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Farmland Sale in Ikwerre Selected Communities & Rural Economy; An Emerging Perspective

By Dr. Eze Wosu

University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract - The paper examined the act of outright farmland sale in the Ikwerre rural communities to non-agricultural purposes and the increasing decline in agricultural food production. The paper argued that the process of farmland sale to non agricultural purposes will further impoverish the people and hamper development. We deplored the interview and observation methods of eliciting data. The use of Ikwerre dialect became an effective communication tool in gathering data; as the rural peasant people are predominantly illiterates. The theoretical framework is the Political Economy Approach which served as a study and method. The findings are that the increase in sale of farm land to non agricultural activities had destroyed the livelihood of the rural economy and hampered development. Also, that the decision of communities to share farmland for sale to avert the forceful taken their lands with little or no benefits by the government had created paucity of land, scarcity of food, communal conflict, enmity and death mortality rate.

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Farmland Sale in Ikwerre Selected Communities & Rural Economy; An Emerging Perspective

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Abstract - The paper examined the act of outright farmland sale in the Ikwerre rural communities to non-agricultural purposes and the increasing decline in agricultural food production. The paper argued that the process of farmland sale to non agricultural purposes will further impoverish the people and hamper development. We deplored the interview and observation methods of eliciting data. The use of Ikwerre dialect became an effective communication tool in gathering data; as the rural peasant people are predominantly illiterates. The theoretical framework is the Political Economy Approach which served as a study and method. The findings are that the increase in sale of farm land to non agricultural activities had destroyed the livelihood of the rural economy and hampered development. Also, that the decision of communities to share farmland for sale to avert the forceful taken their lands with little or no benefits by the government had created paucity of land, scarcity of food, communal conflict, enmity and death mortality rate.

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I. THE PROBLEM

Rivers State government in 2010 embarked on massive acquisition of the Land of Ikwerre people through the Greater Port Harcourt. The vast land acquisition by the government for non agricultural activities created doubt and fear in the minds of the people. Moreso, the Ikwerre people are more of agrarian society. While policy makers, sociologists are busy thinking on the need to strengthen initiatives to diversify our economies, others are busy directly or indirectly depleting the only means of production (farmland).

As an explorative study, the youths in Ikwerre communities are agitating for the various communities to share remaining farmland for sale since; the government is in a bid to acquire their land without compensation. This affects the declining rate of agricultural production. However, some study had been done on the land tenure system in Ikwerre (Okodudu edited 1998, Ekong 1983), but no study has been carried out on the increase sale of farmland. Some people uphold the view that land tenure problems were of no importance and therefore require no consideration or the process of economic development will automatically solve any land tenure problem that exist

(Wosu, 1999). But the present case proves contrary to this assertion as the economic and cultural heritage of the people is eroded.

Ikwerre people are predominantly an agrarian community and like every agricultural community, if the people's farmland are sold or acquired by external authority like the government for purposes other than those that could promote agricultural and related activities; the people are likely to be adversely affected. We had argued elsewhere that the citing of projects by the government in Akpor and Rivers State government (Greater Port Harcourt) without adequate compensation nor aid in modernising the traditional agricultural system of the people has helped not only displacing people from their land, but communities have decided to share and sell their farmland to non agricultural purposes.

Generally speaking, peasant rural dwellers have always been the looser because of their disposition, hence expanse of arable land has been sold and some converted to non agricultural uses. Consequently, dispossession, loss of farm incomes, and agricultural production of the people is the outcome.

Onwulala (2010) asserted that farming and cultivating are carried out using predominantly traditional methods with hand tools thereby limiting agricultural production to subsistence level. Also, lack of technology and non application or research funding, make it extremely difficult to achieve the desired level of rural development. Other factors are poor state of infrastructure, poor access to market, low income – livelihood.

Against the backdrop of poor state of the rural economy, and the incursion of government on farmland led to communities to sell out their lands for non agricultural purposes. What will be the consequences of this land sale to the rural economy? Will the sale of farmland be sustainable and what will happen to the livelihood of future generation? These hypothetical questions will guide this study.

II. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Political Economy Approach (PEA) as a theoretical framework is a method which has material conditions, particularly economic factors as its major tool for the explanation and cognition of human life.

Author : Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Port Harcourt.
E-mail : ewosu@yahoo.com

Once we understand the material conditions and constraints of a society, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed, and what type of social relations arise from the society of production, brings us to understanding the culture of the society, its laws, its religious systems, its political, social and even its mode of thought – consciousness. Again, the political economy examines the economy and its interplay with socio-political institutions with particular emphasis on the internal dynamics and factors of change. This enables us to understand the historical changes in the Ikwerre kingdom. Also, it enables us to take account of the systematic interactions of the different structures in society, especially the economic, political, social and belief systems. According to this theory, it is the economic factor which is the most decisive of these elements of society and which largely determines the characteristics of others. The method therefore offers the opportunity to understand what goes in the society as a result of change in the traditional (material) productive process. Thus Marx asserts that:

In the social production of their existence, man enters into definite, necessary relations of production: corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. Consequently, the totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structures of society. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in generals. It is not the consciousness of man that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production (Lenin, 1978 cited in Wosu, 1999).

This contradiction constitutes the bane of the rural economy in Ikwerre communities. We deplored the interview methods and observation technique of data collection. We interviewed one thousand, two hundred respondents. Those interviewed were rural peasant women, men and able bodied youths on some selected Ikwerre communities. The interview was informal and unstructured which did not limit the respondents to confined questions. Issues of living conditions, community development, land sale, etc. The interview method was used because the farming population was largely non-literate. More so, the illiterate women were interviewed to prod them into unveiling their inner most minds on their alienation from land and the increase in land sale dispossessing them from farming.

The selection of the towns were purely based on the condition of the presence of companies, institutions of higher learning and other government projects which in totality give insight into the degree of diversion of land to non-agricultural purposes. Ogbogoro, Choba and Rumuolumeni are the most populous towns. Incidentally, Rivers State College of Education (now Ignatius Ajeru University of Education Port Harcourt) is sited at Rumuolumeni whereas the University of Port Harcourt is sited at Choba. Thus, both Choba and Rumuolumeni had to be chosen on the bases of the presence of the tertiary institutions and companies for which Ogbogoro was also chosen. Ozuoba, Rumuosi, Alakahia, Rumuokwachi, Rumuekini and Aluu were included because they lost reasonable acreage to the University and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), channel 10 Port Harcourt and African Independent Television (AIT).

III. FINDINGS

Our findings are as follows :

Table 1 : Shows primary and secondary schools in Akpor and Land acreage taken.

Community	No. of Schools		hectares		Remarks
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	
Ozuoba	1	1	7.00	10.00	State Govt.
Rumuosi/Rumuekini	1	1	4.00	6.00	do
Rumuokwachi	1	Nil	4.678	nil	do
Alakahia	1	Nil	3.009	nil	do
Choba	2		5.515		do
Ogbogboro	2	1	6.00	10.00	do
Rumuolumeni	3		9.671		do
Total	11	3	43.00	26.00	

The table explains the acreage of farming land lost and these are rural peasant people. They cannot carter for the upkeep of their families having been dispossessed of their means of livelihood. Another phenomenon about the acquisition of farm lands for

building of schools is that neither the Federal nor the State government pays compensation probably due to the assumption that the community where the school is build has the responsibility of providing land free of charge. The logical implication is that land was

appropriated to build primary and secondary schools, but how many people were allowed or have the capacity to go to school. Or what alternative means of livelihood do the parents possess to cater and train their children. Hence, the Ikwerre people lost the colonial education

and equally lost their farm lands. This was corroborated by the Paramount Ruler of Ogbogoro community; that the Ikwerre indigenes were late comers in the white man's education.

Table 2 : Shows tertiary institutions in some parts of Ikwerre communities and Acreage taken.

Community	Hectare Acquired
Rumuekini	657.725
Alakahia	179.604
Choba	125.466
Rumuokwachi	2.51
Ozuoba	31.85
Rumuosi	405.00
Rumuolumeni	42.52
Total	1.502.145

Source : Ofoma Associates and Phil Annia and company, 1988 culled from Wosu, 1999.

Now, a critical look at the hectare of land lost for the establishment of tertiary institutions by the government stunts the imagination. A total of 42.52 hectares were acquired from Rumuolumeni community in 1971 on which was built the then College of Education, now Ignatius Ajeru University of Education, Port Harcourt. Of this land area, only about one fourth is presently developed. Similarly, in 1975, the state government acquired approximately 9.500 acres or 3.800 hectares of farm land for the establishment of University of Port Harcourt. The land belongs to different communities in Akpor kingdom. The essence was a trade off for anticipated educational and employment opportunities for the people. According to a survey by Anikpo, the decision of the lost of farm land was formally taken by the traditional council of chiefs and elders tele-guided by younger business merchants to become contractors, without due requisite qualification to work in the new organisation. By the time the survey began, bitter complaints from the various communities revealed that very few individuals had reaped the type of benefits that were anticipated. The then Nye-nwe-ali Akpor bitterly complained if they had told us, if only I had known I would rather die than agree to the acquisition of vast land. Meanwhile, University admissions were to be based on tangible qualifications and not on manipulation of friendly networks of patronage (man knows man) or on the basis of host communities syndrome. The indigenes had demanded that 50% admission quota be reserved for the communities; by 1980 only 3 Choba youths had in fact gained admission into the university. Also, contrary to expectations, only three Choba contractors had been registered by that time – Messrs T. Ohakwu, J. Agbara and S. Owume; and only 38 men and women were in the University employment mostly women in catering, cleaners and elderly men in security. This has being the problem till date. The Ikwerre sons and daughters have being

agitating for been marginalized in terms of admission, employment, contracts and above all becoming for once the Vice Chancellor of the university. This agitation had metamorphosed to a serious protest in 2010 by the indigenes over the Vice Chancellorship position. The Ogbakor Ikwerre Convention (an umbrella body) made representation to State and Federal government respectively. The answer for the agitation was that the University operates on a federal principles and character and not on pre-bendal politics. Even the earlier 'gentleman' agreement of 50% admission quota had never being implemented by any administration. Presently, vast expansion of arable land beyond the earlier acquired acres of the people are being taken by the university without due compensation. Rather, the communities' wallows in abject poverty having been alienated from their farm land. Hence, they resort to land sale to individuals and companies rather than government taken their lands without compensation of any sort.



Table 3 : Shows companies in Ikwerre communities and land acquired.

Community	Name of company	Acreage Acquired	Remarks
Choba	Wilbros	4.079	Data not available (n.a) as at the time of this study, but the companies occupies a vast portion of the community's land
	Horizon Fibres	19.00	
	Indomie Noddles	n.a.	
Ogbogoro	Tidex WAOS	3.137 n.a.	
Rumuolumeni	Eagle Cement	15.500	
	Aker	n.a	
	Saipiem	n.a	
	Nissco	n.a	
	Mordant Marine	n.a	
Ozuoba	NTA	n.a	
	AIT	n.a	

These companies settle and operate on land and not in the air. Their presence involves land lost. From the land acquired, compensation and rent on damaged crops and economic trees were not adequately paid. The emergence of the multi national corporations totally changed and disarticulated the rural economy. The people became alien in their own land. The cultural values of the people became destroyed and no more communal sense of social cohesion. The land has been desecrated by the activities of foreigners with their culture. We have argued elsewhere that urbanization and/or industrialization has eroded the cultural heritage of the Akpor kingdom (Wosu, 2012). We now witness high level of crime in the communities as our norms have given way to urban life.

The only compensation by the multinational corporation was the pollution of the land and rivers by oil spills and other toxic chemicals which have seriously affected and destroyed the rural peasant economy. They only engage the indigenes as casual workers like security men, tea girls, cleaners etc. Objectively speaking, the land lost to the MNCs cannot be equated with the benefits meted to the people if any. This has been the bane of communal conflicts between the host communities and multinational corporations.

In the light of the above, the people decide to sale off their remaining portions of land to individuals and corporate organisation for non agricultural project. They claimed that these individuals pay them more than the government or companies under the instrumentality of the state government. The climax of this was the acquisition of mass Ikwerre land by the Rivers State Government christened the Greater Port Harcourt. The situation is that government without due recourse to the people take vast portions of their farmland with a paltry sum of three hundred thousand naira as compensation. Meanwhile, a plot of land is sold for N1.5m depending on the place said one elder in Choba community. This has created violent and sharp reactions by individuals and communities. Some communities have resorted to litigations as the land tenure system in Ikwerre land is

either individually or communally owned. A cross section of interviews conducted by some community paramount rulers and elders attest to this fact. Thus, the communities resolved to share and sell their lands on high price to private individual organisation instead of losing them to strangers. An interview with one of the chiefs from Ogbogoro – Egbelu community asserted that he sold his own portion of land to an individual who established a filing station.

The implication is that the rural economy (agriculture) of the people is disarticulated. The people are alienated from their farm land and the synthesis is the decision to share and sell the remaining land to wealthy and 'powerful' individuals for non agricultural purposes. We now witness paucity of land and low food production. The people are no longer interested in farming. A cross interview with rural peasant women opined that they now prefer to rent a market stall and trade in the urban city rather than remaining in the rural communities toiling from morning till night in the name of farming without food sufficiency. Our interview with the women revealed that a basin of garri now cost as much as N2, 500 and above. This is because they are dispossessed from cultivating their staple food. They travel to far communities to buy garri. This has equally affected other agricultural products – vegetables, okoro, yam, corn, pepper etc.

IV. CONCLUSION

The decision to sell farm land by Ikwerre communities to non agricultural purposes was a contradiction by the acquisition of land by state and corporate organisation without due benefits and recourse to the people's livelihood. This has created not only paucity of land, but food scarcity. It has also created inter and intra communal conflicts over boundary and rightful land owners. In some cases they are subject of litigation. The youths now engage themselves as land agents, a job or occupation not sustainable but lucrative in terms of the money involved. A plot of land is sold for over N1.5m with its commission

for the agent. So the number of plots of land the higher the commission fee. They sell and resell a land earlier bought because no more land to sell. Rather than investing the money in a meaningful project, they live flamboyant and ostentatious lives. The serious contradiction therefore is that the federal government is clamouring to revert to agriculture in the face of communities' land being sold out rightly to individual and corporate organisation. What will happen to future generations when the only means of livelihood of the people (Land) is destroyed? This negates the principles of sustainable development. The question is where do we go from here? Will negation keep on negating?

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