



SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF LAND OWNERSHIP AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY CHANGES: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract:

This study explores the social implications of land ownership structures and agricultural policy changes, with a focus on how these factors impact economic opportunities, social equity, and community stability in rural areas. Land ownership and agricultural policies are significant determinants of socioeconomic status, often exacerbating inequalities by favoring large-scale agribusinesses over smallholder farmers. The concentration of land ownership among few large entities limits access to resources for marginalized populations, thereby increasing economic disparities. Furthermore, agricultural policies that prioritize high-yield monocultures and chemical inputs, while enhancing productivity, have led to environmental degradation, such as soil erosion and water depletion. This study highlights the shift towards sustainable agricultural policies that aim to balance productivity with ecological conservation. Gender dynamics are also addressed, as women often face barriers to land access, which inhibits broader social equity. Empowering women with secure land rights has shown to improve household well-being and community resilience. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of inclusive governance that involves local communities in decision-making processes to mitigate social injustices and promote sustainable practices. However, challenges remain, including persistent land concentration, lack of financial resources for smallholder farmers, and vulnerabilities to global market fluctuations, which impact food security and community stability. This appraisal contributes to understanding the broader social impacts of land and agricultural policies, emphasizing the need for reforms that support equitable access to land and resources, promote environmental sustainability, and strengthen social cohesion in rural communities.

Keywords:

Land, agricultural, policy, social, implications



INTRODUCTION

Land ownership and agricultural policies play a pivotal role in shaping social structures and influencing economic opportunities, particularly in developing regions. These policies not only determine who has access to land but also dictate the distribution of resources, impacting the livelihoods of millions. As the global population continues to rise, coupled with increasing pressures from climate change, the urgency for effective agricultural policy reform has never been greater (Pingali, 2012).

The land system of a particular society is the way which land is owned and gained. It is an institutional framework within which decisions are taken about the use of land, encompassing that legal arrangement whereby persons or groups or organizations gain access to economic and social opportunities through land (Udo, 2003; Oyediji *et al.*, 2024). The land system is also constituted by the rules and procedures which oversees the right and responsibilities of both individuals and groups in the acquisition, use and control of land. Denman (1978) argued that all societies of any culture and political creed have land systems woven of property rights. These property rights lend form to the proprietary land units (Abdulahiet *al.*, 2024). The proprietary land unit is the decision-making unit which is important to all positive decisions about land use and comprises two elements, the run of property rights and the area of physical land to which they pertain (Denman and Prodano, 1972; Ameh *et al.*, 2024). Any land system may show categories of estates or rights in land. These rights are absolute or non-derivative interests and derivative interests. The absolute interests are those rights in land that confer upon their holders unconditional interests in perpetuity and in terms of quality, it is regarded as the most superior form of ownership (Iliyasu *et al.*, 2024).

The absolute interests confer absolute ownership rights and as such allow for the highest scope of proprietary decisions as to the use and management of land (Odoh *et al.*, 2024). The derivative interests on the other hand are interests that have been derived or carved out from the larger estates or superior estates (Udo, 2003). They are inferior in quality and include leaseholds, life interests, kola tenancy, mortgage, borrowed interests, pledges among others (Nwabueze, 1972; Sennuga *et al.*, 2024a). The land ownership structure in Nigeria is based on the absolute and derivative interests. The structure of ownership of these interests in the country has evolved through three major periods. These are the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods (Abdulahi *et al.*, 2024).

This appraisal will analyze the social implications of land ownership and agricultural policy changes, focusing on how these shifts impact social equity, community cohesion, and the rights of marginalized populations. By examining these dimensions, we can gain valuable insights into the complex interplay between agricultural practices and social outcomes, ultimately guiding more equitable and effective policy approaches in the future. Land ownership and agricultural policies are important in shaping economic opportunities and social structures across various regions (Odoh *et al.*, 2024). These policies carries a wide range of regulations and practices that govern how land is allocated, used, and managed, significantly affecting food security, rural development, and social equity (Sennuga *et al.*, 2024b).

Historically, land ownership has been a cornerstone of socio-economic status. In many societies, access to land has been closely tied to wealth and power, leading to profound inequalities. The World Bank (2015) highlights that unequal land distribution often results in economic disparity and social unrest, particularly in developing countries where a significant portion of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihood. Policies that favor large landowners can exacerbate these inequalities,

leaving smallholder farmers marginalized and without adequate support. In response to these challenges, many governments have implemented land reform initiatives aimed at redistributing land more equitably. According to Borras *et al.* (2012), such reforms have had varying degrees of success, often depending on the political will and capacity of institutions to enforce these changes effectively (Olaitan *et al.*, 2024).

Additionally, agricultural policies have evolved to address not only productivity but also sustainability and social inclusion. The Green Revolution, which emphasized high-yield crop varieties and chemical inputs, significantly increased food production in many regions but also brought about environmental and social challenges (Pingali, 2012). In recent years, there has been a shift towards policies that promote sustainable agriculture, emphasizing practices that enhance soil health, conserve water, and support biodiversity. According to Altieri (2018), such policies are vital for building resilience against climate change and ensuring long-term food security.

Furthermore, the social implications of land ownership and agricultural policies extend to gender dynamics. Women, who constitute a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce globally, often face barriers to land ownership and access to resources. Research by Doss (2018) indicates that policies aimed at securing land rights for women can lead to improved agricultural productivity and greater household well-being, thereby promoting social equity (Lai-Solaring *et al.*, 2024).

Lastly, the role of technology and access to financial resources is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in the effectiveness of agricultural policies. Initiatives that provide microfinance or cooperative models can empower smallholder farmers by enhancing their capacity to invest in technology and improve production methods. As noted by Morduch and Haley (2002), access to financial services is instrumental in reducing poverty and fostering economic growth in rural areas.

STRENGTHS OF CURRENT POLICIES

Recent agricultural policies have increasingly focused on promoting smallholder farmers and sustainable practices, leading to several positive social outcomes. One significant strength of these policies is their potential to enhance food security. Initiatives that support smallholder farmers, for example, can increase local food production, which is critical in regions facing food insecurity. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020), empowering small-scale farmers not only boosts agricultural productivity but also enhances the nutritional status of communities by increasing access to diverse and locally produced food. Moreover, policies aimed at promoting sustainable farming practices have been shown to have ecological and social benefits. Programs that encourage agro-ecology practices that work in harmony with local ecosystems—have gained traction. These methods not only improve resilience to climate change but also foster community engagement and knowledge-sharing among farmers (Altieri, 2018). As highlighted by Tscharntke *et al.* (2012), agro ecological practices can lead to increased biodiversity and improved soil health, which are crucial for long-term agricultural sustainability and community well-being.

Strength of current agricultural policies is the emphasis on inclusive governance. Many governments and organizations are beginning to involve local communities in the decision-making process regarding land use and agricultural practices. This participatory approach can enhance social equity by ensuring that the voices of marginalized groups are heard. For example, Borras and Franco (2018) note that inclusive land reform policies have the potential to reduce land tenure insecurity for smallholders, thereby empowering them and improving their livelihoods. Additionally, various policies aimed at improving access to financial resources for smallholder farmers are emerging.

Microfinance and cooperative models enable farmers to secure the capital needed for investments in their land and production methods. As highlighted by Morduch and Haley (2002), access to financial services can significantly enhance the ability of smallholders to invest in technology and improve productivity, leading to better economic outcomes.

Finally, there is a growing recognition of the role of women in agriculture, with many policies explicitly aimed at promoting gender equity in land ownership and agricultural practices. According to Doss (2018), empowering women through land rights and access to resources can lead to enhanced agricultural productivity and improved family well-being. Policies that support women's participation in agricultural decision-making not only foster social equity but also contribute to broader economic development (Sennuga *et al.*, 2024a).

WEAKNESSES AND CHALLENGES

Despite the strengths of current agricultural policies, significant weaknesses and challenges persist that undermine their effectiveness and exacerbate existing inequalities. One major issue is the persistent concentration of land ownership, which remains a barrier to equitable agricultural development. In many regions, a small number of landowners control a disproportionate amount of land, limiting access for smallholder farmers. According to Deininger and Xia (2016), such land concentration can lead to increased rural poverty and social stratification, as larger landowners often have better access to resources, credit, and markets. Moreover, many land reform initiatives have faced implementation challenges that hinder their success. For example, while countries like South Africa have made strides in land redistribution, the process has often been slow and fraught with political resistance. Borras *et al.* (2012) note that insufficient political commitment and weak institutional frameworks can impede the effective enforcement of land reform policies, resulting in incomplete or ineffective redistribution efforts. This lack of follow-through can leave marginalized communities without the support needed to utilize their newly acquired land productively.

Another significant challenge is the environmental impact of agricultural practices promoted under certain policies. The Green Revolution, while effective in increasing yields, has also contributed to soil degradation, water depletion, and loss of biodiversity (Pingali, 2012). The reliance on chemical inputs and monoculture practices has raised concerns about long-term sustainability. As Altieri (2018) points out, policies that prioritize short-term productivity gains over ecological health can undermine the very systems they aim to enhance. Henceforth, gender disparities in land ownership and agricultural decision-making remain a critical challenge. Women often face systemic barriers to accessing land, resources, and credit, which limits their ability to contribute fully to agricultural productivity. Doss (2018) emphasizes that without targeted policies to empower women, agricultural development efforts may fail to reach their full potential, as gender inequities lead to inefficiencies in resource use and lower overall productivity. Access to finance also poses a significant hurdle for smallholder farmers. Although initiatives exist to provide microfinance and credit, many farmers still struggle to obtain the financial resources needed for investment in their operations. Morduch and Haley (2002) argue that inadequate access to financial services can trap farmers in a cycle of poverty, limiting their capacity to adopt new technologies or improve their practices. This lack of capital can hinder their ability to respond to market demands and climate challenges effectively.

Finally, the global nature of agricultural markets presents challenges for local farmers. Price volatility, driven by global market fluctuations, can disproportionately impact smallholders who lack the

resources to absorb shocks. As noted by the FAO (2020), such volatility can lead to food insecurity and economic instability, further complicating efforts to create resilient agricultural systems.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The social implications of land ownership and agricultural policy changes are profound, affecting various aspects of community life, economic stability, and social equity. These implications can be viewed through multiple lenses, including community cohesion, migration patterns, food security, and social justice.

1. Community Cohesion and Social Capital

Land ownership is often linked to community identity and social cohesion. When land is equitably distributed, it fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment among local populations. Conversely, policies that disproportionately benefit large landowners can fracture communities and erode social ties. Borras and Franco (2018) argue that land grabbing, which often displaces smallholders, not only disrupts economic stability but also undermines the social fabric of communities. Displaced families may face social isolation and loss of cultural identity, which can lead to increased tensions and conflicts within and between communities.

2. Migration Patterns

Land ownership policies significantly influence migration patterns, particularly in rural areas. When agricultural policies favor industrial farming and large-scale land acquisitions, smallholder farmers may be forced to abandon their land due to economic pressures. This can lead to increased urban migration as displaced individuals seek better opportunities in cities. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2017), such migration often results in urban overcrowding and strain on city resources, exacerbating issues like housing shortages and unemployment. Furthermore, the loss of agricultural livelihoods can create cycles of poverty that are difficult to escape.

3. Food Security and Nutrition

The relationship between land ownership, agricultural policy, and food security is critical. Policies that empower smallholder farmers and promote sustainable agricultural practices can significantly enhance food security at both local and national levels. The FAO (2020) reports that smallholders produce a substantial portion of the world's food, particularly in developing countries. By improving access to land, resources, and markets for these farmers, policies can help ensure a more stable and diverse food supply. However, when policies favor large agribusinesses, smallholders may struggle to compete, leading to food insecurity and malnutrition in vulnerable populations (Pingali, 2012).

4. Gender Inequality and Empowerment

Gender dynamics play a crucial role in the social implications of land ownership and agricultural policies. Women, who are integral to agricultural production, often face systemic barriers to land ownership and access to resources. Doss (2018) emphasizes that securing land rights for women can lead to enhanced agricultural productivity and improved family well-being. When women have control over land, they are more likely to invest in their families' health and education, thereby fostering broader social development. However, without targeted policies to promote gender equity,

existing inequalities will persist, limiting the potential benefits of agricultural development for entire communities.

5. Social Justice and Human Rights

Land ownership and agricultural policies are deeply intertwined with issues of social justice and human rights. Displacement due to land acquisitions often violates the rights of indigenous and local communities, leading to social unrest and conflict. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) underscores the importance of recognizing indigenous land rights as fundamental to their cultural survival. Policies that disregard these rights can lead to resistance and protest, as affected communities fight to reclaim their land and assert their rights (Borras *et al.*, 2012).

EVALUATION

Evaluating the effectiveness of recent land ownership and agricultural policy changes requires a nuanced understanding of their impacts on social equity, economic sustainability, and community resilience. While many policies aim to address historical injustices and improve agricultural productivity, their effectiveness can vary widely based on local contexts, implementation strategies, and governance frameworks.

1. Assessing Policy Outcomes

One of the critical aspects of evaluating agricultural policies is assessing their outcomes regarding social equity. For instance, land reform initiatives designed to redistribute land to marginalized groups must be analyzed not just on paper but also in terms of their practical implications. While reforms in countries like Brazil have successfully increased land access for some smallholders, the degree to which these changes translate into meaningful economic improvement can differ greatly (Borras *et al.*, 2012). It is essential to monitor not only the quantity of land redistributed but also how beneficiaries utilize it and whether they receive adequate support, such as access to markets and credit.

2. Measuring Sustainability

The sustainability of agricultural practices promoted under current policies is another crucial area for evaluation. Many policies emphasize short-term productivity gains, which can lead to environmental degradation if not managed properly. For example, the push for high-yield crop varieties during the Green Revolution resulted in increased production but also caused soil depletion and water scarcity in several regions (Pingali, 2012). Evaluating whether current policies encourage practices that promote long-term ecological health is essential. Research indicates that integrating agro ecological practices can enhance both sustainability and productivity (Altieri, 2018). Policymakers must prioritize practices that protect the environment while also addressing food security.

3. Inclusivity and Participation

The effectiveness of agricultural policies is often contingent upon the level of inclusivity and community participation in decision-making processes. Policies that incorporate the voices of marginalized groups such as smallholder farmers and indigenous communities tend to be more successful. Studies show that participatory approaches not only enhance the legitimacy of policy decisions but also lead to better outcomes (Ravallion, 2016). Evaluating how well policies engage

local communities and whether they address the specific needs of various stakeholders is crucial for assessing their overall effectiveness.

4. Addressing Gender Inequality

Gender equity remains a significant challenge in agricultural policies. Evaluating whether recent policies effectively promote women's land rights and access to resources is critical for understanding their social implications. Evidence suggests that policies aimed at empowering women can lead to improved agricultural productivity and household welfare (Doss, 2018). However, many policies still fall short of addressing the systemic barriers women face in accessing land and resources. Policymakers must ensure that gender considerations are integrated into all agricultural policy frameworks to foster equity and inclusivity.

5. Adaptive Governance and Resilience

Finally, evaluating the adaptability of agricultural policies in response to emerging challenges, such as climate change and economic volatility, is vital. Resilient agricultural systems are those that can withstand shocks while maintaining productivity and social stability. Policies that incorporate adaptive management practices, such as promoting diversification in cropping systems, can enhance resilience (FAO, 2020). Regular evaluations that consider changing environmental and social conditions will be essential for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of agricultural policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Political Economy of Agriculture and Land Ownership

The political economy of agriculture and land ownership offers a crucial framework for examining how land ownership structures and agricultural policies are shaped by political and economic power dynamics. At its core, this perspective suggests that agricultural and land policies are not simply technical decisions about resource allocation but are deeply influenced by the economic interests of powerful stakeholders and by broader social hierarchies. Historically, land has been a key source of wealth and social power, with ownership patterns often reflecting—and reinforcing—existing social stratifications. In many countries, particularly in regions with colonial histories, land ownership patterns were initially shaped to benefit colonial or local elites, creating systems of entrenched inequality that continue to influence modern land policies (Smith, 2017; Jones & Patel, 2020). These historical inequalities have, over time, been formalized and intensified by economic policies that favour large landowners and agribusiness over smallholder farmers, community landholders, and marginalized groups. By concentrating land ownership and capital within a small segment of society, these policies create barriers to equitable economic development and social mobility, which, as the political economy perspective shows, are not merely side effects of policy but intended outcomes that maintain existing power structures (Harvey, 2003; Bernstein, 2010).

In today's globalized economy, the political economy perspective is particularly relevant in analyzing how neoliberal economic policies—such as market liberalization, deregulation, and privatization—are transforming land ownership and agricultural production. These policies are often promoted by international financial institutions and adopted by governments aiming to increase economic efficiency, integrate into global markets, and attract foreign investment. However, while these policies

may drive growth in certain sectors, they often disproportionately benefit large-scale agribusinesses and landowners, marginalizing smallholder farmers who lack access to comparable resources, technology, and market connections (McMichael, 2012). Large agribusinesses and their advocates typically exert significant influence over agricultural policy, lobbying for subsidies, tax breaks, and regulatory changes that facilitate land consolidation, mechanization, and export-oriented farming. The political economy framework suggests that these policy choices are not neutral but are instead designed to serve the interests of influential corporate actors and wealthy landowners who stand to gain from policies that prioritize productivity and profitability over social equity (Borras *et al.*, 2009). In regions where agriculture remains central to both the economy and social life, this shift has profound implications for community structure, food security, and social inequality, all of which are critical areas of focus in understanding the social implications of these policies.

Applying this perspective to the social implications of land ownership and agricultural policy changes allows for a nuanced analysis of how these policies impact rural communities in tangible and often detrimental ways. For smallholder farmers, who constitute a significant portion of the agricultural workforce in many regions, policies that favour large-scale agribusiness and land consolidation can lead to economic displacement and landlessness. When land ownership is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, smallholders face limited options: they may be forced to sell or lease their land to large agribusinesses or become dependent on temporary or informal labour arrangements that offer little economic stability. This displacement from land not only affects the livelihoods of these farmers but also erodes rural social structures and diminishes community resilience.

Smallholder farmers, who are often highly invested in the sustainable management of their land, play an essential role in maintaining food security and environmental health through diversified farming practices. However, when their land is absorbed by agribusinesses focused on monoculture and high-yield crops, the local agricultural landscape shifts toward less ecologically diverse and more environmentally taxing practices, which can lead to long-term soil degradation, water scarcity, and loss of biodiversity (Shiva, 2016). The political economy framework thus reveals how these changes, though presented as necessary for economic growth, have profound social and environmental costs that are often borne disproportionately by marginalized communities.

The political economy of agriculture also illuminates how neoliberal policies driven by global economic pressures can undermine the autonomy of local communities and weaken traditional land governance structures. Many rural areas have historically relied on communal or customary land ownership practices that prioritize community cohesion, collective resource management, and local ecological knowledge. However, as governments adopt policies that favour private land ownership and corporate investment, these communal land systems are often disrupted. Privatization policies encourage the formalization of land rights in ways that benefit those who can afford the legal and administrative costs of acquiring formal titles—typically wealthier, more politically connected individuals or corporations. Smallholders and marginalized groups, who may lack the financial means to secure formal property rights, often find themselves at a disadvantage in this privatized land market, which reduces their control over land use and resources (Moyo, 2016).

By prioritizing private ownership, these policies limit the capacity of rural communities to govern their land according to local values and needs, instead placing decision-making power in the hands of external corporate and political actors. This erosion of local governance not only weakens community cohesion but also undermines the social capital and traditional knowledge systems that support sustainable land use practices. The political economy framework thus helps to contextualize these changes as part of a broader shift in control over land and resources from local communities to

powerful external actors, driven by policy decisions that prioritize economic objectives over social and environmental considerations.

Further, the political economy perspective highlights the role of power dynamics in shaping who benefits from agricultural policy changes and who is left behind. In many developing regions, agricultural and land policies are influenced by powerful agribusiness lobbies, corporate investors, and political elites who have a vested interest in maintaining control over land and agricultural markets. These actors advocate for policies that provide favourable conditions for large-scale agriculture, such as subsidies for export crops, tax breaks for agribusinesses, and relaxed regulations on land acquisitions. These policies are frequently framed as essential for economic growth, modernization, and food security, but they often exacerbate social inequalities by limiting opportunities for smallholder farmers and marginalized groups to participate in the agricultural economy on equitable terms.

For instance, in India, recent agricultural reforms aimed at deregulating crop pricing and allowing corporate investment in farming have sparked protests among farmers who fear that these changes will make them vulnerable to exploitation by large corporations (Narayanan, 2021). This case illustrates how policies that ostensibly aim to promote efficiency and modernization can instead reinforce existing power imbalances, concentrating wealth and resources within a small segment of society while leaving rural communities with fewer resources and reduced bargaining power. The political economy framework thus underscores the need to consider whose interests are being served by these policies and to critically assess the social and economic trade-offs involved.

Lastly, the political economy of agriculture provides an important lens for understanding the environmental dimensions of agricultural policy changes and their social impacts. As policies increasingly promote high-yield, export-oriented agriculture, the environmental costs of intensive farming practices are often overlooked. Large-scale, industrialized farming frequently leads to soil degradation, water pollution, and loss of biodiversity, which can reduce the long-term productivity of agricultural land and threaten the livelihoods of rural communities that depend on these resources (Moyo, 2016).

Smallholder farmers, who often practice more diverse and ecologically balanced forms of agriculture, are particularly vulnerable to these environmental impacts, as they may lack the resources to adapt to degraded soils or water shortages. In this way, the environmental degradation caused by industrial agriculture disproportionately affects marginalized communities, contributing to cycles of poverty, displacement, and food insecurity. The political economy framework reveals how these environmental challenges are not simply unintended consequences of policy but are the result of prioritizing short-term economic gains and productivity over sustainable land use and rural well-being. By linking environmental degradation to policy-driven economic imperatives, this perspective highlights the need for agricultural policies that support not only economic growth but also environmental sustainability and social equity (Narayanan, 2021).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study examines how changes in land ownership structures and agricultural policies affect social outcomes within rural communities. In this context, land ownership structures and agricultural policies are the primary independent variables, while various intervening variables—such as access to resources, governance, and social networks—mediate the effects of these independent variables on the dependent variable, which is the social implications of these changes in

rural communities. This framework helps to structure the analysis by linking policy shifts and ownership dynamics to specific social, economic, and environmental impacts.

Independent Variables

1. Land Ownership Structures:

- This variable refers to the distribution and concentration of land ownership within rural communities, including who controls the land (e.g., smallholders vs. large agribusiness) and the types of tenure systems in place (e.g., communal ownership, private ownership, or state-controlled land).
- **Operational Definition:** Land ownership structures can be measured by indicators such as land size distribution, percentage of land owned by smallholders versus large landowners, prevalence of communal versus private ownership, and the extent of land consolidation.
- **Expected Influence:** Changes in land ownership, particularly the concentration of land in the hands of a few large entities, are expected to impact social structures by limiting smallholders' access to land, reducing community autonomy, and influencing migration patterns. This concentration can also affect local income distribution and economic opportunity, as those with greater land control often dominate agricultural productivity and profits.

2. Agricultural Policies:

- This variable encompasses government policies affecting agriculture, including land reform initiatives, subsidies, market liberalization, crop pricing, and support for large-scale agribusinesses versus smallholder farms.
- **Operational Definition:** Agricultural policies can be analyzed based on policy documents, levels of subsidies or incentives directed to agribusiness versus smallholders, the degree of deregulation, and the focus on export-oriented crops versus local food security.
- **Expected Influence:** Policies that favour large-scale agriculture, deregulation, and export-oriented production are likely to disproportionately benefit large agribusinesses, while potentially marginalizing smallholder farmers. These policies may also lead to environmental degradation, affect food security, and disrupt social structures by pushing smallholders off their land, thereby forcing them to migrate to urban areas in search of employment.

Intervening Variables

Intervening variables mediate the relationship between the independent variables (land ownership structures and agricultural policies) and the dependent variable (social implications in rural communities). These factors can amplify or mitigate the impact of policy and ownership changes on rural society.

1. **Access to Resources:**

- This variable includes access to financial resources (such as credit and subsidies), agricultural inputs (like seeds, tools, and fertilizers), and market access (both local and international).
- **Influence on Dependent Variable:** Access to resources can determine whether smallholder farmers and rural communities can adapt to changes in land ownership and agricultural policies. For instance, smallholders with better access to credit and agricultural inputs may better withstand the pressures of land concentration and competitive agricultural markets, while those without access may face greater economic hardship, leading to rural-urban migration and a decline in community resilience.

2. **Community Governance and Social Networks:**

- This variable involves the level of social capital and governance structures within rural communities, including communal decision-making, local governance practices, and social networks that facilitate collective action and resource sharing.
- **Influence on Dependent Variable:** Strong governance and social networks can help communities respond more effectively to policy changes and support collective adaptation strategies. For example, communities with high social cohesion and strong local governance may be better able to manage common resources, negotiate fair land deals, or collectively resist unfavourable policies. Conversely, weak governance structures and fragmented social networks may make communities more vulnerable to the negative impacts of land ownership concentration and agricultural policy shifts.

3. **Environmental Sustainability and Resource Degradation:**

- This variable refers to the condition of natural resources (e.g., soil, water, biodiversity) and the impact of agricultural practices on environmental health.
- **Influence on Dependent Variable:** Environmental degradation can exacerbate the social impacts of land ownership and policy changes, especially for rural communities dependent on natural resources for agriculture. If policies encourage intensive, export-oriented farming, the resulting resource depletion may undermine the livelihoods of smallholders who rely on local ecosystems. Sustainable practices, by contrast, may help mitigate these effects, preserving resources that are essential for community stability and resilience.

4. **Rural-Urban Migration:**

- This variable considers the demographic shifts resulting from land and agricultural policy changes, particularly the migration of smallholder farmers and rural youth to urban areas.
- **Influence on Dependent Variable:** Policies and ownership changes that disadvantage smallholders often lead to migration, which weakens rural social structures by reducing the rural labour force, disrupting family and community networks, and diminishing local agricultural knowledge. This migration can have

profound social impacts, including the erosion of cultural ties and increased pressures on urban infrastructure, thereby linking rural and urban socioeconomic dynamics.

Dependent Variable

Social Implications in Rural Communities:

- The dependent variable in this study is the set of social consequences resulting from changes in land ownership structures and agricultural policies. These social implications encompass a variety of outcomes, including economic inequality, food security, community cohesion, demographic shifts, and environmental sustainability.
- **Operational Definition:** Social implications can be measured through indicators such as income inequality, levels of poverty and unemployment, rates of rural-urban migration, levels of social cohesion (e.g., trust and collective action), and environmental indicators like soil health and water availability.
- **Expected Outcomes:** The expected outcomes will vary depending on the direction and nature of the independent variables and the mitigating or exacerbating effects of the intervening variables. For instance, policies favouring agribusiness are likely to increase income inequality, displace smallholder farmers, and contribute to rural poverty, especially if access to resources and local governance structures are weak. Additionally, these outcomes may create ripple effects, such as greater rural-urban migration, weakened community networks, and environmental degradation, which collectively alter the social fabric of rural communities.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between land ownership and agricultural policies significantly impacts social equity, economic sustainability, and community resilience. As challenges like food insecurity and climate change intensify, it's vital to assess how these policies are structured and implemented.

Recent shifts aimed at empowering smallholder farmers and promoting sustainable practices show promise in addressing historical injustices and enhancing food security. However, their success depends on engaging local communities and meeting the needs of marginalized populations. Evaluating these policies is crucial to understand their real-world effects and ensure equitable development. Furthermore, the implications extend to gender equality and environmental sustainability. Ensuring women's rights to land and resources is not just a social justice issue but essential for improving agricultural productivity. Policies should promote inclusivity, allowing marginalized voices to shape decision-making.

Challenges remain, including land concentration and environmental degradation. Policymakers must adopt adaptive governance that prioritizes resilience, enabling agricultural systems to thrive amid change. Lastly, evaluating land ownership and agricultural policies is vital for fostering inclusive agricultural development. By prioritizing equity, sustainability, and community engagement, we can create a just and resilient agricultural landscape for all stakeholders.

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