

POLICY BRIEF

LAND GRABBING: REFLECTIONS, CONCERNS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S LIVELIHOOD



Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre

#8 Bolo Street, D/Line

Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Tel: 08033363172, 08066377338

kebetkachewomencentre.com

info@kebetkachewomencentre.com

kebetkachewomendev@gmail.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Introduction

Understanding National context of land grabbing

Understanding Rivers state context of land grabbing

Conceptualization of land grabbing and its enablers

Established cases of land grabbing in Rivers State

Implications of land grabbing for women's livelihood

Land grabbing and deforestation

Conclusions

Recommendations

References

Manuscript: Kentebe Ebiaridor

Editor: Emem Okon

Layout and Design: Jacob Iniodu

BRIEF BACKGROUND GREEN LIVELIHOODS ALLIANCE (GLA2) PROJECT

Urgent and ambitious climate action and the protection and preservation of forests is critical for sustaining all life on earth, including our own. Deforestation is not only causing climate change, but climate change is also contributing to further deforestation and forest degradation, setting in motion a vicious cycle with devastating effects. Despite global commitments to fight climate change and save the world's forests, deforestation and forest degradation continue to take place at alarming rates

The '*Forests for a Just Future*' programme of the **Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA)** aims to ensure that tropical forests and forest landscapes are sustainably and inclusively governed to mitigate and adapt to climate change, fulfil human rights and safeguard local livelihoods.

Long term objective: Tropical forests and forest landscapes are sustainably and inclusively governed to mitigate and adapt to climate change, fulfil human rights and safeguard local livelihoods.

The assumptions underlying this long-term objective are:

- Well governed forests provide a large range of services to humans, thereby fulfilling human rights;
- Well governed forests store carbon, sequester carbon dioxide and provide basic livelihood needs that increase the resilience of IPLCs to the effects of climate change;
- Through improved understanding of their rights, strengthening their organisations for collective action and engaging with other actors, IPLCs will increase their agency and the likelihood of policies and practices that favour them, reduce land grabs and ensure the long-term maintenance of forest landscapes.

Project partners

- Milieudefensie (lead applicant)
- Gaia Amazonas
- IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands
- Non-Timber Forest Products-Exchange Programme
- Sustainable Development Institute

- Tropenbos International
- Women Engage for a Common Future (Gender advisor). WEP is representing WECF in Nigeria.
- FERN

Kebekache Women Development & Resource Centre implements the GLA2 project in Rivers State on behalf of the Women Environmental Programme (WEP)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Land and land grabbing are top in the list of contentious issues that have gained popularity in Nigeria than any other country in Africa. This policy brief examined land grabbing and its impact on women's livelihood in Rivers state. The study focuses on selected Local Government Areas and communities in Rivers state affected by land grabbing. The study is part of the '*Forests for a Just Future*' programme of the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) project implemented by Women and Environment Program (WEP) and Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre.

Desk-based research, statistical data, focus group discussions, civil society consultations, and key informant interviews were combined in the study locations and served as the major means of data collection. Data was collected from community people, female and male members of Community Development Committee (CDC), opinion leaders, interest groups etc. The study identified cases of land grabbing in Rivers state and its impact on communities and the livelihood of women. Findings of the study revealed established cases of land grabbing in Eleme, Etche, ONELGA, Emohua, Eleme, Khana, Gokhana, Obio/Akpor etc.

The policy brief argued that there is a pervasive impact of land grabbing on women livelihood and forest resource base in the state. The government was identified as the chief enabler of land grabbing with instrumentality of the Land Use Act of 1978. Other enablers of land grabbing (Multinational corporations, financial investors, local elites, comprador bourgeoisie and other private individuals) some of whom relied heavily on government to grab land from the original peasant farmers who owned the land. This act of grabbing people's ancestral farm-lands in most cases by force has a lot of role to play in explaining why forest resources are depleting and why there is high poverty particularly among women who are the primary victims of this act. The overall implications of this and other related issues were addressed by the study and recommendations provided.

INTRODUCTION

Land and land grabbing is an important issue, in both national global discourse. It is often considered as one of the major instruments of exploitation. Worse still, it is more exploitative than the previous forms of capitalism because it does not consider the people whose land it exploits, it dispossesses the peasants especially rural women of their land without regard to the livelihood, health and welfare of the people (Nna, 2004). Indeed, with the expansion of corporate capitalism, the rush for land has increased over the past decades with Africa as the hotbed and Nigeria and Rivers state in particular as the major hotspot of land grabbing. Agents of corporate capitalism alongside government, local elites and comprador bourgeoisie are increasingly taking control of large expanse of arable land with the motive of capitalist production and expansion. According to Amobi (2017), residents of four communities (Elele Alimini, Umudioga, Okinali and Obele) in Emohua Local Government Area, barricaded the Elele Army barracks in protest against and alleged forceful acquisition of landed property belonging to them. The protesters claimed that the land grabbed by the army spanned hundreds of hectares and that the development had affected the farming activities in the areas. Sternberg and Rafiee (2018) avers that "Land grabbing is the control - whether through ownership, lease, concession, contract, quotas, or general power- of larger than locally-typical amounts of land by any persons or entities - public or private, foreign or domestic- via any means- "legal" or "illegal" - for purpose of speculation, extraction, resource control or commodification at the expense of peasant farmers, land stewardship, food sovereignty and human rights".

There is of course, series of land grabbing meted on rural women in Rivers state and the onslaught is still ongoing and has no prospects of ending in the nearest future. Sobomate (2016) identified, Eleme, Ahoada, Egi and Egbema region of Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area as well as other regions hosting multinational

oil corporations as the worst hit victims of land grabbing in the State. Indeed, in addition to the series of land grabbed by government in these areas to build schools, hospitals, refineries, Army barracks and stations. Multinational oil corporations have grabbed a higher percentage of land in these areas than the government; this is not in addition to the percentage grabbed by local bourgeoisie either for commodification or for other economic motives. Consequently, this scenario is just a tip of the iceberg of what constitutes the nature of land grabbing in Rivers state in particular and Nigeria in general. Indeed, the foregoing precursor presents a gloomy future for the small holder farmers especially women whose main occupation primarily depends on land. It presents the exploitation of the livelihood source of local resource dependents.

Thus, it is on the basis of the foregoing that this policy brief describes land grabbing and its impact on women's livelihood in Rivers state with the aim of developing an empirical view of the subject matter as it obtains in Rivers state. Policy recommendations on how the issues identified and raised can be addressed are also provided.



Land grabbed by a local investor in Rivers State

UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL CONTEXT OF LAND GRABBING

Land grabbing has been prominent in Nigeria than any other country in Africa due to the existence of some legislations and laws that encourages land grabbing. For instance "Land Use Act" of 1978. The Land Use Act does not only sanction land grabbing nationwide, it also gave it a legal backing. According to Ojo and Offiong (2018), in relation to the Land Use Act (LUA) of 1978, as duly enacted, the local people are familiar with it but do not really know the full details and implications of the act on their livelihood and sustainability. Emonyonu et al (2017) in their " analysis of land grabbing and implications for sustainable livelihood: A case study of local government areas in Nigeria concluded that lands were grabbed by the government through 'legal means', by the so called Land Use Act and the owners were not duly compensated as all land belongs to the government. The grabbed land are converted to build up areas especially hotels and other edifice construction on the land and that the reduction of land owned by farmers after series of land grabbing obviously affected the livelihood and sustainability of the rural farmers. Thus, it can be seen that land grabbing has a legal backing in Nigeria and the major reason why Government does not need any permission to grab land and/or authorize multinational oil corporations, or individuals to grab arable land from farmers in order to carry out exploration activities at the expense of the livelihood and sustainability of the citizens.



Land grabbed by the Nigerian Army in Elele, Emohua Local Government Area

UNDERSTANDING RIVERS STATE CONTEXT OF LAND GRABBING

As it has been established elsewhere in the study that land grabbing in the Nigerian context is not only pervasive but also legally provided for. Thus, Rivers state is not exempted from this practice. However, the issues of land grabbing in Rivers state takes a skyrocket turn as it is the hotbed of oil production and extraction activities in Nigeria. According to Ekiyor (2019), despite the problem of oil pollution in Eleme area of Rivers state, the issue of land grabbing have worsened the economic livelihood of the rural people in this area as government combined with oil corporations and have grabbed over 50 per cent of agricultural land for oil related explorations and petrochemical industries as well as the commercial and economic needs of One seaport.

Iheanachor (2017) reported that indigenous communities hosting multinational oil corporations in Rivers State not only suffer from oil pollution but also from land grabbing. Indeed, accumulation of wealth of the state for personal aggrandizement by the different managers who are saddled with the responsibilities of governing the state have overwhelmed the government and state actors that they no longer care about issues of land grabbing, in every nook and cranny of Rivers state, cases of land grabbing abound ranging from cases in ONELGA, Akuku Toru, Emohua, Bonny Local Government Areas, to Land grabbed by government and their comprador bourgeoisie. This obviously undermines women livelihood. In fact, it denies them their right to farmland as well as destroying and/or depleting forest resources in the state.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF LAND GRABBING AND ITS ENABLERS

Many schools of thought have conceived land grabbing in many perspectives. However, this diversity is a consequence of the persuasions of scholars defining it. According to Vicol (2015), land grabbing involves the (coercive) transfer of land ownership or access (enclosure) from traditional or customary users (usually small-holder agriculture or forest lands) to corporate agriculture, special economic zones (SEZ), housing development or nature conservation. It may also include buying or leasing of large pieces of land in developing countries in order to produce for export (Daniel and Mittal, 2009). Indeed, land grabbing has a negative effect at all points even though the purpose of grabbing at some point might be positive like development, it is not really a good outcome at both end. Kachika (2008) posits that land acquisition and land grabbing are related in conceptual meaning. Land acquisition has been defined broadly to include not only the purchase of ownership rights but acquisition of users rights- i.e through concession, notwithstanding the duration of the acquisition. On the other hand, land grabbing has been defined as

taking possession of and/or controlling a large scale of land for commercial and industrial agricultural production that is disproportionate in size in comparison to the land in the region (FIAN, 2010; Aarts, 2009). In summary, land grabbing involves the forceful acquisition of land.

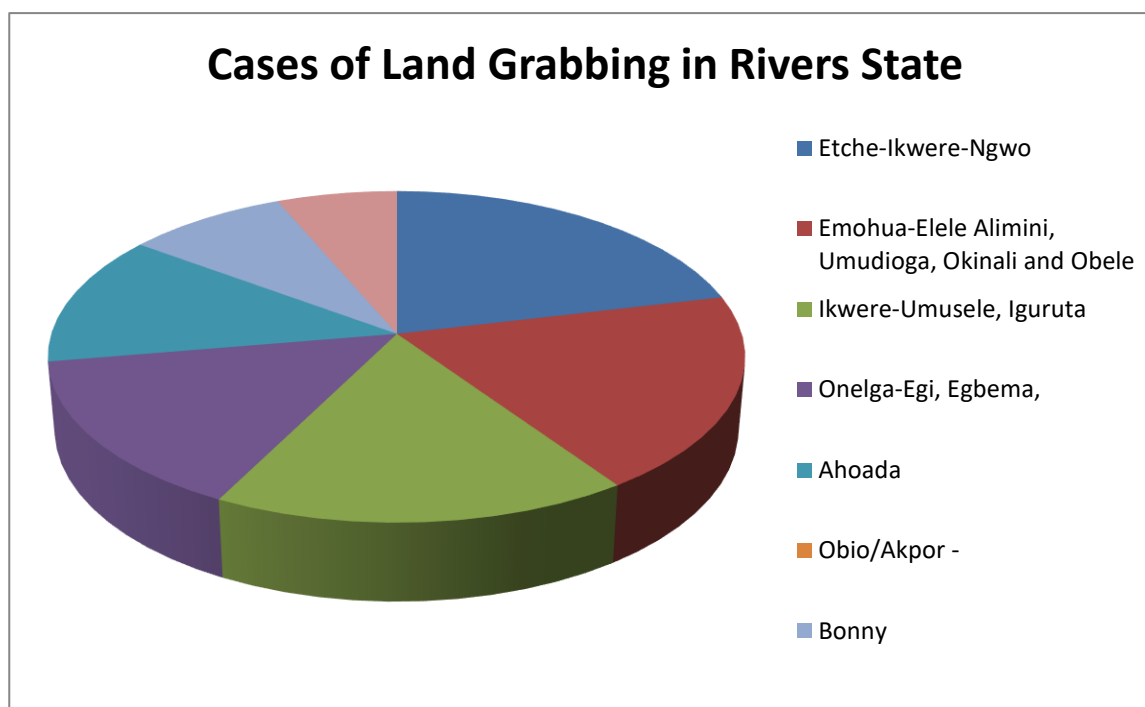
Indeed, various research conducted over the past decade suggest that multinational corporations and foreign companies are the major culprit of land grabbing in Africa. However, there is now a proliferation of many actors including sovereign wealth funds (notably from European and Gulf states), private equity funds and other financial institutions (Policy brief, 2011). Land grabbing is a contentious issue of large scale land acquisition: buying or leasing of large pieces of land in developing countries by domestic and transnational companies, government and individual (Emonyonu et al, 2017). One common trend among government land grab justification has been that of "promoting development". Indeed, a glance at Nigeria in general and Rivers state in particular will reveal that the government is the chief enabler of land grabbing with instrumentality of the land use act of 1978. Other enablers of land grabbing (multinational corporations, financial investors and private individuals) relied heavily on government to grab land from the original peasant farmers who owned the land.

Established Cases of Land Grabbing in Rivers State

This segment of the policy brief deliberates on the findings of the Key Informants Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) investigation in Rivers State on land grabbing. The analysis is organized based on the research questions, and is consequently separated. This includes identification of land grabbing and its impact on women's livelihood. The Key findings are explained for each part, and both parts are further broken down into sub-sections.

Key findings

Figure 1: Land Grabbing in Rivers State



Source: Field work 2022

The figure above represents the views of stakeholders in Rivers State. Stakeholders engaged during the field work: CSOs consultation, focus group discussion and interview collectively identified the above areas affected by land grabbing in the state.

It is important to add that, there are many cases of land grabbing in Rivers state but most of these cases are not being documented. The fact that Total energies, Agip, Shell B.P have grabbed so many lands for exploration activities is not hidden; they do these in virtually all in the local government areas they operate in Rivers state. For instance, Egi, Ogba, Eleme, Emohua, Ahoada and Obio/Akpor areas. Additionally, according to Amobi (2017) Residents of three communities in Rivers state on Wednesday 13th of September 2017 barricaded the Elele Army barracks in protest against an alleged forceful acquisition of landed property belonging to them. The protesters claimed the land grabbed by the Army spanned hundreds of hectares and the development had affected farming activities. The protesters called on

President Muhammadu Buhari, the Senate and the House of Representatives to intervene and compel the Army to vacate their land.

Elsewhere, Nwaoku (2022) reported that the operatives of the Rivers State Police arrested four police officers for their involvement in land grabbing deals, four other communities in Rivers state sent a "save our soul" appeal to the Rivers state Governor and the inspector General of the police in 2017 over an alleged involvement of Police Officers in land grabbing. The communities noted that some men in the area were using men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, an outfit of the Rivers state police command to dispose them of their land. The communities include Rumuokwurusi and Atali in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Ikwere-Ngwo in Etche LGA, Umusele in Igaruta, Ikwere LGA all in Rivers state. They complained that their land had been taken over by grabbers (Amobi, 2017). Just recently, the Nigerian Senate asked the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas limited (NLNG) to appear before its committee on Ethics, Privileges and Public Petition over alleged land grabbing in Rivers State, this was sequel to the presentation of a petition by 73 communities in Rivers state. It was gathered that NLNG acquired landed properties in Rivers state in 1996 spanning over 210 km for use as its pipelines rights of way which ended at the export terminal of NLNG in Finima, Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers.

Emeka (2018) reported that the volume of land grabbing in Rivers state is beyond what is known or speculated as some communities have totally lost their agricultural lands to land grabbing. Emeka further noted that due to oil exploration, communities like Obagi and Ogbogu in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area where Total Energies operates now has little or no amount of agricultural land due to oil related land grabbing and that this is just a litmus paper test of what land grabbing in Rivers state looks like and the scenerio exist without recourse to the negative impact it has on livelihood of the local people especially women.

The pictures below show some of the selected land grabbed presently by (Multinational corporations, financial investors, local elites, comprador bourgeoisie and other private individuals in River State:



Land grabbed by Siat Nigeria Ltd in Elele

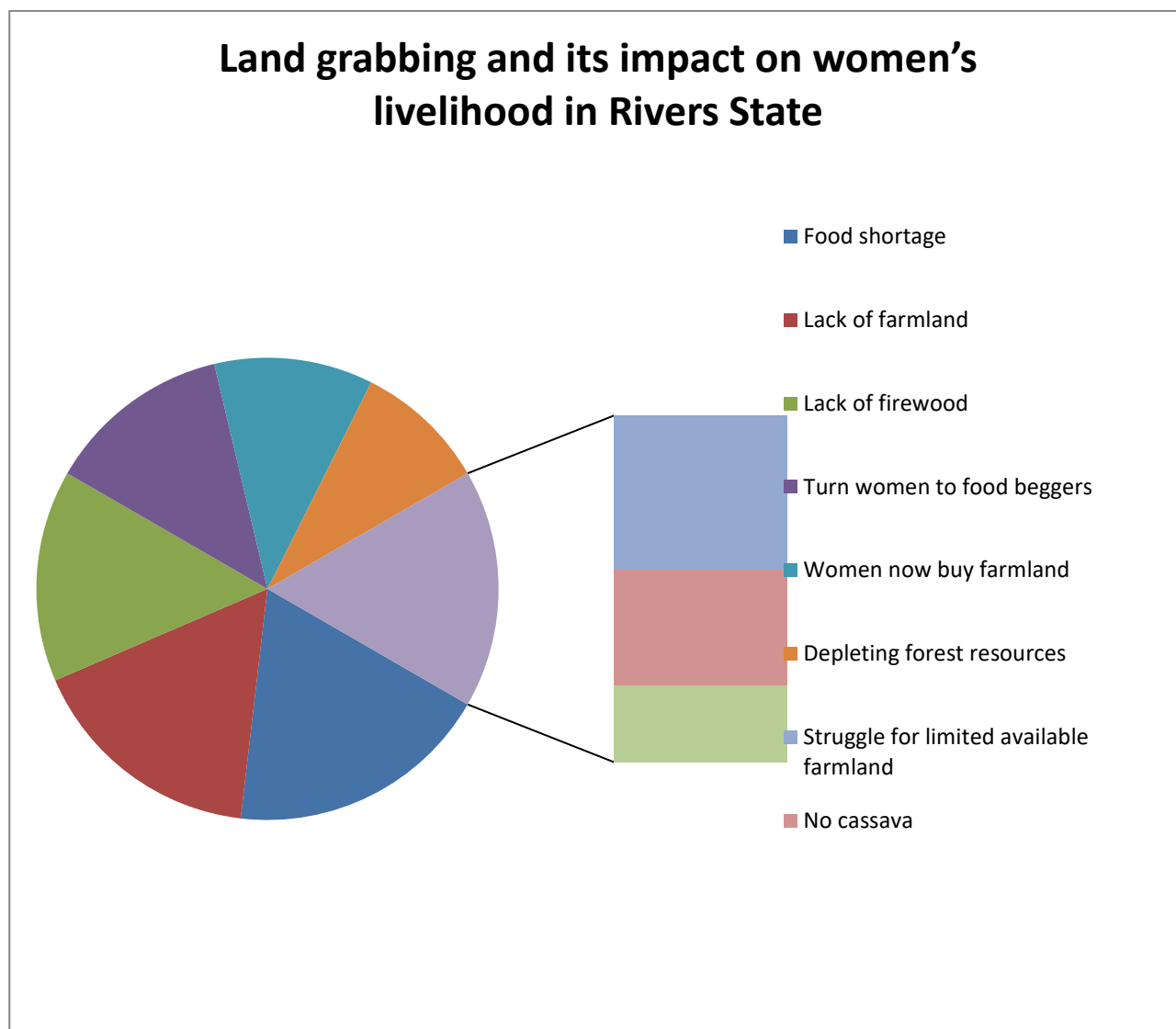
IMPLICATIONS OF LAND GRABBING FOR WOMEN'S LIVELIHOOD

This section of the policy brief discusses the findings of the KII and FGD investigation in Rivers State on land grabbing. The analysis is organized based on the research questions, and includes land grabbing and its impact on women's livelihood in Rivers State. The Key findings are explained for each part, and both parts are further broken down into the sub-sections.

Women are the majority of the world's poor and are more often responsible for household food production, family health and nutrition, and management of natural resources—these are sectors that are particularly sensitive to climate change.

Key findings

Figure 2: Land grabbing and women's livelihood in Rivers State



Source: Field work 2022

The figure above represents the views of stakeholders expressed during the KII and FGD on the impact of land grabbing on the livelihood of women in the Rivers state. Furthermore, Iheanachor (2017), reports that Ogoni women, some of them widows, mostly driven by carmine from Eleme, Tai, Khana and Gokana Local Government Areas of Rivers state have protested against land grabbing and disregard of women in these areas. The women who alleged that they were denied access to their ancestral land for crop growing and they were facing unspeakable sufferings, their

children undergoing untold hardship since farming is their major source of livelihood. Indeed, land grabbing affects women livelihood in Rivers state in a number of ways. Firstly, it depletes the forest resources and ecosystem in which women depend majorly for farming. Secondly, it eliminates their source of cooking fuel which is firewood gotten from the forest reserve. Thus, land grabbing reduces and/or impacts the adaptive capacity of women.

LAND GRABBING AND DEFORESTATION

The primary motive behind land grabbing is the utilization of land for explorative activities, large scale farming, government buildings, private industries and residential buildings thus, the lands which were previously forest has been built up. Worse still, is the scale of land grabbing in Rivers state. According to Emenyonu et al (2017), the reduction of forest reserve due to land grabbing is so visible and has an overarching impact on the environmental resources base. When these forest resources are lost, it does not only reduce food production capacities, it also affects variety of areas that depend on forest resources to run. It may be difficult to get timber or some pharmaceutical herbs if the current spate of deforestation due to land grabbing is not stopped. Thus, it is derived from the foregoing that land grabbing apart from its impact on women livelihood, and food security, it also portends a threat to the available forest reserve and by extension the society.

Human activities have resulted to continued biodiversity degradation necessitating monitoring, protection and conservation.

In 2010, Etche had 16.1kha of natural forest extending over 37% of its land area. In 2021, Etche lost 23.0ha of natural forest, equivalent to 16.9kt of carbon emissions.



Land grabbed in Rivers State

Conclusions

This policy brief examined land grabbing and its impact on women's livelihood in Rivers State. The study focused on selected Local Government Areas and communities in Rivers State affected by land grabbing. Earlier studies and literature reviewed established cases of land grabbing and how this affects the livelihood of women. The analysis of this study collaborates with these early findings and further identified cases of land grabbing in the State and how this is affecting women, their livelihood and deforestation.

Findings of the study revealed established cases of land grabbing in Eleme, Etche, ONELGA, Emohua, Eleme, Khana, Gokhana, Obio/Akpor etc. The study further revealed that land grabbing is having a pervasive impact on women livelihood and forest resource base in the state. The government was identified as the chief enabler of land grabbing with instrumentality of the Land Use Act of 1978. Other enablers of land grabbing (Multinational corporations, financial investors and private individuals) relied

heavily on government to grab land from the original peasant farmers who owned the land. This act of grabbing people's ancestral farm land in most cases by force has a lot of roles to play in explaining why forest resources is depleting and why there is high poverty particularly among women who are the primary victims of this act.

On the basis of the foregoing, land grabbing must be given utmost priority and consideration beyond political statements, conference speeches and communiqué to practical action that will address land grabbing issues and the challenges it poses to both our environment and women.

It is widely held that gender equality and women's inclusion is crucial for accelerating sustainable development. Gender-responsive approaches can make a difference, particularly in reducing emissions from agriculture, forests and land use.

For gender equality and women's empowerment to be effective, it needs to be a part of our daily work. Understanding women's and men's roles in forest management and forest-related value chains is critical to addressing land grabs and deforestation ensuring that responses are implemented in such a way that equitably involves and benefits women, men and young people.

There is also need to provide safe spaces for women to equitably and actively participate in actions and influence decisions on mega projects that will grab land. Women's equitable and active involvement, including in leadership roles and decision-making processes, builds support for gender-responsive approaches and policy making.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy recommendations have been made to address issues of land grabbing:

Federal Government of Nigeria

- i. The Federal government should revisit the Land Use Act of 1978 in order to address issues of land grabbing;
- ii. Federal government should make law that will ensure equitable land resources reserve across the nation to avoid livelihood disasters.

Rivers State Government

- i. Rivers state government should make laws that will stop the spate of land grabbing in the state;
- ii. The State government should ensure that land grabbers are punished according to the dictates of the law to serve as deterrent to others;
- iii. The state government through the Ministry of Lands should make policies that will ensure that there is adequate land resource reserve especially in the rural areas.

Development Agencies and Donors

- i. Fund only projects that that does not encourage land grabbing;
- ii. Provide funding for only projects and programmes that are not targeted at deforestation.

Communities

- i. Communities should form coalition against land grabbing;
- ii. Discouraged internal forms of land grabbing among members of the community;
- iii. Resist local elites used as tool to grab community land;
- iv. Community leaders should weigh the alternatives of large developmental projects and the livelihood impact it has on the people, before making decisions on land concession.

CSOs

- i. Civil society organizations should among other things, intensify campaign and awareness on the level of land grabbing.
- ii. Help build the capacity of community members so that they will be in a better position to fight for their rights and resist land grabbing.

Media

- i. Media should continue the work of sensitisation and information dissemination on the subject of land grabbing and its implications and effects, particularly, on the livelihood of women.

Women's Demands

Land should be prioritized for poor women in rural, urban and communal areas.

Communal areas must not exclude women.

Recognition of inherited customary land rights that respects

Build capacities of women and men in gender-sensitive planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of agricultural and forestry programs/projects.

Conduct practical trainings for communities on sustainable agricultural practices and forest management

Provide alternative livelihoods for women and youth in agricultural and forest-dependent communities

Enhanced protection and preservation of forests and sustainable use of agricultural lands

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