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## INEQUALITIES AND MODES OF ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES OF WOMEN'S HOUSEHOLDS IN THE TAHOUA REGION

Mahamadou MOUSSA DIT KALAMOU\*<sup>1</sup>, Soumana BOUBACAR<sup>2</sup>, Mahamane Moctar RABE<sup>3</sup> and Boubacar YAMBA<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Head of Department of Agriculture in Arid Zones, Assistant Professor, University of Agadez, P.O.Box: 199, Niamey-Niger; <sup>2</sup>Head of Department Sociology and Rural Economy of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, ABDOU MOUMOUNI University, P.O.Box: 10896, Niamey-Niger; <sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, DJIBO HAMANI University of Tahoua, Department of Sociology and Rural Economy of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences; <sup>4</sup>Doctoral School Coordinator, Department of Geography, ABDOU MOUMOUNI University, P.O.Box: 419 Niamey-Niger

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#### \*Corresponding author:

Mahamadou MOUSSA DIT KALAMOU

### ABSTRACT

The response to the harmful effects of the droughts of the 1970s was effective by the Nigerien authorities and development partners. The latter have carried out actions aimed at combating environmental degradation in the most affected regions. In Tahoua region, these actions aimed to alleviate the land problem and access to natural resources of households, especially women who suffer from inequalities in inheritance and lack of freedom of action because of customs, traditions and cultures which weigh heavy on them. This situation hinders their participation in the fight against poverty and chronic food insecurity in this region. In this study, it appears that male households all own land, significant income and livestock more than women. It turns out that 2.4% of land is owned by women in this region despite the efforts made to eradicate this disparity between men and women in equitable access to natural resources which condition existence in rural areas. Thus, access to land, water, and control of ownership of these resources by rural women depend on factors linked to the particularities of the rural world.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a 2010 report based on an international comparison of census data, it was estimated that women own less than 20% of land<sup>1</sup> (FAO, 2012). In North Africa and West Asia, women own less than 5% of land and in sub-Saharan Africa, they own barely 15%. According to an estimate cited by UN-Women, globally, women own less than 2% of all land properties. Access to land and water as well as the control and ownership of these resources by rural women are conditioned by different factors, some of which are linked to the particularities of the rural world, while others concern generally women. The term "rural women" refers to women who reside and/or work in primarily agricultural environments and in coastal and forest areas. This definition includes women who engage in work, paid or unpaid, regular or seasonal, on a farm or in another setting, as well as in food preparation, household maintenance, childcare and other activities, centered on the home and the management of natural resources. The study on discrimination in the context of the right to food showed that rural women constituted a group subject to discrimination.

It set the following observation: The point of intersection between women's rights and the right to food offers a rich panorama of the many overlapping aspects of discrimination against women with regard to access to land, goods, property and markets, which are inextricably linked to access to education, employment, health care and political participation. On a global scale, even if more than 50% of food products are grown by women, they are nevertheless part of the 70% of the population suffering from hunger and are victims of malnutrition, poverty and food insecurity to a disproportionate extent. States are not honoring their international commitments to protect women against discrimination, since it is clear that the gap between legal equality and discrimination in practice continues to persist and resist change<sup>2</sup> (M. H. Nguyen, 2006). It is in this sense that Professor Yamba affirms poverty ("Talawci" in Hausa) is different from vulnerability ("Rishin Garkuwa" or "Rishinkariya" in Hausa), because vulnerability is not a state, but it's a situation. In Niger, being born a woman implies that you are already vulnerable because you do not have access to certain resources. Thus, every household must operate on a principle of social systems which go beyond relations between households, but which must also take into account and resolve

religious, cultural and conflicting issues, in short on the basis of an entire network of social links.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This part follows a survey carried out over 2 weeks in the last two decades of August 2012 (11<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, August) towards the end of the agricultural campaign at a time when food crops are at the heading/seed-set stage. The survey covered 155 household heads, including 55 women, spread across Tahoua region. Stratified sampling is based on a choice of households within an enumeration area which offers statistical representativeness by departments (8) that the region had at the time; then according to demographic weight. It is obtained according to the two strata: the enumeration zones and the type of environment (rural and semi-urban environment) in the different production systems by agro-ecological zone. This sample was drawn from all the households included in the study which amounted to 420 heads of households in 20 villages which were surveyed as part of the diagnostic survey on food insecurity in Tahoua region. The survey concerns 55 female heads of household (set of female heads of households) and 100 male heads of household (5 heads of household per village), all belonging to the first sample of 420 heads of household. Unfortunately during this second visit, we learned of the death of the ten female heads of households (5 in Abala Sani, 3 in Rumbuki, 1 in BagayeGarba and 1 in LabaChediya) peace to their souls and three others of whom we did not have access to the village (Dulunfou) due to lack of track, lost in the millet fields. This survey was complementary; certain concerns were answered through focus groups organized in all the villages visited in order to obtain secondary qualitative information, especially on the land management system and social relations between men and women. These focus groups are led by investigators and the village chief surrounded by his notables and opinion leaders. This analysis focuses on sedentary households (female and male) in our study region. The first stratum (enumeration area) is calculated on the national sampling frame of the National Institute of Statistics of Niger (NIS-Niger) and the second stratum which is the heads of sample households.

**Table 1. The areas concerned by the choice of the sample of female households**

Areas/ Production system	Departments	Communes	Villages	Number of people surveyed
Agricole area	Bouza	Déoulé	Hiro	2
		Karofane	KouroutouGabass	5
	BirniNkonni	Tsernaoua	Tamaka	3
		Dogaraoua	Balgaya	2
	Illéla	Badaguichiri	Roumbouki	8
		Illéla commune	Doulounfou	0
	Madaoua	Bangui	Malley Sédentaire	4
		Madaoua	Rini	2
Agro pastorale area	Tahoua	Afala	Abalasanani	2
		2 <sup>ème</sup> Arrondissement	Amadouk	4
		Kalfou	BagayeGarba	2
	Kéita	Garhanga	Labatchédiya,	8
Pastorale area	Abalak	RAS	RAS	0
	Tchintabaraden			
Total				42

**Table 2. Distribution of households by agro-ecological zone**

Production system	Gender		Total
	M	F	
Agricole	27	26	53
Agropastoral	15	16	31
Total	42	42	84

This unpredictable situation led us to focus our analysis on 84 households drawn from the initial sample and composed of 42 female heads of households and 42 male heads of households from villages containing these female households. All these households are located in the two agro-ecological zones of the region shown in Table 1 (Agricultural and Agro-pastoral). The pastoral zone (Abalak, Chintabaraden) does not have female households from which it was excluded from the analysis. Thus, we group the villages of the

departments of Birni Nkonni, Madaoua, Bouza, and Illéla in the zone of agricultural production systems then Tahoua and Keita in the zone of agropastoral production systems. The distribution of the areas studied is based on their dominant production system practiced by sedentary households in the chosen villages. The objective of this part is to highlight the situation of female households among all households in order to also analyze their food situation and the degree of vulnerability in access to natural resources in the study areas. The main indicators studied for this highlighting of the situation of women in social systems depend on socio-economic factors (income-generating activities and expenditure), agronomic (access and management of land), management of natural resources for feeding themselves (search, access, availability and use of food) and household strategies in the face of cyclical and structural problems, without forgetting their daily behavior in household management. The results also attempt to make a comparison of household production methods and survival strategies in these areas according to gender in order to identify poor and vulnerable households to food insecurity to seek adequate responses for resilience. Our analysis will pay particular attention to the situation of female heads of household in the study region in order to find strategies and policies aimed at combating such discrimination of women who despite their contribution remain not only limited to access to natural resources, but also the poorest of the poor in rural areas.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The households analyzed are divided into the agricultural (63%) and agropastoral (37%) system zones of the region based on the presence of female heads of household. The latter thus represent 62% in the zone with an agricultural system and 38% in the zone with an agropastoral system (See Table 1). Among the heads of household, we find others who do not have agricultural land. These households which do not own land are mainly female households and they represent 2.4% of the sample as shown in Table 2. Among the agricultural land available to households in these areas, we distinguish fields and gardens.

It appears that male and female households have plots with variable surface areas which reach 15 hectares for fields and 3 hectares for gardens. In a context where fields are agricultural land which provides households with most of their food production, then crop yields are too linked to expansion due to the lack of appropriate land, agricultural inputs and unpredictable climatic conditions. Female households only have on average 2 hectares of land compared to around 6 hectares for male households (see Table 4). Hence these

female households find themselves with plots of land three times smaller than those of male households. From these previous results, inequality emerges and also show the source of precariousness of female households which will be confirmed by the analysis of income later in this part. The situation of women is worrying when their access to land and resources is based not on titles or property rights but on usage rights, and when control of these means belongs to the elders of the community. Lacking assets, they also risk not enjoying any decision-making power within the household or community. As a direct consequence of this situation, women also have smaller livestock and smaller animals. It is their responsibility to care for the animals and market the products resulting from breeding, but decisions regarding income and expenses remain with the male head of the household. The lack of land titles also limits the possibility for women to have access to credit. When they do not have a stable income, it is difficult for them to feed their children<sup>3</sup> (UN-Women et al. 2011). In some cases, customary law recognizes women's property rights but only on the condition that they are held jointly with the male head of the household and are subject to his approval or signature. Thus, in Indonesia, although land is jointly owned by spouses, it is most often registered only under the name of the male head of the household. This situation is mainly due to the fact that authorities and communities do not adequately involve women in the land registration process. Moreover, very often, women do not have the necessary information regarding the different options in this area<sup>4</sup> (J. Brown, 2003).

often linked to gender. Although new theoretical models have been proposed, we note, however, that these conceptual advances have had relatively little impact on the construction of major statistical surveys<sup>6</sup> (Isabelle DROY, 2012). The various land conflicts mainly encountered in these areas are due to disputes over field boundaries and differences between farmers and breeders following nighttime damage by animals or the clearing of rangelands and animal passage corridors by farmers in search of land for the extension of crops in order to increase production. In addition to these conflicts, other types of minor conflicts are noted in these zones of Tahoua. These are conflicts related to the sharing of inheritance, loan clauses and land transactions (purchase and sale) without notifying the heads of the basic land commissions (traditional chiefs or rural town halls). Although they are installed in most villages, we note knowledge of basic land commissions by 65% of households. These commissions were established by the permanent secretariat of the rural code, an institution serving as a tool for land security in rural areas in Niger. Despite everything, only 9.5% of households secure their land after a transaction to purchase new plots. The management of land acquisition is mainly done by the head of the household (59.5%), the village head (21%), the head of the household, the village and the elders (12%) and the committee of 'wise people' (3.6%) composed of the village chief, religious leaders, and the oldest as shown in Table 6 below. Female households recognize the management of land acquisitions more to the two heads of the household and the village at 20% and mainly to the village chief at 14%.

**Table 3. Land ownership by gender**

Gender		Land possession		Total
		owns	Not owns	
M	count	42	0	42
	% of Total	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%
F	Count	40	2	42
	% of Total	47,60%	2,40%	50,00%
Total	Count	82	2	84
	% of Total	97,60%	2,40%	100,00%

**Table 4. Areas of household fields and gardens by sex**

Gender of house hold head	Land type	Sup.max (ha)	Sup. total (ha)	Mean sup. of household (ha)
Masculin	Champs	15	242	5,75
	Jardins	3	13	0,31
Féminin	Champs	15	87	2,07
	Jardins	3	3	0,07

**Table 5. Mode of land acquisition by gender**

Gender		Acquisition modes											Total	
		No land	H	R	L	H-P	H-R	H-G	R-L	H-P-R	H-P-L	H-P-G		P-G
M	Count	0	21	1	1	9	2	1	0	4	1	1	1	42
	% of Total	0,00%	25,00%	1,20%	1,20%	10,70%	2,40%	1,20%	0,00%	4,80%	1,20%	1,20%	1,20%	50%
F	Count	2	23	5	2	7	2	0	1	0	0	0	42	
	% of Total	2,40%	27,40%	6,00%	2,40%	8,30%	2,40%	0,00%	1,20%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	50%	
Total	Count	2	44	6	3	16	4	1	1	4	1	1	84	
	% of Total	2,40%	52,40%	7,10%	3,60%	19,00%	4,80%	1,20%	1,20%	4,80%	1,20%	1,20%	100%	

H: heritage, R: Rental, L: Loan, A: purchase, D: gift, M: Male, F: Female

**Table 6. Recognition of officials responsible for managing land acquisitions**

Genders		Management of land acquisitions					Total
		No Answered	Head of households	Head of households and villages	Elders' Committee	Head of households, villages and elders	
M	Count	1	38	1	2	0	42
	% of Total	1,20%	45,20%	1,20%	2,40%	0,00%	50,00%
F	Count	2	12	17	1	10	42
	% of Total	2,40%	14,30%	20,20%	1,20%	11,90%	50,00%
Total	Count	3	50	18	3	10	84
	% of Total	3,60%	59,50%	21,40%	3,60%	11,90%	100,00%

Thus, access to land and control of ownership of these resources by rural women in Tahoua region are not equitable. This situation shows a predisposition of female households to food insecurity and poverty in this region. This situation is confirmed by the words of A.Sen, in his work on famines (1981), underlined the importance of intra-family inequalities in the distribution of resources, inequalities most

There are thus four types of acquisition management that we will describe in the rest of this paragraph. Indeed, the management of the acquisition made by the head of the household operates in the following way: the father or mother, head of the household, bequeaths or gives portions of the land generally in the main farm or 'gandu' in Hausa to the son emancipated elders without a deed of donation, or

witness to the nature of acquisition which may be temporary or permanent. In certain cases, these practices lead to conflicts within the household during succession or the sharing of inheritance. Other right holders (children or wives) especially in polygamous families claim the shares given by the head of the household during his lifetime for a new redistribution according to Islamic law or customary law for non-Muslims. The division of agricultural land into succession or inheritance is rarely carried out by modern law except in the case of bloody conflicts which lead the protagonists to public justice. Thus the safe way of accessing a piece of land, even if the sharing is not equitable, is inheritance. Also, the emancipated heir with responsibility for the children does not have the right to die before his father or mother, head of the household; otherwise his children will be excluded from sharing and will not have plots of land. These orphaned children will remain social cases, landless in rural areas. The second type of acquisition management is done by the head of household and the village chief. In this case the head of the household decides to give or sell to third parties (a son, a relative or others) with the often hammered testimony of a deed of transfer or transaction established by the village chief. These cases are rare and present less risk of conflicts. This is becoming rarer due to the fact that land is precious in rural areas, its sale is often poorly received by society and can cause disobedience, distrust and tensions within household members who only swear and identify themselves by this land which provides them with the means of existence. The third type of management of land acquisitions is similar to the second, but only the composition of the authors differs by the presence of wise people. That is to say, in addition to the head of the household and the village chief, we have the testimony of wise people for the acquisition of land. This type of management is satisfied only with the oral testimony of the actors and these clauses are respected except in the event of the disappearance of all the witnesses although the values and cultures are transmitted from generation to generation. The fourth type is that of the committee of elders who sit after the death of a head of household, often at the request of the heirs to divide the inheritance concerning the material goods and lands of the deceased by this committee. The latter is chaired by religious leaders, then with the presence of right holders for possible conciliations in relation to the choice of land positions or compensation for example. This type of land acquisition management is based on Islamic law, it is certainly unrivaled when the beneficiaries are of different sexes, but generates fewer conflicts in rural areas in these study areas.

## CONCLUSION

The economic emancipation of women can only result from an evolution of relations between the sexes at all levels and in all

institutions, including within the home, and it requires above all the active participation of women and their representation<sup>7</sup> (UN-woman in United Nations, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to provide women with information about their right to food and to take legal action when they are discriminated against. But before arriving at the competent jurisdictions, several levels and local bodies for resolving land conflicts and disputes around natural resources exist. These bodies advocate dialogue and consensus according to socio-cultural and religious rules. They are the different land commissions from the grassroots to the regional level (village, communal, departmental, and regional), the village chiefs, the gendarmerie and the justice system as a last resort to ensure that the most vulnerable groups have their right of access to natural resources.

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