

## WOMEN AND THE LAND REFORM PROGRAMME IN ZIMBABWE

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### Introduction

*Women and access to land are some of the most contentious issues in the agrarian reform in Zimbabwe. Since time immemorial women in Zimbabwe have lacked access to and control of land and its benefits (Mgugu, 2002). Men have had dominance over land, and its implications on women were not considered. However the disparities between men and women in land ownership and control have increasingly been realised. Civil society and other stakeholders have been lobbying for equal opportunity to be awarded to women. Women are an essential part of rural and agricultural development and should be major beneficiaries in accessing land. Therefore there is a growing need to understand whether or not women have been empowered by the land redistribution programme.*

The government has attempted to put in place policies that are intended to rectify gender imbalances in key sectors. Examples of the policies include:

1. The amendment of the Legal Age of Majority Act, which conferred majority status on women.
2. Section 5.6 of the ZIMPREST stipulates that programmes would be launched to specifically promote income earning and business opportunities for women (Mgugu 2002).
3. The Land Reform and Resettlement Programme-Phase II of 1998 committed government to resettle people 'in a gender sensitive manner' (GoZ 1998).

However the moves seem not to have achieved any change as women continue to be marginalised. For instance, under the fast track land resettlement programme, land continued to be registered in the husbands' names though government had promised joint registration. This excludes women from land ownership (Mgugu 2002). Thus it ap-

pears that despite the government's efforts, its policies on women's empowerment have not done enough to address the gender inequality in terms of access to land. Civil society has also contributed through advocacy work and projects aimed at promoting awareness and empowerment of women. However the efforts have proved to be inadequate because they lack political back up. The Agrarian Reform and Development Project's study on agrarian reform and empowerment of rural communities has observed that women have remained marginalised in the current land reform programme.

The paper seeks to report on the women's access to land under the fast track land redistribution programme in Zimbabwe. The first section provides background information on women's access to land since the pre-colonial era up to the 1980s. This gives a comprehensive overview on how the status of women in accessing land has evolved over time. The next section gives a brief summary of the Agrarian Reform and Development Project (ARDP), its aims and what it has done so far. The third section discusses the study findings on the 'agrarian reform and women's empowerment' survey. The final part presents the conclusion and recommendations.

### Women and land: A brief History

In pre-colonial times in Zimbabwe, men and women had specific roles in the household and in the community. The traditional customs and values were supportive of women and they recognised and acknowledged women's roles in agriculture, (Hausmann, n.d.). In terms of land, women were allocated their own pieces of land for supplementary crops. However the family land and that 'women's land' belonged to the husband. The colonial administration affected the status of men and women in different

ways. The migration of men to urban areas to seek employment left women with a disproportionate workload. They now had to carry out their tasks as well as fill in for their husbands. In the 'tribal trust lands' where they were moved to, they could no longer have 'women's land' due to small plots and overcrowding.

The legal instruments introduced by the colonial government worsened the plight of women. The laws gave all the land rights to men and did not recognise women especially married women. The Land Tenure Act of 1969 gave the widows and divorced women a plot half the size of a family plot but they still could not inherit land or give it to their children, (Hausmann n.d.).

*...despite the government's efforts, its policies on women's empowerment have not done enough .....*

After independence, the Communal Lands Act of 1982 did little to improve the status of women. Married women had secondary land rights, as their husbands were the ones entitled to the land. Divorced women had no rights to continue using the land they had been working on. This was the same for widows unless there was a will stating that they should inherit the land. Unmarried daughters were given land temporarily if it was available as it was assumed that they would get married and move to their husbands' land, (Hausmann, n.d.).

Under the post-independence land resettlement programme in the 1980s, land permits were issued mainly in

the names of the men. This automatically meant that the affected women could not be co-owners of the land. However in most cases, women assumed that they were co-owners since they did most of the farm work. Women in the resettlement areas were thus not different from those in the communal areas in terms of their land ownership status. Moves were made to resettle women particularly widows and divorcees but the numbers were insignificant, (Batezat and Mwalo 1989). By virtue of holding the land permit, men had access to formal credit and input services as well as income earned from commercially marketed crops. Married women were usually disadvantaged, as they sometimes had no access to profits earned from crops that they had laboured to produce.

The lack of women's access to land has also been attributed to their lack of decision-making powers. The dominant patriarchal attitudes and the legal framework have contributed to denying women that right. On the other hand, women are still ignorant of the positive laws that have been passed. There is also lack of political will and there are few women in decision making at various levels to influence the implementation of these laws (Southern African Economist, 1995).

It is against this backdrop that the Agrarian Reform and Development Project was launched.

It sought to investigate and understand the impact of the gender sensitive policies on the status of women particularly in accessing land under the land redistribution programme.

.....Continued on page 10



Continued from page 8  
**The Agrarian Reform and Development Project**

The Agrarian Reform and Development Project (ARDP) 2002-2004 is a special project focusing on agrarian reform and its developmental needs, including gender equity. It is housed under the Department of Agrarian and Labour Studies of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Zimbabwe. The study will be essentially useful to the following areas:

1. Policy research, studies and publications on agrarian reform, sustainable resource management and empowerment of rural communities, particularly women
2. Policy dialogue and development
3. Lobby and advocacy

As noted, one of the major aims of the project was to examine whether gender streamlining was considered in the land reform programme. It also sought to determine the extent to which rural communities have been empowered by the programme particularly women. To obtain this information, the ARDP conducted field surveys and studies in communal and resettlement areas in rural Zimbabwe between August and December 2002. The surveys and studies were based on the theme "Land Reform and Community Empowerment". Provinces covered were Masvingo, Midlands, Matebeleland South, Mashonaland Central and Mashonaland East. This wide distribution of study areas was meant to get a comprehensive view from different agricultural regions and farming categories in different areas of the country. The following discussion provides an insight from the study on gender and women's empowerment under the fast track land resettlement programme.

## Study Findings

### a) Beneficiaries and benefits from a gender perspective

Farmers were resettled in different resettlement models depending on qualifications, resource endowment and differing capacities to manage farming, (GoZ 1998). Under the A2 model each household was allocated one consolidated

farm unit and basic services and infrastructure were provided for the scheme. The targeted group was generally the financially well-endowed, experienced and qualified farmers who were resettled to practise commercial farming. Under A1 model families have individual ownership of arable and residential land and share village facilities such as water, roads and grazing.

*....it is ex-combatants and those married to foreign husbands who own land in their own capacity*

The targeted group was the poor and landless households from communal areas, (GoZ 1998). This model was also aimed at decongesting the rural areas. Source: survey results 2002

own right. Generally the land ownership status of married women in the new resettlement areas is not different from those in communal and old resettlement areas. The study noted that among the married females, it is ex-combatants and those married to foreign husbands who own land in their own capacity. The majority of married women assume that they are automatically co-plot holders with their husbands, even if they are not jointly registered. In reality, it was observed during registration that land was being registered in the husbands' names thus, unbeknown to them, women lost out on land ownership. The study also noted that the status of married women was more compromised because they are not offered protection in the case of divorce or the death of the spouse.

Of the single women who were allo-

**Table.** Beneficiaries of land by farming model and gender

	Model A2 (n=41)	Model A1 (n=236)
	%	%
Men	95.12	85.17
Women	4.88	14.83
Total	100	100
Women	(n=2)	(n=35)
Married	50	20.00
Single	50	80.00
Total	100	100

Table 1 illustrates that there were major variations between men and women who got access to land under the fast track land resettlement programme. The male respondents who own land comprise over 95% of model A2 farmers whilst women are less than 5%.

In the A1 scheme, over 85% of the respondents were male landowners and women plott holders are less than 15% of the farmers. This shows the grim extent to which women have been sidelined in the land allocation. Married women, as shown in table 1, comprise 20% of women landowners signifying that not many married women got land in their

cated land in the study areas, 71% of them are widowed, 25% are divorced and the rest were never married. War veterans form the largest component of those who were never married. Taking war veterans as a separate

group, It was noted that female members are also marginalised. Women comprise 20% of the war veterans who were allocated land in the study areas.

To page 11



Other studies found out that Zimbabwean women felt that they were left out of the land redistribution exercise despite claims by the government that everyone was entitled to land. The women allege that the registration exercise was unclear, not transparent and open to abuse especially at the lowest levels. Chief Rushinga, for instance, stated that no woman would be allocated land in his area (Daily News, 05/07/99). Such cases support the view that women are indeed being marginalised at the grassroots level and reveal the deviations between policy and practice.

Women who got land generally feel that they have benefited especially the fertile land and larger grazing area for their livestock. They hope for a normal rainy season so that they can produce more and be able to feed their families. These sentiments were expressed mainly by female-headed households, which have few livelihood sources. On the other hand, some say that they have not yet benefited anything as their crops were affected by drought and some had not started farming. An insignificant 3% managed to acquire assets especially for farming to boost their productivity and output from last season's income earned from commercially marketed crops.

### **b) Agricultural Productivity in relation to gender**

The 2001-2002 farming season was affected by drought especially in the drier natural regions IV and V. Crops in the Midlands, Masvingo and Matabeleland regions were the most affected that most farmers produced little or nothing at all. Those who managed to harvest some grain generally did not sell any, as household food security was the priority. The drought distorted the survey results because it was not a normal farming season.

The average planted area for the maize crop in the A1 study areas is 5 acres. The study noted that 37% of male farmers and 34% of female farmers cultivated above this average. The high, closely similar acreage may be attributed to the fact that maize is a staple crop and all farmers would want to

### *affecting women's productivity in resettlement areas is lack of basic infrastructure such as clean water and medical centres*

grow more to enhance their food security. In the A2 study areas, the average planted area for the maize crop is 11 acres. The majority of A2 farmers, close to 90%, planted below that average. It seems most A2 farmers have not yet embarked on large-scale intensive farming except for Mashonaland Central farmers who have an average of 54 acres. Generally the A2 farmers' productivity does not significantly differ from those in A1 farmers. The results question the validity of the prerequisites that were considered in the land allocation and the status of the A2 model beneficiaries.

Crops grown were mainly maize and groundnuts, with other crops being grown in particular provinces. Wheat and tobacco were grown in Mashonaland East and cotton was mostly grown in Mashonaland Central. Of the 34% of A1 farmers in Mashonaland Central who produce cotton, 10% of them are women. In Mashonaland East 43% of the farmers are involved in wheat production and all of them are males. Still in Mashonaland East, 26% of the farmers are tobacco growers with 17% of them being female. Generally very few women are involved in cash crop production. This may be explained by lack of resources that need to be invested in growing those crops. On the other hand, since the season was affected by drought it may have affected their cash crop production as most resources were channelled to food crops thus nothing conclusive can be derived from the results.

The productivity of men and women was almost similar for the maize crop with men producing on average 485kg/acre and women's average yield being 439kg/acre. The productivity of women was lower than that of their male counterparts, for cash and other supplementary crops. The variations in productivity were mainly linked to fewer means of production on the part of women. Up to 60% of

female farmers have less than the average 3 basic farming implements in the resettlement areas. Seed and fertiliser were also difficult to acquire because they were not readily available and expensive. The process of acquiring these inputs was rigorous and exhaustive resulting in more women giving up. IFPRI (2000) confirms that men have greater access to non-household labour and fertiliser for their plots than do women. Not surprisingly then, generally farm plots owned by women have lower yields than those controlled by men. It was noted that 14% of both male and female farmers used fertiliser though there were variations in the amounts used.

Generally the main farming problem was lack of draught power. Close to 54% of women and 31% of male A1 farmers do not have cattle which form the main source of draught power for rural farmers. Although men have the same problem it impacts more on women for they have fewer livelihood means with agriculture being the main source of livelihood. Though women have other supplementary income sources including horticulture, vegetable vending, handicraft, hiring out labour and remittances, these are generally less lucrative. This is in comparison with men who engage in more rewarding income generating activities like brick moulding, construction, carpentry and welding.

Another problem, affecting women's productivity in resettlement areas is lack of basic infrastructure such as clean water and medical centres. Women travel long distances to fetch water or visit medical centres. This limits the time allocated to farming activities. The study clearly noted that lack of material means of production for agriculture, infrastructure and other off farm activities is depriving women from gaining more from land and its resources. Therefore it is essential that the means of production be made accessible to them to uplift the status of women.



...From page 10

Other studies also reveal that female war veterans suffered the same plight as ordinary women. Out of 25 569, war veteran families resettled, only 2211 were female headed households (Mgugu, 2002). Therefore, it was noted that women were still discriminated even under special circumstances. Marginalisation of women is saddening considering that 52% of the national population are women and 86% of them are dependent on land (Mgugu, 2002). The population figures imply that, women should have gained much more from the programme than they did.

### c) Governance issues and management of resources

The study observed that there is rampant destruction of natural resources in the resettlement areas. The new settlers explain that they need to clear some vegetation for their residential stands and farming plots. Cutting down of trees is clear as vast areas have been cleared of trees. Apparently the trees are used for firewood, as it is the only source of energy in virtually all the survey areas. Because of their role as household providers, women are responsible for collecting firewood. As a result they are found to cut more trees than men.

***Women are not being adequately and appropriately represented in the decision making structures that set and enforce local land use, resource use and management policies***

They see the large expanse of forests where they were resettled as a major benefit, as they no longer have to walk for long distance in search of firewood. A few farmers confessed that they are selling firewood as a source of income thus contributing to the destruction of trees. Failure to address the problem of environmental degradation will repli-

cate the irreparable natural resource damage like in the communal areas. Women will start facing the same firewood shortages and long distance burdens that they used to have in the communal areas. Other forms of land degradation, which were noticed in the survey, are stream bank cultivation and veldt fires.

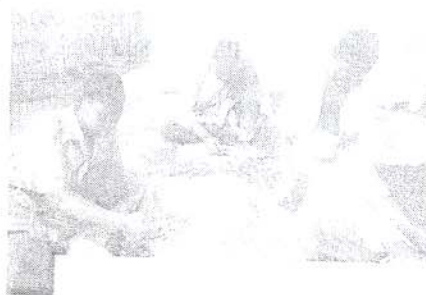
The former is mostly done by farmers who have vegetable gardens close to rivers for easy access to the water source. Generally the utilization of natural resources being done in the new resettlement areas is not sustainable. Without appropriate policy intervention, the resettlement programme will only serve to erode any empowerment and condemn the 'beneficiaries' to even more poverty.

The environmental degradation in the resettlement areas is mainly attributed to the lack of environmental policy enforcement by the local authorities. Resettled farmers are violating the rules and nothing is being done to punish the offenders. The offenders do so with the confidence that there is no one to enforce the rules or are ignorant of the rules. There is confusion on which role each party should play in the management of natural resources. This is because there are no distinctions between government ministries and departments, traditional leaders and party leaders' responsibilities. However some farmers strongly feel that it is the duty of the ruling party to manage resources. From what the study observed, the ruling party is not being effective in that endeavor. Generally the various departments and committees are male-dominated. This prevents the consideration of women's issues concerning their use of natural resources and possible lasting solutions to the damage being done.

The issue of resource utilization and management as well as environmental degradation also takes a gender dimension. Women are not being adequately and appropriately represented in the decision making structures that set and enforce local land use, resource use and management policies. These structures include Ward and Village Committees. Women's positions with regards to pol-

icy contributions are generally insignificant and not influential. These include posts such as village health workers and committee members of clubs and churches. The study observed that only 8% of women are village development committee chairpersons and ward coordinators. Generally men believe women should be holders of minor and household roles that do not have anything to do with the management of natural resources. The lack of consideration of gender implications in decision-making roles is rooted in the cultural context of the people (Mgugu 2002). It has been realized that since most decision-makers in Zimbabwe are men, this has led to the failure of taking women's strategic interests in decision making on board.

.....To page 13



*...the financially well-endowed, experienced and qualified farmers who were resettled to practise commercial farming*



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Continued from page 12

#### d) Women and HIV/AIDS

The impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on both national development and household economies has compounded a whole range of challenges surrounding poverty and inequality. FAO (2002). It has seriously depleted human resources as it has affected the young and most productive people. According to Kwaramba (2002) the greatest number of HIV/AIDS cases in Zimbabwe is found in the 20-39 age bracket. Apparently that same economically active group of 20-49 years, according to the study, gained the most land from the land reform programme. It is the one that has the responsibility of making the whole exercise successful and sustainable. However the land policy ignored the potential impact of the epidemic on the land reform programme and particularly on rural women. The pandemic has the potential to erode the benefits of the programme and only serve to push the farmers into deeper poverty if no measures are taken to address it. On the household front, HIV/AIDS has introduced adverse effects on income, labour and food security.

The study sought to find out the most problematic diseases in the new resettlement areas. Malaria, HIV/AIDS, TB and diarrhoea and cholera were the most prevalent. HIV/AIDS and TB were mentioned by over 90% of the respondents in the Mashonaland East province. This shows that the resettlement areas have not been spared by the pandemic. However in Mashonaland Central, Masvingo and Matabeleland South provinces it was hardly mentioned at all. Generally 10% of the AI farmers stated that HIV/AIDS has been one of the diseases that have mostly affected their areas. Growing evidence has shown that the effects of the pandemic have been felt almost everywhere in Zimbabwe therefore it was disturbing to get a generally low acknowledgement of it in the new resettlement areas.

The pandemic has forced an extra burden on rural women by increasing their workload on domestic work, care giving and farm duties. Women already bear a disproportionate burden in nurturing

children, food production, processing and preparation and community work. In the 15-29 age group 5 times more women are infected than men. (Kwaramba, 2002). Women thus bear the brunt of the epidemic because they are more vulnerable to infection and are the main caregivers. (SAfAIDS, 1998). This has serious implications as women form the bulk of rural farming labour. This result in less time being allocated to farming activities which in turn results in less productivity. This is so because, less land will be cultivated due to limited time, less input including labour used thus leading to fewer outputs being harvested. The financial resources required for medication compromise the finances to be invested in farming inputs and assets. Since more resources will be required than those available, women will have to find other means of income generation so that they can provide for their families though they may also be infected. This increasingly becomes difficult for them due to lack of resources like start up capital and access to credits.

Some farmers stated that their farming activities would depend upon their health status. Meaning that if they were sick less farming would take place thus compromising their household food security and income. Ill health was cited as one of the contributory factors to the last season's poor harvest in some households. Female-headed households affected by HIV/AIDS are highly disadvantaged because those women who are supposed to fend for the household will not be able to do so. This is unlike male-headed households affected by HIV/AIDS as women will be there to manage and fend for the households (SAfAIDS, 1998). The general adverse effects of the disease on affected rural communities will increasingly be realised through under utilisation of land leading to constant poor productivity and increased rural poverty.

#### Conclusion

Women have remained marginalised despite the government gender sensitive policies. Land is only part of the equation to women's empowerment and the land reform programme has largely failed to satisfy that. Generally, women have no means of production and no adequate institutional help to improve their productivity. They are not adequately represented in the decision-making bodies par-

ticularly at grassroots level in managing the use of their natural resources. The HIV/AIDS scourge has added to their plight as it is bent on worsening their poverty by its adverse effects.

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research as presented in the preceding analysis, one can safely say that women deserve more than they are getting. Obviously something needs to be done. Below are some of the suggestions that if taken up, will help in improving the status of women in having title to land. They will also help in empowering women through the provision of necessary means of production for optimal and sustainable use of land and its resources.

- Provisions should be made to include the women's names in the government's landowner registers such that women may be official co-plot holders.
- Effective institutions should be established to help women with financial and technical support to improve their productivity.
- Mechanisms should be put in place to help women diversify their income base with rewarding sources to increase their investment in agriculture and reduce their vulnerability.
- Adequate influential representation of women in grassroots decision-making bodies is essential for the management of natural resources.
- Men's consciousness needs to be raised about gender issues for them to appreciate women's role in the community decision-making bodies.
- Reforestation programmes and other related activities should be introduced to maintain or improve natural resources in resettlement areas.
- Speed up the introduction of basic infrastructure in the newly resettled areas to reduce women's burden.

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