urban and rural poor (Mendie *et al.*, 2010). Agriculture is still non-profitable and attractive and poverty has heightened the ease of access to genuine and most times young entrepreneurs. Any land reform should be one that would stimulate greater private sector involvement and investment in agriculture as well as encourage private sector to assume the lead in agriculture enterprise.

## Study Area

Igbo land is a geographical and ethnic region occupied by the Igbos of SE Nigeria. They are found in Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo States of SE Nigeria. Anambra and Imo States were purposively selected for the study. In Anambra and Imo States, land issues are of paramount interest and concern to both rural and urban households. In these areas too, customary, statutory and economic factors among others majorly combine to heighten the rate of land access and equitability across different and most times growing land interest groups. A total of 188,002 and 176,740 households respectively are found in Anambra and Imo states with average household size of 4.5 each (NBS, 2009).

## METHODOLOGY

Two major settlement groups (urban and rural areas) were considered. Numerous documented texts give indications that urban and rural settlements have differential influences on the degree of access to livelihood opportunities and the processes of land transactions and holdings (POPIN, 1995). Rural areas are areas that do not intersect with urban nucleus and have less than 5000 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and located distant from urban agglomeration while urban areas are areas with full urban communities with over 95% within the urban nucleus and having above 5000 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (Wang and Guldman, 1996; Gallego, 2005).

Onitsha (population: 263,109; population density: 571/km<sup>2</sup> and Owerri (population: 403,425; population density: 5,038/km<sup>2</sup>) are urban areas respectively located in Anambra and Imo states which were selected for the study. Urban-based research in these areas have either been carried out or documented in Anunuoru *et al* (2009) for Imo State and UN-Habitat (2012) for Anambra State. Again, Oyi (population: 168,201; population density: 261/km<sup>2</sup>) and Ohaji (population: 182,891; population density: 191/km<sup>2</sup>) are rural areas located respectively in Anambra and Imo states. They were randomly selected from a list of rural areas located in the above states. Rural-based studies in these locations have been carried out by Nkwocha and Egejuru (2010) in Imo State and Ajayi and Nwalieji (2010) in Anambra State.

Questionnaires were structured and administered to a random sample of 300 households resident across the two settlements. (160 questionnaires were administered equally to the urban households; 140 questionnaires were also administered equally to the rural households in the study area). A total of 231 questionnaires were retrieved after the field study (124 from rural settlement; 107 from urban settlement).

Information obtained from respondents included (i) household socio-economic background; (ii) size of land owned or held (ha) as a measure of access to land (iii) cost of land in the area (iv) household welfare and investment capacities. Rate of land access by respondents was categorized into four classes: households who lack access to land(s); those who hold/own <2ha land area; 2-3ha; and >3ha land. In Nigeria, poverty line is put at <2USD (< ₦322 at 1USD = ₦160) per day (Research into Use, 2007; National Statistical Coordination Unit, 2011). Poverty Incidence (PI) is the proportion

of people living below the poverty line. Welfare capacity is a measure of the relative ability of a household to afford minimum basic or benchmark household needs. In this regard, information was obtained on the income level of respondents which gave an indirect measure of the ability to afford basic assets and needs. Investment capacity is a measure of the ability of a household to plough back part of the household resource (e.g. income) as support strategy with a view to improving short or long term living standard(s).

Multiple correlation was used to establish the degree of association of socioeconomic variables (gender, age, household size, education, marital status, welfare capacity, investment capacity) with access to land and tested at  $p < 0.05$ . Estimation of the functional relationship between poverty (welfare poverty; investment poverty in each case) with access to land was done using regression model after logarithmic data transformation.

$$\ln Y = \ln B_0 + \ln Ed \dots \dots \dots \text{Equation 1}$$

Where  $\ln$  = Common logarithm (to base 10)

$Y$  = Access to land (size of land owned by respondents)

$B_0$  = welfare poverty level on one hand (investment poverty level on the other)

$Ed$  = Residual or error term

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Land access and socioeconomics

One hundred and six (106) respondents (or 45.8%) held land ranging from 0.5ha up to a maximum of 5ha (Table 1). The modal land size held by residents was 3-5ha in rural areas and <0.5ha in urban areas.

In the 1960s prior to massive urbanization, arable land per capita of up to 2.524ha was accessible in Nigeria (Famoriyo, 1979). In the above Famoriyo's report, a direct relationship exists between family land size and the available labour within the households. Arable land area of about 74.03 million hectares in Nigeria decreased up to 1.39ha in 1961, 1.22ha in 1966 and 1.10ha in 1970 (Famoriyo, 1978). The continued rapid trend in land fragmentation appears to have intensified scramble over available lands and have given even stronger attachment and value that households place on the remaining land property. During this period (1960s), when most African countries struggled for independence, family income levels were low but there was relatively food and fibre sufficiency and even export in face of low agricultural mechanization. Agriculture was the mainstay of households in Africa including countries south of the Sahara.

Inheritance and purchase are major means of land holding in Nigeria (Table 1). Large projects which need large expanse of land like mechanized farm outfits, forest and game reserves, agro-based industries, farm settlements and other development-based outfits, from the result of the study, could at present be pretty difficult to reasonably obtain from individuals except if sufficient collaboration can be mustered from and among households and communities, the State (institution), opinion leaders and relevant stakeholders on land. Cultural affiliations, institutional collaboration and household peculiarity and behavioural concerns are salient issues of concern in land access for meaningful agricultural entrepreneurship and development. In Nigeria, if the research carried out by Olawepo (2010) that farm households produce 0-1 tonnes of output per year which represents about 75.7% household-funded enterprise within per capita arable land size of 0.3ha as documented in World Bank Report (2010), then, gross deficits could be expected in food security, forestry entrepreneurship and private sector wildlife management and participation. Agriculture which used to be a sole occupation of majority of households in Africa especially in rural areas is now seen to be gradually taken over by other occupational preferences which have become sedentary. Previously, occupations and careers characteristic of urban life now favourably compete and in some cases outweigh agriculture even in some rural areas. Some urban employees get transferred to the hinterlands which now enjoy appreciable infrastructural build as urban areas.

**Table 1.** Rate of land access and means of access in Igbo land

Parameter	Category	Rural (124)	Urban (107)	Total (231)
Land access (ha)	No access to land	13	33	46
	<0.5	5	25	30
	0.5-1.00	5	21	26
	>1.00 - 2.00	10	13	23
	>2.0 – 3.0	8	7	15
	>3.0 – 5.0	12	-	12
	>5	-	-	-
Means of access	Inheritance	42	9	51
	Purchase	21	62	83
	Lease/rent	17	19	36
	Communal	23	3	26
	Gifts/donation	9	5	14
	Indifferent			

1ha=100m x 100m

## Poverty status and land cost

Literature contained in LeVine (1966) relates the poverty situation observed in Nigeria to low capital investment. Results of this study (Table 2) showed that about 60% of households in rural areas and 23% of households in urban areas live below the poverty line. Levels of welfare poverty and investment poverty varied widely across the settlement areas. On the whole (Table 2), the rate of welfare poverty (90 or 38.9%) was more than double that of the level of investment poverty (39 or 16.8%) indicating a revisal in the spiral between consumptive and productive preferences among households. In the foregoing, respondents demonstrated that all things being equal, they have above marginal capacities to make meaningful outputs from what they currently survive on in a bid to improve their living standard.

The modal cost of a plot of land was between ₦500,000 and 1million naira which is far beyond the average annual income of rural and even urban residents (Ejiogu, 2009). Given the value of land in food production and security, at least 39% of households in the study area (or by extension about 54.6million Nigerians or 390 million Africans) cannot be able to access land to engage in meaningful production venture. In this regard, the fraction of the rural dwellers that tend to live above the poverty line (42 out of 124 or 33.87%) may use this economic instrument to manipulate land transactions to their interests as an opportunistic instrument.

**Table 2.** Land cost and livelihood capacities across households in Igbo land

Parameter	Category	Rural (124)	Urban (107)	Total (231)
Cost of a plot of land	<₦100,000	-	-	-
	₦100,000-₦200,000	26	1	27
	₦200,000-₦500,000	55	2	57
	₦500,000-₦1m	99	21	120
	₦1m-₦2m	7	39	46
	₦2m-₦5m	-	28	28
Welfare capacity	>₦5m	-	3	3
	Welfare poor	63	27	90
	Not welfare poor	42	91	133
Investment capacity	Poverty Incidence (%)	60	23	39
	Investment poor	13	26	39
	Not investment poor	75	92	167

1 plot of land=0.5ha

**Table 3.** Correlation matrix showing the degrees of association of variables relating to land access in rural locations in Igbo land

	Land Size	Household size	Age	Education	Gender	Marital Status	Welfare capacity	Investment capacity
Land Size	1							
Household size	-0.21311	1						
Age	0.18147	0.441674	1					
Education	0.18391	0.236978	0.299488	1				
Gender	0.06939	0.574801*	0.607371*	0.377308	1			
Marital Status	0.067443	0.257084	0.256258	0.18087	0.267725	1		
Welfare capacity	0.257594	-0.475075	0.011282	0.106089	0.112532	0.269115	1	
Investment capacity	0.01448	-0.20289	-0.599136*	-0.1949	0.16736	-0.28753	-0.44043	1

**Table 4:** Correlation matrix showing the degrees of association of variables relating to land access in urban locations in Igboland

	Land Size	Household size	Age	Education	Gender	Marital Status	Welfare capacity	Investment capacity
Land Size	1							
Household size	-0.23552	1						
Age	0.163966	0.295057	1					
Education	0.2582	-0.64505	-0.13003	1				
Gender	0.218218	0.115642	0.125231	-0.16903	1			
Marital Status	-0.1849	-0.38216	0.419029	0.071611	-0.18157	1		
Welfare capacity	0.821045***	-0.02185	0.046439	0.538919*	0.245796	-0.20028	1	
Investment capacity	0.481454	0.020191	0.210423	0.281718	-0.33333	0.221917	-0.70721**	1



### Correlation and regression of land access with other variables

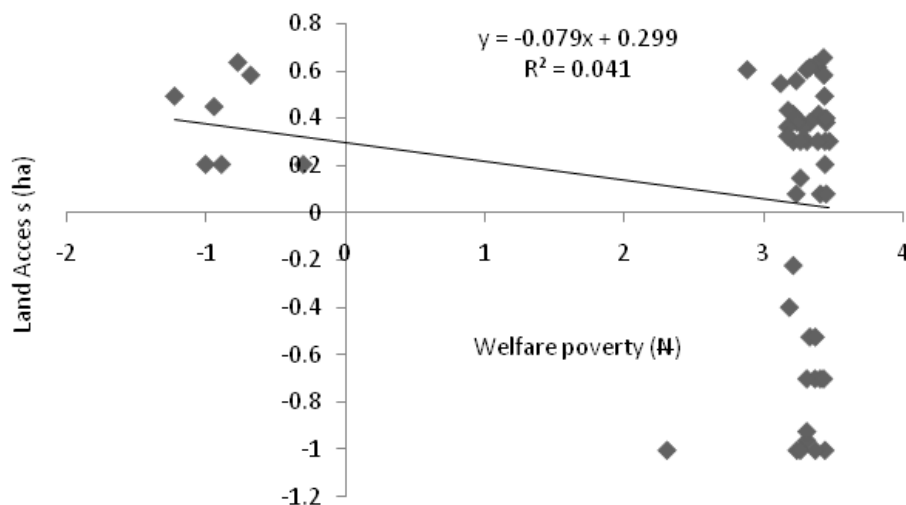
In rural areas (Table 3), land size (access to land) correlated positively with age (0.181), education (0.183), gender (0.069), marital status (0.067), welfare capacity (0.25) and investment capacity (0.01). Agricultural entrepreneurship involves innovation, technical and managerial skills. As recorded in Njoku (1990), at least 75% of farmers in Imo State of Nigeria are 52 years and above indicating that virtually productive agricultural lands have been left in the hands of the aged. Given this scenario, such an agrarian population that is old and almost resistant to novel information is bound to have low productivity.

Traditionally, the more elderly one is, the more traditional rights one enjoys as heir to an ancestral land resource. This is readily observable among the male respondents who traditionally enjoy such right of land access irrespective of how fragmented such lands are. Agricultural, forestry and wildlife entrepreneurship which involves risks and long gestation, the implication therefore is that households especially those in rural areas will tend to be conservative and risk averse.

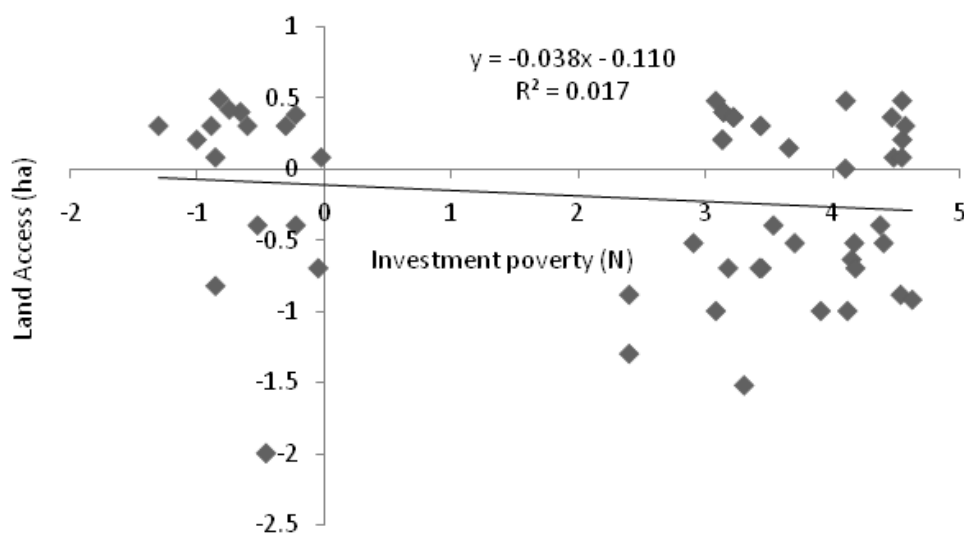
The level of literacy in Nigeria is perceived low (Osuntogun and Oludimu, 1982). Results in Table 3 show that education (0.183) correlated higher than age (0.181) with land access (size of land owned) showing that, one's level of educational attainment has greater propensity to empower one to access land across the region (rural and urban alike) than custom and traditional procedures can. In this context, literate residents who cannot afford land costs and the conditions attached to such transactions in urban locations appear to make alternative choices in rural areas which tend to heighten land transaction in the study area especially in rural areas. Urban residents are often seen making brisk and periodical appearances in rural villages and communities and most times in collaboration with rural-based land ricketeers where economic reasons more than cultural procedures spur rural households to divulge their lands for urban bidders. Low education hence would limit the ability of any prospective entrepreneur to cope with growing challenges of new innovation, changing agricultural markets and government agricultural policies that are mostly non-implemented.

In urban areas, land access negatively correlated with household size and marital status. There was a high positive significant correlation between land access and welfare capacity (0.82) but positively also with investment capacity (0.48). Welfare capacity showed significant positive correlation with education (0.538) while investment capacity showed negative significant correlation with welfare capacity (-0.707). Given the plurality of urban environment and the economics of agglomeration in the cities, the number of lands held or owned by households are comparatively small. This has implications for livelihood sustenance especially among low class income earners and prospective entrepreneurs. Bottlenecks and bureaucracy which characterize land access especially in the cities are major reasons discouraging prospective entrepreneurship in agriculture in Nigeria and other developing countries. The underdevelopment of the Nigerian agricultural sector has accounted for her huge and increasing food import bills from about N0.13billion in 1973 to about N75.56billion in 2000 (Onyebinama, 2004). Households make more savings by having smaller number of household members which can translate into improved welfare capacity (-0.021) and also enhance access to educational attainment and opportunities (-0.645). Documents contained in NBS (2008) show that in 2004, poverty trend was lowest (12.6%) in households with 0-1 members and 90.7% in households with over 20 members.

In the regression curve (Figures 1 and 2), there were low regression coefficients between land access and welfare poverty ( $R^2=0.041$ ); and land access and investment poverty ( $R^2=0.017$ ). In Figure 1, about 79% of respondents were potentially welfare poor. In Fig. 2, about 38% of respondents were investment poor. Both figures showed negative gradients indicative of the inverse relationship between poverty and livelihood capacity. Poverty in its different forms limits growth, productivity, welfare and livelihood. The proportion of households who are inherently poor amidst the huge and abundant natural and human resources in Africa and Nigeria in particular is revealing of the import of the global as well as national and regional development policies, e.g. Millennium Development Goal MDG, National Poverty Eradication Programme NAPEP, Agricultural development Programme ADP, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy NEEDS etc. Mechanisms to improve household capacity to access land for production have positive multiplier effect on the economy and development of the society. This would facilitate or improve entrepreneurial interest and productivity. More so, interest and capacity for investment among the Igbos can equally be seen in Table. This result can also lay credence to the premise that the Igbos among all other human groups in the world are about the most enterprising, productive and dogged entrepreneurs (Olutayo, 1999).



**Figure 1.** Relationship between land access and welfare poverty



**Figure 2.** Relationship between land access and investment poverty

In the light of the foregoing, there are indications that there is still a considerable level of poverty across the study area as it is the case in other developing societies which grossly limit even development. To fast track development particularly in the agricultural sector,

1. Disinterest and low or inexistent popularization of agriculture among different segments of the society particularly land users should be promptly stemmed through empowerment and capacity building targeted particularly to the youths who constitute over 55% of the Africa's population.
2. Effective collaboration among different sectors of the economy on entrepreneurship building among citizenry as well as inclusion of agricultural development division within as an aspect of their strategic action plan would stimulate positive multiplier effects on the overall agricultural development plan.
3. A review of existing land laws and practices in line with changing trends would provide needed insights into areas of existing regulation meriting total scrap or replacements with workable alternatives that would provide needed positive results of common interest.
4. Majority of Africans are still strongly tied cultural and traditional values and practices which in some cases are at variance with statutory codes. Enlightenment and education of the youths and the aged as well will enhance behavioural change and adaptation. Government should be prepared to compensate for such rapid change and adaptation with short, mid and long term institutionalized plan and procedures for local development, rural livelihood and provision of alternatives.

## CONCLUSION

Access to land and household livelihood capacity are related in several ways. Efforts made by successive governments to enhance agricultural production and investments in agricultural enterprises through input supplies and poverty alleviation programmes appear to have shown only marginal improvements in household livelihood strategy. In the study, only 19.9% of households have access land, 39% live below the poverty line and 16.8% of the households in SE Nigeria are investment poor. Majority of households hold/own <2ha land area. Strategies to increase access to land would involve consideration of integrated and collaborative options and alternatives which border across economic, cultural, institutional, cultural and behavioural aspects. Such implementation synergy on land rights, land use and land governance would stimulate and galvanize entrepreneurial interest and spur agricultural enterprise development. In both urban and rural areas, improvements in access to education, enhancement in alternative income generation for households as well as instilling in residents investment habits are needed to reduce poverty and enhance agricultural production within the short, mid and long term range.

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