

(IFAD – 50X2030 Initiative)

Policy brief

Ensuring land tenure security is critical for improving household welfare

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Executive Summary

Land ownership and access are critical to ensuring inclusive and transformative improvements in household welfare, despite its limited attention. Government and other non-state actors have undertaken efforts to support access and ownership of land, especially among rural and agricultural communities. However, the gendered effect of land ownership (tenure security) on household welfare has been overlooked in some on-going interventions. Using nationally representative data from three waves (2013/14, 2015/16 and 2018/19) of the Uganda National Panel Survey, this brief highlights the role of land tenure security in improving household welfare. Therefore, gender-sensitive approaches to ensure land tenure security need to be adopted by the government and non-state actors improve household welfare for all.

Introduction

Agriculture is vital to the livelihoods of many Ugandans, with about 68% of the population engaging in agriculture and related activities of forestry and fishing (UBOS, 2021). Of the total employed Ugandan population, more women (73%) than men (63%) are engaged in agriculture. Relatedly, more women (55%) than men (38%) are engaged in subsistence agriculture. This distribution of Uganda’s working population has implications for their livelihoods and welfare.

However, challenges in access, ownership and usage of the available agricultural land have negatively affected agricultural production and productivity and household welfare. Yet everyone is not affected in the same way – women are more affected than men. The existing challenges are linked to increases in population, demand for land, urbanization and the decrease in the arable land per individual from 0.22 hectares per person in 2000 to 0.16 hectares per person in 2018. Previous studies indicate that most Ugandans are becoming landless due to the rampant land evictions, which have disproportionately affected women (Muriisa et al, 2013). Secure land tenure rights could liberate households from the increasing land wrangles and other challenges so that they can pursue strategies to improve their welfare and food security. The lack of secure and sustainable access to sufficient and nutritious food results in hunger and malnutrition, which have profoundly negative impacts on people’s health and productivity (Landesa, 2012).

Whereas improving household welfare is a top priority at the national level, countries including Uganda are still finding it difficult to translate the increased funding on agricultural interventions into improvements in welfare. This suggests that increased financing as a mechanism to boost the agricultural sector is not sufficient because agricultural systems face several constraints such as land tenure insecurity, land scarcity and ownership inequality, among other challenges. Yet secure access to land is crucial for agriculture development and poverty reduction (Lawry, et al., 2017). In addition, land tenure insecurity is associated with uncertainty, which may discourage

households to increase investments in food production and productivity and non-farm activities, exacerbating the decline in household welfare. However, the status of perceived land rights affects farmers' decisions regarding whether to invest in land, which crops to grow, and which farming practices to adopt (Mwesigye et al, 2020).

While insecure land tenure systems are common and affect both men and women, women are often more disproportionately affected and exposed especially if they live in rural areas. This is partly because of the social-economic (limited education, incomes and assets) and cultural factors (customary laws) that restrict women's access, ownership and usage of land and other productive assets. These factors could result in lower household welfare. For instance, in most areas of Uganda, women rely on conjugal (bridal) co-ownership of land, which is only applicable as long as the couple stays married (Friends of the Earth-Uganda, 2012).

Therefore, understanding gendered effects of land ownership on household welfare is critical for identifying, strengthening and developing effective policies for improving household welfare. This policy brief is based on the study titled “**Gendered effects of land ownership on household food security and welfare: empirical evidence from Uganda**” (Mpuuga, Bulime & Ogwang, 2021).

Research Approach

The study relied on nationally representative data from three waves of the Uganda National Panel survey (i.e. 2013/14, 2015/16 and 2018/19), which is collected under World Bank's Living Standards Measurement Survey–Integrated Survey on Agriculture project. We also adopted the number of meals per day (including breakfast) and household consumption expenditure in Ugandan Shillings (UGX) to proxy household welfare.

Key findings

Female-headed households have fewer number of meals per day compared to male-headed households. Each household consumes approximately 2 meals per day – including breakfast – which implies that, minus breakfast each household consumes 1 meal per day on average. In addition, on average female headed households spend less on consumption (UGX 16,087.22) compared to male headed households (UGX 22,607.72) in 7 days. This finding could suggest that female headed households have lower levels of welfare than male headed households.

On average, female-headed households acquire new parcels by purchasing compared to male-headed households¹. Conversely, male headed households acquire new parcels through inheritance and gifts compared to female-headed households. This could be explained by the

¹ Overall, only 16 percent of parcels have either a certificate of title, certificate of customary or a certificate of occupancy, which suggests that parcel certification is very low in Uganda. Mwesigye et al (2020), argue that titling and leasing are not widely embraced because of the high costs involved in surveying and demarcation of land during the process of obtaining a land title.

prevailing norms and customs which favor male inheritance to female inheritance². This also suggests that most females are likely to mainly acquire land through direct or indirect purchase. Notably, on average, female-headed households own smaller parcel sizes (1.1 acres) compared to male-headed households (1.5 acres). Whereas efforts have been undertaken to guarantee tenure security, female headed households are more concerned that somebody might dispute their ownership/user rights on the parcel.

Possession of a parcel certificate by a household member improves welfare: The possession of a parcel certificate (i.e. either certificate of title, certificate of customary ownership or certificate of occupancy) by a female household member increases both the meals per day (by 0.15 percent) and the consumption expenditure (by 0.26 percent) for the household, holding other factors constant. This suggests that having a parcel certificate improves household welfare by ensuring increased investments, which could lead to more incomes the number of meals consumed by a household per day and consumption of more varieties of food.

Droughts and floods negatively affect household consumption: On average, droughts reduce the number of meals consumed by a household per day while they reduce household consumption expenditure. On the other hand, floods reduce the number of meals consumed by a household per day while the effect on household consumption expenditure is muted. The climatic shocks are likely to affect household consumption through their effect on food production and incomes.

Urban dwellers are better off in terms of household consumption expenditure compared to rural dwellers: This could translate in better household welfare demonstrated by the ability to diversify one's dietary consumption and maintain an adequate number of months of adequate food provisioning. Previous studies suggest that the variation in household consumption expenditure could be explained by the existing inequalities in incomes.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

Improving household welfare is critical for boosting their social economic status and livelihoods in Uganda. However, previous studies have provided limited evidence on the gendered effects of landownership on household welfare. This brief shows that gender peculiarities and inequalities are critical for landownership, which in turn affects household welfare. Whereas other factors such as climate risks (drought, floods), residence, marital status and household size affect a households' welfare, critical policy interventions are needed to guarantee tenure security, especially for women. This is because land tenure insecurity will most likely affect women more compared to men. The following policy recommendations are worthwhile;

The government should provide for and enforce inclusive (gender-sensitive) and fair tenure systems that regulate access and ownership of productive resources such as land. This will boost

² Consequently, the traditional and customary tenure and governance systems are perpetuated by norms and customs that forms the basis for land rights, ownership and usage.

household welfare by encouraging households to invest in agricultural production and productivity and non-farm activities. More specifically, this will also reduce concerns by households about potential land wrangles and evictions – legal and gender sensitive interventions are of the essence.

Implement an integrated approach to supporting land registration to boost land rights of access, ownership and usage, especially for women and/or female headed households. The recognition of women’s rights of ownership and usage is a pathway to improved household welfare, poverty reduction and development. Current efforts are overly focusing on a critical component for boosting ownership such as capacity building, literacy, legal support, advocacy and awareness creation. Equally important, but overlooked is reducing or subsidizing the cost of land registration. State and non-state actors need to push for a more integrated approach that incorporates all key components that impede land registration in Uganda. For example, actions of the different actors need to be coordinated so that a partner focusing on creating awareness is linked to one that is subsidizing the cost of registration.

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