



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

International Journal of Advanced Research

**Publisher's Name: Jana Publication and Research
LLP**

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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-59495

Title: Customary Norms and Differentiated Access to Land: The Case of Women in Keibla (Central-Western Côte d'Ivoire).

Recommendation:

Accept with Minor Revisions.....

Rating	Excel .	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	✓			
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity		✓		
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer Comment:

The manuscript examines how customary norms shape women's access to land and influence their economic activities and participation in village governance in Keibla, Côte d'Ivoire. Its principal strength lies in connecting the everyday mechanisms of land allocation, particularly lineage authority and male-mediated access, with the practical consequences for women's agricultural activities and social position. The study also benefits from combining household-level survey data with interviews and observations. The discussion is generally well organised, moving from customary land governance to women's access strategies and their economic and political consequences. A few specific clarifications would strengthen the paper's empirical precision and ensure that its conclusions remain closely aligned with the evidence presented.

First, the quantitative results require clarification concerning the sample and the denominators used to calculate the reported percentages. Section 1.3 states that the quantitative component includes 100 respondents selected through purposive sampling. However, Section II.1.2 reports that land sales account for 56.4% of access arrangements, rentals for 18.7%, and planter-share arrangements for 24.9%. These figures do not correspond to whole-number counts out of 100 respondents. Similarly, the percentages in Section II.2.2—55.6% for social mediation, 33.3% for marriage, and 11.1% for land development—

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appear to use a different denominator. The authors should specify whether respondents could report multiple answers, whether the percentages refer to responses rather than individual respondents, and how the denominators were calculated. A short note beneath each figure would be sufficient. This would help readers interpret the results without requiring additional statistical analysis.

Second, the manuscript would benefit from a clearer distinction between general land-access patterns in Keibla and the specific position of women. The pie chart in Section II.1.2 presents the overall modes of access to land, including sales, rentals, and planter-share arrangements. The accompanying discussion sometimes moves from these general figures to conclusions about women and migrants without showing how the categories are distributed across these groups. The authors should clarify whether the survey collected sex-disaggregated information on access arrangements. If such information is available, a brief comparison would make the gender argument more precise. If it is not available, the discussion should identify these percentages as village-level findings and rely on the interviews to explain how women experience the different arrangements.

Third, the sampling procedure should be described a little more precisely. Section 1.3 explains that the 100 survey respondents were selected purposively according to land tenure status, mode of access, and duration of settlement, while the qualitative sample comprised ten key actors: four members of the village leadership, three lineage heads, and three leaders of women's associations. This information is useful, but the manuscript should clarify whether the 100 survey respondents included both men and women, approximately how many women were interviewed through the questionnaire, and how the respondents were distributed across the stated selection criteria. Since the paper focuses specifically on women's land rights, the gender composition of the survey sample is particularly important. The authors should also avoid describing the survey as statistically representative, as the manuscript itself correctly identifies the sampling strategy as purposive.

Fourth, the analysis of customary authority in Section II.1.1 provides a useful account of lineage-based land management, the role of the recognised lineage manager, and the unequal position of women within this system. However, the manuscript states that women's access to land is recognised in customary practice while also arguing that women are generally excluded from inheritance and cannot exercise full land rights independently. These claims could be reconciled more clearly by distinguishing between access to use land, control over its allocation, and inheritance or ownership rights. The authors could make this distinction explicit when discussing women's access through fathers, husbands, and brothers.

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This would sharpen the central argument that women may be permitted to cultivate land without acquiring secure or autonomous rights over it.

Fifth, the manuscript makes an important argument in Section II.3.2 that limited land rights weaken women's participation in village governance, producing a cycle in which women's lack of land reduces their decision-making authority and their limited political voice, in turn, makes it harder to claim land rights. The discussion is persuasive when it draws on the reported statements that women have limited opportunities to speak in public and that decisions about land remain largely in male hands. However, the claim that women's participation is "never" decision-making and remains confined to consultative or symbolic roles is quite categorical. The authors should clarify whether this conclusion is based on the interviews conducted in Keibla or whether it describes a wider customary pattern. A more precise formulation grounded in the evidence collected would preserve the argument while avoiding a generalisation beyond the study site.

Sixth, the discussion of the relationship between land insecurity and women's economic activities in Section II.3.1 could be made more specific through a closer connection between the interview evidence and the conclusions. The testimony of the women's association concerning the inability to establish a maize field because of a shortage of available land provides a concrete example of how land access constrains collective agricultural activity. The quotation about the possibility of a younger brother reclaiming land used by a woman similarly illustrates insecurity of tenure. These examples are valuable, but the manuscript moves from them to broader claims about low profitability, restricted investment, and reduced income without presenting direct quantitative measures of these outcomes. The authors should distinguish between consequences directly reported by participants and consequences inferred from the reported insecurity. No additional statistical model is necessary; clearer wording and a closer interpretation of the existing evidence would be sufficient.

Seventh, the discussion in Section III could be connected more directly to the specific findings from Keibla. The authors draw on several scholars to discuss customary governance, gender inequality, and the negotiation of land rights. This literature is relevant, but some paragraphs read primarily as summaries of existing scholarship, with only a brief statement that the findings from Keibla confirm the argument. The discussion would be stronger if each subsection identified one or two precise findings that support, qualify, or extend the literature. For example, the reported shift towards land sales and rental arrangements could be connected to the continued importance of lineage authority, showing how market-based access and customary control coexist rather than necessarily replacing one another. Likewise, the

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reliance on male relatives for land access could be used to explain how women negotiate within customary institutions without necessarily changing the underlying distribution of authority. Finally, the manuscript requires a focused editorial and bibliographic review. The title and abstract are relevant to the study, but the English abstract contains numerous spacing errors, including “customary norms,” “household survey,” and “women’s success.” Similar spacing and punctuation problems occur throughout the text. The headings and numbering also require consistency: for example, “1.2. Espace d’étude” contains a typographical error, and the methodology subsections alternate between different numbering styles. The reference list should be checked carefully for complete and consistent bibliographic details. Several works cited in the discussion, including Colin (2019), Boone (2023), Lavigne Delville (2021), Peters (2020), Berry (2022), Djurfeldt (2020), Toulmin (2022), Kairaba (2020), Whitehead and Tsikata (2021), Ribot (2019), and Perry (2023), should be verified against the reference list to ensure that the publication details are accurate and that every in-text citation corresponds to a complete entry. The authors should also check that the sources listed in the bibliography are actually cited in the manuscript.

Overall, the manuscript presents a useful case study of the relationship between customary land allocation, gender inequality, and local governance in Keibla. Its main contribution is the demonstration that women’s access to land often depends on negotiated and mediated arrangements rather than secure, autonomous rights, with implications for both agricultural activity and participation in local decision-making. The paper does not require major restructuring. Clarifying the quantitative denominators, specifying the composition of the survey sample, distinguishing land use from ownership and control, and calibrating a few claims to the evidence would substantially improve the precision and credibility of the findings.

Final Recommendation

Decision: Accepted with minor revisions.