

Who Owns the Land? Rural Women's Access to and Control of Agricultural Land in the Madondo Communal Lands of Gutu District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: *This study was aimed at exploring the issues of lack of gender parity with regards to access and control of agricultural land in Madondo Communal lands of Gutu district. It argues that land is one of the key resources that determine women's living standards, as well as their economic empowerment, and, to a certain extent, their struggle for equity and equality. A number of factors such as economic, legal, social and cultural combine to ensure that women's rights to access, control and pass on land are less secure than those of men. The study used qualitative research methodology. Field data was gathered using key informant interviews, questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions while documentary research involved reviewing different policies and documents on the land tenure system in Zimbabwe. The results revealed that rural women do have access to agricultural land through their families, but do not control the land. It was found that there is no association between access to and control of agricultural land. Some of the recommendations include the need to promote social protection floors, change discriminatory land tenure systems and emphasising the importance of rural women in agriculture.*

Keywords: Access, Control, Agricultural Land, Rural areas, Rural Women, Gender Inequality, Land Tenure

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the challenges faced by rural women in accessing and controlling agricultural land in the Madondo communal lands of Gutu District, Zimbabwe. Since the establishment of communal lands in Zimbabwe, there have been significant changes in the socio-economic and political environment of the country. These changes were caused by the war of liberation, independence, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), hyperinflationary environment and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. This has changed the way people make livelihood decisions and access land. Rural women have been adversely affected, as they are not entitled to land under customary tenure rules and form an increasing number of the rural population in Zimbabwe (Paradza, 2010).

Land is an important source of security against poverty across the African continent and developing world. Unequal rights to land put women at a disadvantage, perpetuate poverty, and entrench gender inequality in Africa (Hindin, 2002). Gender has become a critical issue in women's land rights due to the fact that there is a direct relationship between accessing land resources, having secured land rights, achieving food security and overcoming poverty. Women produce more than 80% of the food in Africa, yet they own only 1% of the land (Hindin, 2002). Therefore, improving women's access to and control over land is crucial to the socio-economic development of Africa.

In rural areas, land is the most important resource to women. It is a source of economic empowerment and represents a key factor in the struggle for equality and equity. The rights to use and control land are therefore central to rural women's livelihoods. However, despite the importance of land to rural women, their land rights are still often violated (UNECA, 2003). The administration of land in rural areas is based on

customary tenure, implying that traditional norms and cultural beliefs are the main determinants of decision-making. Under customary tenure, land is communally owned and is normally allocated to male heads of households (Arisunta, 2010).

The study adopts a broad definition of land access, as the processes by which people, individually or collectively, gain rights and opportunities to occupy and use land (primarily for productive purposes but also other economic and social purposes), whether on a temporary or permanent basis. These processes include participation in both formal and informal markets, land access through kinship and social networks, including the transmission of land rights through inheritance and within families, and land allocation by the state and other authorities with control over land.

Rural women are resourceful economic agents who contribute to the income of families and the growth of communities in a multitude of ways. They work as entrepreneurs, as farm and non-farm labourers, in family businesses, for others and as self-employed; while they take on a disproportionate share of unpaid work at home. However, their contribution is limited by unequal access to resources as well as persistent discrimination and gender norms which need to be addressed to allow the realisation of their full potential.

The concept of gender is important for understanding access to and control of land as a natural resource. Gender refers to the socially constructed differences between men and women (Gupta, 2000). Gendered patterns refer not only to relations between men and women as husbands and wives but also to relations between sisters and brothers, between co-wives, between mother and daughter, father and daughter and others (Peters, 1995). In rural areas of Zimbabwe, gender has generally been thought to determine women's access to

resources as it defines their identity, position, entitlement and status through social-cultural meanings, practices and power (Kesby, 1999; Hindin, 2002).

Rural women have been adversely affected in terms of accessing and controlling agricultural land in Zimbabwe, as they are not entitled to land under customary tenure rules and form an increasing part of the rural area population. In the context of the extreme economic crisis, and high and increasing HIV and AIDS mortality, rural women heading their own households (particularly widows) have become more vulnerable. Land ownership is an indispensable condition for the achievement of the rights to subsistence and to family welfare, without whose rights rural women faces a violation of their most fundamental rights. Lack of access to resources on the part of women leads to extreme poverty, and this has negative repercussions on all those people who depend on them (Kesby, 1999).

2. Justification of the Study

This research argues that gendered land rights are not well captured by the distinction between primary and secondary rights, and secondly because rural livelihoods are not just dependent on land. The main debates about gendered land access in patrilineal societies have primarily concerned the typology and the security of rural women's access to land relative to that of men (Paradza, 2010). There have been debates on whether access to and control of land are hierarchically ordered and gendered, with men having primary control and women having „weaker“ secondary rights (Mvududu and McFadden, 2001:110). Primary land rights give direct access to the resource and include rights to bequeath and dispose of land, whereas secondary rights are normally restricted to use rights. Other scholars have rejected both the primary/secondary rights distinction and the hierarchical ordering of claims, stressing instead the existence of multiple claims, and the negotiated, dynamic and fluid nature of tenure relations (Gray and Kevane, 1999; Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003). The arguments of this study are that gender is a social construct and diverse, in communal areas rural women generally do not have access to and control over land than men. Equality in access to and control over agricultural land has a positive impact on rural development (Arisunta, 2010).

Secure rights to land are also a basis for shelter, for access to services and for civic and political participation. They are also a source of financial security, as collateral to raise credit or as a transferable asset that can be sold, rented out, mortgaged, loaned or bequeathed. Moreover, secure access to land creates incentives for the user to invest labour and other resources in it, so as to maintain or enhance its value and sustain its productivity, and to access social and economic development opportunities (Paradza, 2010).

Systematic differences in land tenure rights between men and women contribute to structural inequality and to poverty for women. Access to land and control over its use are the basis for food and income production in rural areas, and, more broadly, for household wellbeing. Access to other productive

resources such as water, irrigation systems, and forest products is tied to land tenure as well (Meizen-Dick, 1997). Women who become heads of household are particularly vulnerable: when their access to land is through their husbands and fathers, they often lose their property rights as a consequence of widowhood, divorce, or desertion. Differences in property rights of women and men, and lack of direct access to and control of land, may place constraints on women's productive roles and diminish their power and influence in the household and the community. In many societies, property rights reflect, if not determine, a person's citizenship status or degree of inclusion in the group.

3. Purpose of the Study

Access to land is crucial for women's livelihoods in rural areas, especially for widows, who often lack sufficient income generating alternatives. The purpose of this research was to examine access to and control of agricultural land through a gender analysis lens and thereby build understanding of the factors that enable and constrain different women's access to land. This study does not suggest that men do not face problems in accessing and controlling land, but rather focuses specifically on women due to the lack of attention these issues receive with regards to women.

4. Objectives

- 1) To investigate on the inter-relations between rural women's land rights, food security and good governance.
- 2) To examine the impact of land discrimination against rural women with regard to access, control and ownership of land;
- 3) To provide recommendations on improving rural women's access to and control of land.
- 4) Raise awareness on the need to strengthen women's land rights for economic development, improved livelihoods, food security, environmental sustainability and enhanced land governance.

5. Research Questions

- 1) What are the inter-relations between women's land rights, food security and good governance?
- 2) What is the impact of land discrimination against women with regard to access, control and ownership of land?
- 3) What measures can be taken to improve rural women's access to and control of land?
- 4) What measures can be taken to improve rural women's land rights.

6. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

6.1 The Livelihood Framework

A livelihood can be defined as „the way people get by and get things done“ (Bebbington, 1999:2021). The framework identifies five forms of capital at the basis of a livelihood. These are human, social, physical, natural and financial, which people use to build their livelihoods (Carney, 1998;

Farrington, 1999). The capitals allow survival and are the basis of power to act, reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources (Bebbington, 1993:3). The institutions outside the domestic unit are important in determining access to and control of resources such as agricultural land. The institutions may also provide safety nets to their members as a form of insurance against risks and threats (Scoones, 1996:34; Huisman, 2005:260). These institutions are better analysed by focusing on social relations. Social relations are the key to understanding the capabilities of livelihoods.

There is an increasing body of literature which has produced tangible evidence highlighting the insecure position of women's land rights. The existing gender inequality in access to and control over land and natural resources is an obstacle to the sustainable management of natural resources and socio-economic development. Land is one of the cornerstones of economic development on which rural women base their livelihoods (Paradza, 2010). Therefore, securing land rights can have a profound impact on economic development. Land in rural areas is both a means of agricultural production, livestock rearing and a place for gathering natural products that play an important role in local economies such as woodcutting, wild harvesting, grazing, fishing and hunting. Furthermore, land is a source of identity and cultural heritage (Tekle, 2002).

Access can be defined as the „ability to derive benefit from material objects such as persons, property, institutions, social and political, economic relations, actions, entitlement, relations of production and their respective histories that shape benefit flows. Different circumstances change the terms of access and may change the specific individuals or groups most able to benefit from a set of resources“ (Ribot and Peluso, 2003:153). Access primarily refers to the social and political relations mediating access. Property refers to a more restricted set of relations that people have with land. The concept of property is normative and has spatial boundaries (Blomley, 2004). It is supported by regulatory systems of law, custom or convention (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). This view excludes the people who are not entitled to hold property (Rose, 1994; Ribot and Peluso, 2003). In rural areas in Zimbabwe, land cannot legally be annexed or transacted on the market and does not lend itself to regulation by state law as is the case in freehold property regimes. The property focus disregards derived land rights, which are most important for rural women as customary law prohibits them from holding primary land rights.

The three general means for obtaining rights to land in Zimbabwe are through social and kinship relations at the local level, at land market and or from the state. These means are embedded in institutions that create, modify, and influence land tenure systems namely, socio-cultural institutions, state institutions, and market economy. In both rural and urban Zimbabwe, women are still handicapped by the fact that they do not have the financial means to acquire land. They also suffer from other discriminatory policies and practices, such as in the provision of credit and extension services (Paradza, 2010).

6.2 Importance of Land to Women

With agriculture as the backbone of most African economies where it provides about 33% of the African Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 40% of its exports (World Bank, 1989), women have been known to be the key players in this field. In 26 African countries in 1991 between 80% and 97.8% of all economically active women worked in agriculture (ILO, 2004). Furthermore, research has confirmed that 70%-80% of all subsistence farming in Africa is carried out by women (World Bank, 1997). On average African women are responsible for 60% of all harvesting, 70% of all weeding and 90% of all processing; 50% of livestock rearing, and 60% of the marketing of agricultural products. Mwangi (2001) stresses that women's roles in natural resource management are not limited to crop production as women are also responsible for water, fuel wood and animal fodder collection. These figures alone go a long way in testifying the amount of contribution that women in Africa make to their environment. To add prominence upon these facts, Meena (1992) claims that women in sub-Saharan Africa produce up to 80% of all staple foods according to some World Bank estimates. Though women produce up to 80% of all staple foods they own less than 10% of the land.

Rural women depend on access to land for survival and withholding access to such land inevitably presents a crisis to them while consequently threatening their subsistence. According to Meena (2001), though most African states have acknowledged the significant role played by women in the agricultural sector, few have paid much attention to the land tenure systems which have been discriminating against women. To make matters worse, women's access to loans and other credit facilities for agricultural improvement has been constrained by this inability for women to gain access to land which means that women will continue being poor and marginalized (Sachs, 1996).

The Beijing Platform for Action emanating from the World Conference on Women held in 1995 acknowledges that women's right to inheritance and ownership of land and property should be recognized. The Habitat Agenda adopted at the Habitat II Conference held in Istanbul in 1996 includes commitments from governments to;

“Providing legal security of tenure and equal access to land to all people, including women and undertaking legislative and administrative reforms to give women full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and ownership of land and other property”.

6.3 Security of Tenure for Women

The legal framework on access to land by women does not guarantee them security of tenure. In most cases women have to access land through male heads of households such as husbands, fathers or brothers. This dependence on males makes their use of the land dependant on their continuation of their relationship with these men. For married women, it permits their husbands to exploit their labour. Thus, there are situations where men who work and live in urban areas have

control of agricultural produce produced by their wives and children who live in the rural areas (Meena, 2001).

In some cases the men abuse the income derived from the sale of this produce. This becomes a source of grievance for the wives and there are reported incidences where the aggrieved wives have committed suicide. For single women who never married (most of them have children), the failure to allocate them land in their own right in communal areas means that they are at the mercy of their fathers or brothers if they want to engage in agricultural activities for their livelihood. Given the pressure on land in most communal areas, the fathers or brothers may not be willing to assist them (Sachs, 1996). This lack of land for agricultural activities may force them to migrate to urban areas where their chances of getting formal employment are very slim. Most of them end up engaging in informal income generation activities such as petty trading which may not give them enough income to live on in the comparatively more expensive urban environment. Inability to earn sufficient income from informal income generation activities or failure to find opportunities to engage in such activities may force some of these women to engage in prostitution. The negative consequences of engaging in prostitution, including the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS are obvious (Paradza, 2010).

Divorced women are another category of women whose ability to access land is severely curtailed because women depend on their marriages to access land. When the marriage is terminated by divorce, they find themselves without access to land. The traditional approach, which is practised in the rural areas, is to send divorced women to their natal homes where their fathers or brothers are expected to support them materially including giving them land for agricultural activities (Paradza, 2010). As with single women who never married, the fathers or brothers are usually very reluctant to offer them land because of the general scarcity of land for agricultural activities. A study by Women in Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) revealed that these "returnee" daughters (in some cases they return with their children) are often in competition for resources with their brothers and their brothers' wives and children. Inability to secure land in rural areas may result in their resorting to the same measures as single women who never married (Paradza, 2010).

When it comes to security of tenure, widows are in the same precarious condition as single women (never married or divorced) (Sachs, 1996). However, their position is slightly better particularly if they have children. In some rural areas, widows are permitted to remain on the land which they occupied prior to the death of their husbands and to continue their agricultural activities. However, in some cases widows are evicted from the land. This is particularly true of childless widows or those young widows who refuse to be married by a relative of the deceased husband. Sometimes accusations of witchcraft, where the widow is accused of causing the death of her husband through witchcraft, are used as an excuse to evict the widow (Paradza, 2010). Access to land can be crucial for women's livelihoods in rural areas, especially for widows, who often lack sufficient income generating alternatives (Grace, 2005).

6.4 Legal and Policy Implications on Women's Land Rights

In the African context, especially the role of customary inheritance and property laws cannot be ignored. While there are exceptions and examples of matrilineal societies, most African cultures are patrilineal. This has hindered women's access to land or other resources in three ways:

- (i) Traditions that prevent women from owning land
- (ii) Traditions that prevent women from inheriting land
- (iii) Traditions that prevent women from speaking in public (Marcos, 1997).

Traditions that prevent women from owning land include social, cultural and religious customs. Despite the positive policy developments, the general public environment of many countries does not support women's equal ownership rights, partly due to discriminatory customary practices (Marcos, 1997).

Several countries in Africa have either formulated their land policies or are in the process of doing so. Reforms that seek to formalize land rights must intentionally consider the economic, social, and political dimensions of property rights to ensure that women are not left worse off by the process. At the same time to be effective in the long term, the reforms must consider the social as well as legal legitimacy of the change they seek (Gupta, 2000). While African countries have achieved different legal and policy strides in addressing the land issue, studies have shown that even where laws are equitable, women may not know their legal rights (FAO, 1997). In addition, implementation may still be gender-biased, and law enforcement may be grossly inadequate or prejudiced against women. In Kenya for example, laws technically allow women to own land, yet nearly all land is registered in the names of male elders. This needs a concerted effort and the diligent implementation of land laws to benefit the women (Kesby, 1996).

It is important to examine legislations in African countries that affect women's land tenure rights with a specific reference to the types of rights that exist and how those rights are held including whether women can hold property in their own names. Legal situation of women's land rights to be looked at beyond land laws, family laws, inheritance laws in particular are critical to the land rights of women. Some African countries have positive action oriented provisions in their legislation. However, implementation remains a major challenge (Mvududu and Mcfadden, 2001). While in some African countries women's land rights are enshrined in the constitution or land law, in reality this does not bring feasible outcomes with respect to equitable access and control over land due to poor implementation and enforcement of the laws. Women still lack decision-making power. Effective land administration requires women's participation at policy formulation and at level of implementation on an equal footing with men in order to ensure gender-equitable land tenure systems (Gupta, 2000).

6.5 Women's Land Rights and International and Continental Obligations

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) prohibits any form of discrimination against women. It established women's rights and fundamental freedoms. It established women's rights on par with those of men to political, economic and social participation and benefit (UNCEDAW, 1995). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by 187 countries, was adopted to combat continuing discrimination against women. It requires State Parties to recognize the important economic and social contribution of women to the family and to society as a whole. More specifically, CEDAW Article 14 addresses rural women, guaranteeing them the protection of their human rights under the entirety of the Convention's provisions. State parties are called upon to ensure that rural women have equal access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities and appropriate technology. State Parties are also required to take all appropriate measures so as to ensure rural women's equal treatment in land and land resettlement schemes, access to adequate health-care facilities and to social security programs, as well as to training and education (FAO, 2011).

The Beijing Platform for Action 1995 fosters the promotion of equality, development and peace from a gender perspective. However, this is against the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) that promotes gender equality and empowers women. The Millennium Declaration builds on the most important development commitments made at international conferences and summits in the 1990s. It recognizes the links between gender equality and development, especially poverty reduction. This notion was strengthened at the 2005 World Summit, which referred to the centrality of gender equality to human security and human development. The outcome document from the Summit contained commitments on labour rights and land and property rights for women, as well as on access to reproductive health care and the elimination of violence against women.

The African Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa calls upon all African States to eliminate discrimination against women and to ensure women's rights as set in international declarations and conventions. It demands African governments to combat all form of discrimination against women through appropriate legislative and institutional measures. The protocol includes a number of articles on women's social, economic and political equality and gives particular emphasis to the rights of widows and divorcees.

6.5.1 Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013)

Section 80 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe focuses on the rights of women. It indicates that;

- (i) Every woman has the equal and full dignity of the person with men and this includes equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities;

- (ii) All laws, customs, traditions and cultural practices that infringe the rights of women conferred by this constitution are void to the extent of the infringement.

The Constitution is however, silent when it comes to issues of access and control of arable land in rural areas.

6.5.2 The Communal Land Act (Chapter 20:04) 1982

This Act provides for the classification of land as communal. In accordance with Section 8(2), access to and use of communal land shall be in accordance with customary law. Yet, customary law has, in many instances, been deemed discriminatory towards women in that it curtails their access to and control of resources. Hence, this provision is sometimes seen as perpetuating the marginalisation of women in the allocation of land under communal tenure. Inequitable distribution and uncertain land tenure security have been indicated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2006) as one of the major problems of land policies in Zimbabwe.

6.5.3 The Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17) 2000

This Act provides for the appointment of traditional leadership, such as chiefs, headmen, village heads, and other subsidiary functionaries such as the village assembly, and spells out their duties, functions and powers. In terms of Section 23, all communal land is to be surveyed and boundaries drawn demarcating each village. Each village shall then be issued a village registration certificate describing its boundaries. The Rural District Council will be required to prepare a land use plan for each village and shall issue a settlement permit to the head of each household in the village. According to Section 24(4), each settlement permit shall bear names of all spouses. In terms of Section 24(4), unmarried women who are heads of household can have permits in their names as can widows and girls or child headed households. However, while these provisions would seem to be sufficient to protect women's rights, other provisions requiring the permit holder to have consent of adult members of the household and the Rural District Council would nonetheless compromise gender rights.

7. Research Design and Methodology

This study was conducted in the Madondo Communal lands of Gutu district in Zimbabwe. A qualitative research approach was used in the study. A total of 60 households from five wards were sampled using the simple random sampling method. Questionnaires were administered to households in order to solicit information on socio-economic background, methodologies and techniques that were used for land allocation and challenges faced by rural women in accessing and controlling agricultural land. Both closed and open ended questions were used in this study. In-depth Interviews were held with key informants, including one respondent from the Rural District Council (RDC), District Administrator and two traditional leaders. Three Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) were conducted and each group constituted 6-10 respondents. Some of the information from households' interviews, key informants interviews and FDGs was used to corroborate field observations. Documentary

search was used to review different policies and legislations on land in Zimbabwe.

Due to the sensitivities, perceived or real, of discussing women's rights and activities with men, fewer questions were asked of men than was originally planned. The researcher was, however, able to ask women all the necessary questions but would have preferred to get a better idea of men's perceptions of women's access to land.

8. Discussion of Findings

45 (75%) of the rural women in Madondo communal lands who were interviewed indicated they have little or no access to land and basic necessities. Their standard of living is low and their quality of life is not improving. Agricultural activities have declined and non-agricultural activities do not generate sufficient income. The majority of these women (56%) is illiterate, but has special indigenous knowledge, which is used to develop survival strategies. Although this knowledge is used in child care, health care and food security, 60% indicated that it has not been incorporated into development projects.

These findings indicate that the ability of rural women to sustain livelihoods is not a new phenomenon, but plays a vital role in economic development. The demographic, social and economic trends of rural economies have generated the need for rural women to increase their participation in household livelihoods. Most rural women are poor and are engaged in subsistence agriculture to improve the quality of life in their households and communities.

8.1 Rural Women's Access to Agricultural Land

72% of the rural women indicated that when they gain access to agricultural land through marriage, the sole objective is to feed children and other members of the household. Only 53% of these women said that the system of managing household food production does not permit them to sell surplus agricultural output or use the revenue from such sales, because production is entirely controlled by men. Three FGDs shared the same sentiments that this lack of control over agricultural output highlights women's lack of control over agricultural land, turning them into simple agricultural labourers, with no financial remuneration for their work.

One widow indicated that;

Our labour plays an important role in the survival of households. We perform many roles in the households and communities. We need to be empowered in order to actively participate in the community.

Poor rural communities with inadequate infrastructure and a weak financial base, such as Madondo, have the task of addressing structural imbalances and the concerns of women. The social perception of rural land ownership is based on the existence of common agricultural land passed down by inheritance through a patrilineal system that share out family-owned land exclusively between the male family members, regardless of age. The social perception of rural land

ownership is based on the existence of common agricultural land passed down by inheritance through a patrilineal system that share out family-owned land exclusively between the male family members, regardless of age.

8.2 Rural Women's Control of Agricultural Land

In order to assess the extent to which rural women have control over agricultural land, a frequency analysis was performed from all the rural women who participated in the study. The results of the analysis showed that a percentage of 2.9%, 21.7%, and 51.1% of the respondents have no control at all, have no control, and were undecided, respectively. By adding those three percentages, this shows in total that, a majority (75.7%) of the rural women believe that they do not control agricultural land. Hence, it can be concluded that rural women in the study area do not have control over agricultural land. However, the study showed that only 8.9% have control and 15.4% definitely have control over agricultural land.

Research findings show that there are many constraints that women face in accessing land as well as some enabling factors. Some of these constraints include culture and tradition; lack of credit; and poverty. Much can be done to overcome these constraints, though some will be harder to tackle than others.

When women gain access to land through marriage, the sole objective is to feed the children and other members of the household. The system of managing household food production does not permit them to sell surplus agricultural output or use the revenue from such sales, because production is entirely controlled by men. This lack of control over agricultural output highlights women's lack of control over agricultural land, turning them into simple agricultural labourers, with no financial remuneration for their work.

8.3 Reasons why Women Would Benefit from Access to and Control of Agricultural Land

- a) Land ownership is considered to increase women's decision-making power inside the household, and women are often able to control the income gained from the sale of livestock produce inside the village.
- b) Land can provide security for elderly women who are often solely dependent on their family.
- c) Ownership and access to land can generate more income that most activities women are currently involved in. This in turn can enable women to support a family, which may give some young widows the choice over whether to remarry and potentially lose custody of their children or support their children themselves.
- d) Few other income-generating options currently exist for women that can be carried out inside the village, as compared to men who can work outside the village and migrate for work.
- e) Many women already possess knowledge of crop agriculture. Improving this knowledge could contribute to increasing food security at the household level.
- f) Improving women's agricultural knowledge could help increase livelihood security at the household level. Women know how to carry out many agricultural tasks. Supporting

women's access and improving their agricultural knowledge could contribute towards household livelihood security if the household owns or has access to land.

9. Conclusion

Rural women's access to and control of agricultural land is a prerequisite for any agrarian reform in Zimbabwe. The right to control and use land is central to the lives of most rural women. The lack of land rights deprive women the right to economic empowerment and their struggle for equity and equality (Wiggins, 2003). Agricultural land is one of the most important resources that determine rural women's living standards, economic empowerment and to a certain extent their struggle for equality and equity. A combination of legal, social, cultural and economic factors combines to ensure that women's rights to access and control are less secure than those of men.

Rural poverty is strongly associated with poor access to and control of agricultural land, either in the form of landlessness or because of insecure and contested land rights. There is need to recognise the importance of land rights for growth and for poverty reduction which growth can bring. Increased access to agricultural land for rural women can also bring direct benefits such as poverty alleviation and contributing to food security. Rural women are resourceful economic agents who contribute to the income of families and the growth of communities in a number of ways. However, their contribution is limited by unequal access to resources as well as persistent discrimination and gender norms which need to be addressed to allow the realisation of their full potential.

Land is a critical resource for rural women for food production and income. It is also a key social and economic asset, crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in policy decision-making. The results of access to and control of agricultural land indicate that the prevailing pattern of land accessibility could be due to socio-cultural or land tenure practices in the study area.

10. Recommendations

- (i) Promote the social protection floor, which is an integrated set of social policies designed to guarantee income security and access to essential social services for all. Such social transfers are particularly important to women by giving them greater control over how household income is spent.
- (ii) There is a clear need to define the roles of customary and statutory laws. In Zimbabwe, customary laws continue to overrule statutory laws, a situation that usually leaves women without independent economic security. Cultural values are often considered as a stagnant system of customs, to be preserved, nurtured and left untouched.
- (iii) Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can be involved through development of a more nuanced understanding of women's role in agriculture and use this to inform programme design.

- (iv) Emphasising the importance of women's agricultural activities to both men and women through extension work.
- (v) Coordinating and scaling up a legal rights outreach programme that educates women and men about inheritance rights at the village level.
- (vi) Promote equitable access to, and productive use of land by women farmers through gender sensitive agrarian reform, promoting land rental markets and services to small farmers, joint titling of land/assets, and revising discriminatory land laws.
- (vii) Increase the breath, depth and "women-friendliness" of financial services in rural areas, as a key strategy for providing capital for women-led rural businesses and farms, through gender sensitization and support for rural financial institutions.
- (viii) Improve gender equality in access to basic services (schools, health care, and child care) in rural areas, by investing in their supply so as to reduce women's vulnerability and increase their capacity to access more remunerative jobs and opportunities.
- (ix) Coordinating and scaling up a legal rights outreach programme that educates women and men about inheritance rights at the village level.

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