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Revisiting Gender in Rural Livelihoods and Development Interventions

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Gendered Tensions in Rural Livelihoods and Development Interventions

Akua Opokua Britwum

This issue of *Feminist Africa* revisits rural women and agricultural livelihoods, focusing on the persistence of contexts that compromise their ability to benefit from development interventions. An accumulation of studies over the years have set out to unravel the hindering factors. Some such studies, premised on the economic efficiency argument, push for greater attention to women's productivity in rural agriculture. These studies note that women's enhanced productivity could increase agricultural output and end poverty, hunger, and malnutrition in rural communities (Agarwal, 2011; Kelkar, 2013; Kumase et al., 2010). In response, interventions have been designed to benefit women, reaching them directly as individuals or in groups. Others have used women as agents to introduce high-yielding crops and animal breed varieties. Some interventions target resource access, while others deal with environmental challenges in weather, soil, and water content. Yet more of these interventions are devoted to providing agricultural communities with alternative livelihoods to end rural poverty. Such projects have increased over the years as different institutions attempt to resolve the perceived challenges in agricultural production, especially in the follow-up to the liberalisation of public service delivery as part of structural adjustment policies (Tsikata and Torvikey, 2021; Kelkar, 2013; Doss and Morris, 2001).

Following the failure of interventions to deliver according to expectations, subsequent research attention turned to understanding the differential outcomes for women engaged in rural agricultural projects (Doss and Morris, 2001; Padmanabhan, 2004; Tsikata and Torvikey, 2021). The earliest studies focused on the gendered impact of agricultural technology, especially the negative effect on rural women's productive and reproductive labour. Such research to account for the situation noted that gendered access to resources caused women's failure to benefit from agricultural interventions (Agarwal, 2011; Doss and Morris,

2001). The direct culprits identified were literacy skills to read and write in the language of innovations, time use burdens, independence to decide land use, and control over labour, either their own or others (Zakaria et al., 2015). The requirements for adopting new crop and animal breed varieties affect gender orders because they introduce new demands on skills, time, or resource use by participating farmers. Britwum and Akorsu (2016) contend that factors affecting land access, especially land size and tenancy arrangements, are critical to adopting interventions. Women's ability to control their earnings and the opportunities offered by innovations to assist them in performing their gender roles are the factors that account for their ability to participate in agricultural interventions (Britwum and Akorsu, 2016; Okali, 2012).

Because intervention uptake is closely related to women's status, most studies blame patriarchal norms and values as the main constraining force – a situation that makes rural women's resource constraints the most glaring form of patriarchy. Patriarchal traditions in all social institutions entrench women's subordination, thus becoming relevant to agrarian livelihoods. This connection to patriarchal norms and values enables gendered constructions around production relations to flourish within rural communities and to support other forms of discrimination. Many studies trace the basis of the patriarchal system from the conception of farmers as male along with the notion of the trickle-down effect, which assumes that accumulated benefits to household heads will reach all members equally. Patriarchy thrives through the invisibilisation of women's labour, riding on beliefs that materially and symbolically undervalue women's labour (Apusigah, 2009; Mitra and Rao, 2016). This situation leads observers to note that agricultural interventions are gendered to the extent that they uphold systems that entrench patriarchy (Padmanabhan, 2004). The conclusions point out that approaches with significant potential for uptake strengthen women's productive resource access by packaging the inputs into divisible or small-sized technologies and targeting women in groups to achieve economies of scale. Those that present inputs as integrated and not in single disparate units also have high levels of uptake (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2010). Women might be unable to adopt innovations because the latter carry the barriers that structure women's production status in agriculture. Women's supposed preference for traditional agricultural practices and inputs might be a safety measure to circumvent the

constraints they face in acquiring the additional land, labour, and finance that innovations demand.

Mitra and Rao (2016) note that current trends critical to gendered production relations in agriculture are the rise of corporate or contract farming, avenues for non-farm livelihood diversification, and casualisation of agricultural labour. They made this observation in their work analysing critical literature on family farms in the Asia-Pacific region to discern how gender relations have been affected by emerging agrarian structures, state policies, and market forces. Despite the multiplicity of contexts covered in the region, we find useful lessons to apply in African situations in terms of the prominence of women's labour on family farms, the tenuous connection between women's production and their reproductive roles, and the value placed on women's labour. Tsikata and Torvikey (2021) note that as national economies increase their levels of liberalised corporate agriculture, land use gets increasingly diversified and land markets intensify. The impact of corporate farming on women is generally presented in the literature as mixed, with some suggesting increased cash earnings for rural households and the possibility of autonomous incomes for women. However, there seems to be more agreement about the impact of corporate farming and large-scale land acquisition as narrowing existing customary routes for women to acquire land, further marginalising women's productive labour (Mitra and Rao, 2016; Tsikata and Torvikey, 2021).

Women are not a homogenous group, even as gendered beings. Here we are reminded of the question of the diversity amongst rural women, which mediates patriarchal conditions to circumscribe their productive and reproductive roles. Later studies acknowledging discrepancies in the impact of interventions experienced by various categories of women focused on the additional socio-economic conditions of women which mediate impact. Gender modifiers identified include class, ethnicity, maternity, marital status, and age (Mitra and Rao, 2016; Yaro, 2009; Adolwine and Dudima, 2010). Age as a gender modifier operates in tandem with life cycle changes, particularly around women's childbearing and marital status. In subsistence agriculture, where the distinctions between domestic and productive work are tenuous, women's life-cycle changes become closely associated with their access to productive resources as such changes are tied to their household provisioning roles. The age

of women, their household status, either daughter or mother, daughter-in-law or mother-in-law, count in terms of the opportunities around resource use and how their households finally benefit from interventions.

Beyond the gendered dimensions of innovation uptake, studies have tried to understand how women who successfully access development interventions are motivated to adopt and adapt available innovations. According to Britwum and Akorsu (2016), female provisioning, especially via their roles within marriage, informed women's participation in agricultural interventions. Though farm households are not a unitary whole and members have different needs, obligations, and rights, Mitra and Rao (2016) note that households in Asia exhibit both shared interests and conflicts in the performance of household tasks due to the interconnectedness of roles required for the survival of the household as a unit and its members as individuals. Thus, women must negotiate conjugal and familial relations as they adopt new technologies and adapt to altering tenure regimes. Such negotiations often affect gender orders. The type of intervention shapes its gender-altering potential; for example, livestock rearing is noted to shore up women's income, allowing them to access additional resources to expand avenues for altering gender orders in household provisioning (Mitra and Rao, 2016).

Studies also step beyond the direct benefits of interventions to examine women's responses to livelihood changes, especially concerning non-farm diversification strategies. They wonder how alternative employment strategies impact household income, women's status, and emerging gender relations. One observation from such studies is that agricultural labour is feminising. This process is captured through traditional economic indicators, such as higher levels of female participation in sections of the agricultural labour force or more significant involvement of women in market-oriented agricultural work. Another indicator of agriculture feminisation is where women's labour force participation increases in rural agriculture as men take up more non-farm activities in response to livelihood diversification (Mitra and Rao, 2016). The final form of feminisation identified in the literature is the expansion of female waged labour in commercial agriculture. Because women are considered to be easier to discipline with incredible ability to multitask, coupled with their lower need for cash income, feminisation tends to be accompanied by less

secure jobs. These often fall outside of ILO-defined decent jobs, thus having a higher propensity to be exploitative. Here mention is made of work forms seen as feminine because they remain unskilled and temporal without formal contracts (Mitra and Rao, 2016).

Raising some critical questions about what Mitra and Rao (2016) considered to be sweeping generalisations of agriculture feminisation, the authors advise that research should focus on exceptions to the rule, such as situations of higher levels of female out-migration or what they term 'masculinisation of agriculture' (Mitra and Rao, 2016: 67). Existing studies also question the source of agriculture feminisation, whether it is the general lack of state investment, low value placed on agriculture, or general lack of opportunities for women outside the agricultural sector. They suggest as a way out a number of modalities for understanding agriculture feminisation. The first is increased male employment in the non-farm sectors, leaving women to assume full responsibility on household farms. Well-placed households could benefit from remittances to hire labour to compensate for the male absence in farming. Feminisation can also occur when women take up commercial farming on household plots of land, even when men remain within the rural space. The pressure on women emerges from the need to spend long hours outside their homes as they market their agricultural produce. The most crucial consideration is that agriculture feminisation takes a form which is dependent on the nature of female productive labour that is engaged (*ibid*).

Even though rural agricultural production relations are situated within patriarchal relations, Doss (2002) observes that the ensuing gendered production relations respond to specific cultural, social, and economic contexts. She notes that, as a result, conceptual framing is essential for a critical unpacking of the specificities of the contexts. Following Boserup's seminal work highlighting distinctions between female and male farming systems, Young (1993) extended our conceptual tools by pointing to the fact that agricultural production is segregated around tasks and products. She elaborated further that the segregation around farm tasks can also be sequential. Thus, even around so-called male agriculture products, women's labour is needed, occurring with and in between male tasks. Apusigah (2009) also explains that the limited land access granted to women is derived from the cultural construction of their labour within farm

households. Some cultures view women as farmhands, while others perceive their status as farmers only in relation to male household members.

For Young, we need to proceed with our research into rural agricultural production relations from a deeper understanding of how femininity and masculinity are constructed around particular farm tasks and products. Such analytical debates are essential for understanding alterations around cropping patterns and husbandry practices in rural communities. Padmanabhan (2004) explains that the gender orders around agricultural production shift in response to modifications in provisioning roles as the agrarian contexts make concessions for women or men to transgress known gender orders to ensure household well-being. Studies have, therefore, been interested in how interventions affect women's status, what Padmanabhan (2004) calls staple replacing varieties that have the potential to shift gender restrictions around agricultural resources. Instances of how interventions have allowed women to bypass male household heads' control over maize in northern Ghana have been highlighted (Padmanabhan, 2004). Thus, for Doss (2002), our focus when exploring agrarian livelihoods should be on how gender relations play out in agricultural production relations and the emerging gender orders that become necessary to support them.

Given that change is inherent in agricultural enterprises, some authors ask that while paying attention to gender relations and rural livelihoods, researchers should consider changes in household structures and production relations. They demand new lenses to unravel the role that gender relations play in alterations in the choice of agricultural products and the vexed questions of access to productive resources (Mitra and Rao, 2016). They ask that the new lenses should capture gendered relations within agrarian livelihoods through individual and community trend studies. They also believe that understanding women's strategies for household maintenance is just as critical as their ability to resist patriarchy. However, they contend that gender roles should feature in the design and implementation of projects that seek to bring new technologies or farm practices to rural communities (Meinzen-Dick, et al., 2010).

The feature articles in this issue focus on rural interventions that purport to improve the lives of agrarian workers in rural Africa. Taking a cue from

Mitra and Rao (2016), who caution against the singular focus on the impact of interventions on women's labour burdens, we agree that just focusing on the manifestations of women's participation in agricultural interventions will ignore the underlying political economy of rural spaces and how women are integrated into capitalist structures for surplus extraction. New framings are necessary to avoid erasing other forms of extraction that depend on women's productive or reproductive labour. The feature articles examine two main intervention processes: land tenure and agricultural inputs. The two articles on land focus on tenure forms arising from large-scale land acquisition for commercial farming and for post-apartheid land redistribution. The other two features are on inputs and consider the introduction of livestock breeds targeting women and the theoretical framing of interventions. Examining women and agrarian livelihood interventions with different lenses brings to the fore the new issues that help to devise more transformative strategies.

Natacha Bruna addresses how rural women's productive and reproductive labour are incorporated into the capitalist economy. She does this by examining large-scale land acquisition in post-independence Mozambique, focusing on women's direct relations with commercial agriculture as household heads or indirect relations as members of households headed by men. In the latter case, the men are of varying social and economic statuses, due to the size of their land holdings and ownership patterns. Bruna outlines the differentiated outcomes of compensation mechanisms adopted by the commercial entity Portucel Mozambique, by drawing on Shivji's explanation of capitalist processes of surplus extraction from rural workers. Bruna clarifies how different categories of women subsidise the surplus extraction by Portucel through the differential land tenure conditions. Relying on Nancy Fraser's discussions on social reproduction to explain how women's reproductive labour is exploited, Bruna notes that land acquisition for plantation agriculture in Mozambique rides on female labour, irrespective of the employment status and income levels of household heads. Thus, the emerging work forms, whether waged labour, permanent, temporal or peasant farming, do not preclude female labour from subsidising capital. However, pre-existing social hierarchies modify how households are incorporated into the production relations around Portucel plantation

agriculture. Differences in household land holdings determined the levels of peasantisation of women; for men, it was the process of proletarianization.

In the second feature article, Petronella Munemo, Joseph Manzvera and Innocent Agbelie try to unravel the benefits that women derived from Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Policy. They adopt the feminist political ecology approach to understand how women's everyday experiences shape their identities as gendered subjects and how the social orders around reproduction and production are manifested and challenged. Their work, based on a review of existing literature on the subject, shows that women's benefits from the land redistribution programme, although limited, surpassed those of previous land reform policies. The authors conclude that women's participation and contribution to land invasions in Zimbabwe provided them avenues to acquire and own land.

The findings of Bruna as well as those of Munemo, Manzvera and Agbelie, draw attention to how women who are free from marital bonds can access land outside customary holdings. Under customary holdings, it is women's connection to men that provides them access to land. Women without marital ties appear to stand a better chance to access land under systems governed by statutory instruments. Thus, whereas marital status gives access to communally held lands, statutory access seems to work better for women with little or no ties to men through marriage. This finding needs further interrogation.

Gendered divisions in agricultural tasks revolve around food staples and livestock. Agricultural interventions, especially those that carry new technologies, are directed towards shifting products from those meant for consumption to petty commodities. They carry demands for new inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, and agrochemicals like pesticides and weedicides. The accompanying inputs are also gendered in terms of the new labour forms required and those that disappear or intensify with intervention uptake. More importantly, there are the symbolic meanings attached to agricultural products, inputs, and tasks. Studies note that all of these are affected and, in turn, affect gendered access to productive resources, household provisioning and reproductive labour (Mitra and Rao, 2016; Rao, 2016; Quisumbing et al., 1995; Bryceson, 1995). Using interventions around livestock, Patricia Aboe, Akua

Britwum, and Ernest Okorley note how gendered institutional rules and norms shape women's adoption of technologies concerning small ruminant husbandry. Introducing small ruminants to women broke the norms establishing male household heads as the automatic beneficiary of development interventions, whilst increasing women's livestock asset base. Other norms broken were women taking up more husbandry practices, such as providing health care for small ruminants. However, critical male roles remained intact; thus, men retained control over the sale of small ruminants. Men also set the rules on community-level ruminant husbandry practices and ensured adherence to these rules. Although women made some intrusions into small ruminant husbandry, the alterations in gender roles around the husbandry practices were insufficient to break the male monopoly over small ruminant ownership and marketing.

Since interventions extend existing patriarchal barriers to resource use, the demand for conscious gender targeting programmes as a solution has been pursued over decades. Agricultural interventions that address women's constrained access, observers have cautioned, should not reinforce existing gender orders (Mitra and Rao, 2016). In this issue, Loretta Baidoo pursues the viability of women-targeted interventions. She notes that how interventions are framed and how the are goals set out, are critical for altering women's status in agricultural households. Baidoo draws on radical feminist analytical tools to examine how interventions that have tackled the non-transformative shortcomings in liberal feminist approaches still fail to realise their intended outcomes. Drawing on her experience with two interventions targeting rural women's livelihoods, Baidoo sets out to unravel, through an autoethnographic account, the viability of development interventions to challenge patriarchal gender orders and address other discriminatory social hierarchies differentiating women's lived experiences. To do this, she combines gender analytical frameworks from three sources: Moser's gender needs assessment, social relations approach, and Sara Longwe's women empowerment frameworks.

The selected analytical tools were applied to assess the interventions in the planning, implementation and outcomes. Baidoo's interest was to determine the agentic opportunities that development interventions provide women. She also analysed the gender sensitivity of the interventions and drew on Sara Longwe's empowerment framework to analyse the practical deployment of empowerment

in the selected interventions. Baidoo notes that interventions can only be gender transformative when women are involved in all stages of the project cycle and make essential inputs. The project which allowed women to participate in the process seeking to promote women's access to productive resources, also sensitised women in field schools and community activities. Because women were given opportunities to be actively involved in the project cycle, they showed greater confidence and agency during the project implementation. The second project, which addressed women only in terms of needing credit, could not develop women's sense of confidence.

Faustina Obeng Adomaa's Standpoint also discusses recurring poverty among rural women despite decades of development interventions. She blames the standards set by these interventions, which she calls 'the low hanging fruits', as the cause of their failure to break the barriers that women face in accessing farm and non-farm livelihood resources. Adomaa explains that the failure to address differences among women constrains their access and only ends up entrenching disadvantages in rural communities. Therefore, the framing of development interventions matters not only for addressing patriarchal discrimination but other forms of hierarchy as well.

The two conversation pieces present activist experiences within a community-based system and within larger institutional structures. In the first case, Fati Abigail Abdulai, the director of the Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM) in Ghana, shares her experience organising at-risk women, widows and orphans in patrilineal Ghana. Her work reveals the challenges in using legislation to protect women's interests in agricultural resources, particularly land. The patriarchal system that supports women's differential access to resources also stands in their way and prevents them from using protective legislation to promote their interests. Women's literacy, economic status, and time use burdens prevent them from using existing legislation to protect their access to resources, especially those acquired together with their husbands, which should divulge to them through the law on intestate succession in Ghana. In a situation where women's productive activities in subsistence production are tied to their marital obligations, inheritance rights are critical to the well-being and economic survival of widows and their orphaned children. In this context, the work of WOM becomes a crucial part of sustaining the conditions of women

in rural agriculture. A grassroots-based organisation like WOM discovers that the traditional institutional setting matters and that building alliances with traditional leaders can allow inroads for addressing customary rules of granting women land in patrilineal communities. Abdulai's experience in WOM highlights the limits of activism devoted to providing relief to women. In the long run, the achievements of NGOs are undermined by institutional failures outside their control. Thus, assisting women to gain control over their dead husbands' property does not provide solutions to intergenerational poverty.

The daughters of widows cannot break the poverty cycle without reproductive health facilities to avoid teen pregnancies that cut short their formal educational opportunities. *Feminist Africa* draws on lessons from an Asian country with regard to activism addressing institutional structures, especially the UN and state-sponsored interventions. Rizwana Waraich of Pakistan, a board member of the NGO Lok Sanjh Foundation, shares her experiences. As she explains, her task is to ensure that state institutions live up to their international commitments to gender equality and women's rights. Waraich's tasks include sensitising male departmental heads about the need for gender mainstreaming. Affirmative action provisions have increased women's presence in public office and politics; however, patriarchy still enables men to push back against women's autonomy in several ways. Waraich's experience in Pakistan and Abdulai's in Ghana, show the limits of legal reform in dealing with systemic structures that promote patriarchy.

This issue of *Feminist Africa* responds to an earlier one, *Feminist Africa* 12, on 'Land, Labour and Gendered Livelihoods', which encouraged the application of alternative conceptual tools for examining gendered rural livelihood insecurities. The application of such conceptual tools highlights policy inadequacies and pushes the debate towards re-evaluating development practices and intentions under neo-liberalism. It is clear, however, that development as practised, will not address the persistent inequalities produced by capitalism and its modification of patriarchy. This awareness then emphasises the need for feminist scholarship and activism to confront the question of alternative frameworks for pursuing a transformative agenda.

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Gendered Terms of Incorporation and Exclusion in Rural Mozambique: Unpacking Pre-existing Inequalities and Mechanisms of Compensation

Natacha Bruna

Abstract

Existing literature focuses primarily on the general impacts of land grabbing and their compensation mechanisms. However, pre-existing structures of inequality heavily condition and differentiate the outcomes of land expropriation and compensation mechanisms. With this in mind, this article addresses the differentiated impacts of such mechanisms on diverse segments of the rural population. Through the experience of the operations of a tree plantation company in rural Mozambique, this research shows that compensation mechanisms are not improving the livelihoods of affected rural households. Because pre-existing inequalities are not addressed, female access to opportunities is limited. Women-headed households are at higher risk of being excluded. Most end up adversely incorporated, ultimately resulting in the exclusion of the majority. They are more likely to suffer negative impacts of land grabbing even where compensation packages are implemented. The article shows how the burden of social reproduction is further transferred to, and ultimately carried, by women, as affected households increasingly depend on female productive and reproductive labour to survive the impact of land acquisition on their rural livelihoods.

Keywords: land grabbing; terms of incorporation; working people; gender; rural livelihoods; social differentiation.

Introduction

Context and objectives of the research

Land grabbing is conducted through different processes and models with differentiated outcomes in the expulsion of people through direct land expropriation and resettlement, resulting in the unfair reallocation of fertile or resource-rich land. Others include mechanisms of adverse incorporation, social and gendered exclusions, and the transfer of land control through contract farming (Borras and Franco, 2012; Hall *et al.*, 2015; Tsikata and Yaro, 2014). Local socio-economic conditions play a critical role in the outcomes for different categories of households, particularly conditions related to land tenure, labour regimes, livelihoods, and local economies (Ali and Stevano, 2019; Hall *et al.*, 2017).

In Mozambique, public discourse claims that foreign direct investments in rural areas (even those that imply land expropriation) promote rural development through compensation mechanisms designed to integrate the affected rural households into socio-economic development projects. The mechanisms include corporate social responsibility programmes, social and development plans to provide alternative livelihood strategies and income generation, or even optimistic long-term plans of employment creation. Supported by such claims, in 2009, Portucel Moçambique initiated a mega project on plantation agriculture in the country, in partnership with the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank. It remains the largest in the agricultural sector – in terms of land size obtained and investment volume (around 2.5 billion USD). Over 350,000 hectares of land were obtained in the Zambézia and Manica provinces. The company avoided the stated national land acquisition requirements such as public consultation and resettling displaced residents as spelt out in the Mozambican Land Law. Instead, it claimed it would compensate for the land loss by putting in place a Social Development Plan. Each household was considered a unit for the distribution of benefits, with household heads as their representatives.

This article examines the strategies adopted to compensate for the loss of land and livelihoods incurred by rural households that were affected by Portucel's land acquisition. It focuses on household heads affected by the project to understand how levels of incorporation in the ensuing production

relations introduced by Portucel Moçambique were differentiated by prevailing social categories. It is particularly interested in how women-headed households and different categories of women in male-headed households were affected. Overall, the article attempts to answer the following questions: what are the differentiated outcomes of mechanisms of compensation, in the context of land grabbing, to distinct groups of rural working people? How did patriarchy shape the coping mechanisms of the different categories of households to expand their survival strategies?

The research questions were addressed using information from a qualitative study, where primary data gathering occurred in five field visits made intermittently between 2015 and 2019. The data collection consisted of interviewing heads of households that previously owned the land where Portucel is currently running the plantations (including women and men owners of land). The data collection methods included focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. Since the company's compensation mechanisms considered households as the unit for the distribution of benefits, 33 household heads were interviewed, of which 15 were women, and 18 were men. Two FGDs took place, including one with seven women and another with men who were permanent workers (only men were in permanent employment in the study area). Sample selection was purposive and interviewees selected were those who had had their land expropriated by Portucel. One limitation of this methodology was the difficulty of engaging more deeply with the gender dynamics within households headed by men. Therefore, the research focuses mainly on understanding the distinct implications of land grabbing for households headed by women versus those headed by men, differentiated by their socio-economic status, which is determined by land ownership.

Segments of working people and terms of incorporation

The current dynamics of land expropriation show complex contextual and historical specificities in how on- and off-farm labour dynamics, which shape rural livelihood strategies, are determined by existing social inequalities. Analysis of forms of integration as an outcome of land grabbing leads to debates around adverse incorporation, which happens when expropriated

rural populations are integrated into capitalist processes through different exploitative mechanisms (Hall *et al.*, 2015). This includes being incorporated into the practices of corporations, markets and value chains but simultaneously excluded from the benefits of accumulation processes (Hall *et al.*, 2015; Hickey and Du Toit, 2007). These mechanisms can include precarious jobs offered by the corporation, unfair contract farming framings, and high risk market integration. Compensation mechanisms also significantly determine who gets what as a result of how they are incorporated into the production systems after land acquisition.

Gender relations have been acknowledged as one form of inequality that shapes the outcomes of land grabbing and its respective compensation mechanisms. Tsikata and Yaro (2014) underline how pre-existing gender inequalities and gender biases embedded in investment projects are implicated in post-project livelihood activities. They argue that even projects that seemingly include mechanisms of community inclusion might fall short of protecting women's livelihoods or even limit their access to opportunities if pre-existing inequalities are not addressed. Many cases show that men are usually incorporated through employment and other mechanisms, while women are excluded from these processes leading to an intensification of gender inequalities (Gyapong 2020; Hall *et al*. 2015; Levien 2017; Tsikata and Yaro 2014). In the context of incorporation of smallholder farmers into global circuits of accumulation, Torvikey *et al*. (2016) bring to the fore how women and men are positioned differentially in terms of out-grower value chain employment benefits, as men occupy higher earning positions on permanent contracts, and women are disposable casual workers. Tsikata (2016), looking specifically at how gendered land tenure systems disadvantage rural women's livelihoods, suggests the need to recognise the importance of the gendered division of labour in production and the control of resources since they affect how women experience land grabbing in ways that predispose them to higher levels of exploitation.

Shivji (2017) analyses the process of surplus extraction by capital and shows that the cost of rural workers' necessary consumption sits at its core. He refers to 'working people' as the different segments of the rural population which go through exploitation processes, thereby feeding the accumulation of capital. Shivji (1987) explains that capital maximises its rate of exploitation by

letting peasants retain their traditional means of production and control over their labour process so that they assume responsibility for the costs of their reproduction. He also points out that men become semi-proletarianised through working in plantations, and women remain 'peasantised', subsidising capital. The capitalist surplus extraction harms social reproduction, as the burden of unpaid and self-exploited labour falls ultimately on women. Irrespective of their positions in their households, women keep producing food in addition to all other activities that involve taking care of the household. Women under such conditions, he explains, live "sub-human" lives "while exerting super-human labour". Women's additional exploitation often takes place in the process of subsidising capital by generating additional products and income to make up for shortfalls in household sustenance (Shivji, 2017).

Fraser (2016: 100) puts forward the discussion on social reproduction as the "condition for sustained capital accumulation". Currently, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilise the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies. She refers to the disruptions as "the crisis of care". Fraser calls for making the economies of care visible by recognising labour conducted by women, including a range of work from food preparation, provision of clothing and shelter, care for workers, raising of children, and caring for the elderly (Fraser, 2016). These and other activities provide capitalism with the labour force it relies on to produce surplus value.

While it is necessary to make visible the contribution of women's unpaid labour to capitalist surplus extraction, the burden of subsistence production as women experience high levels of peasantisation under large-scale land acquisition, needs further interrogation. In the face of their differential incorporation into the land compensation deals, it is essential to understand the role of the gendered division of productive and reproductive labour in the survival strategies of those dispossessed of their land. I borrow from Shivj's analysis of surplus extraction to understand how Portucel's survival as a company relies on women's productive and reproductive labour as shaped by the patriarchal context of rural Mozambique. The benefit of patriarchy to capital is how it allows women's labour to be configured to augment capitalist surplus value extraction in ways that allow capital to renege on any responsibility for its survival.

Incorporating rural households into Portucel's rural development project

Brief historical background, rural settings, and rural livelihoods

The current shape of African agrarian society is derived from its colonial past. The first scramble for Africa shaped agrarian societies into what they look like today (Moyo *et al*., 2012). Historical processes of agrarian change due to colonialism and imperialism are still present, at least implicitly, particularly regarding rural livelihoods and land distribution. Labour force exploitation was one of the main strategies of colonial Portugal and foreign capital concessions in colonial Mozambique – which shaped the dynamics of semi-proletarianisation among the peasantry. From 1930 to 1970, Portuguese colonialism intensified the integration of peasants into the global capitalist economy, including transforming indigenous populations from southern Mozambique into a labour reserve for South African mining capital. The country's central and northern sections became a plantation economy with big companies producing sugar, cotton, and tobacco. Plantation agriculture co-existed with smallholder agricultural families who produced food and other cash crops for the external market (Serra, 2000). Thus, according to Wuyts (1989: 27), the colonial historical path spurred three main clusters of livelihood strategies for the peasantry, namely: (i) selling crops to the market, (ii) selling labour to plantations in the northern and central regions, and a labour reserve for South African mining, and (iii) practising agriculture for own consumption.

After independence, and the adoption of the Bretton Woods institutions' structural adjustment programmes, the Mozambican economy took a neoliberal turn which intensified after the 2000s. High levels of foreign direct investment engaged in extractive and export ventures, directed both at mining and agriculture industries, making Mozambique one of the main targets of land grabbing (Land Matrix[1]). Rural development and livelihoods are highly shaped by these dynamics, as evidenced by the foreign investments of Portucel Moçambique and the implications of its land acquisition model and social development plan for the district of Ile.

Portucel Moçambique, land acquisition model and social development plan

Mozambique is a country where land is predominantly state-owned. Land acquisition follows the procedures outlined in the Land Law, beginning with the identification of targeted land, preparation and submission of the land exploration plan, and request for the right to use the land. A critical part of the process is submitting the *Direitos de Uso e Aproveitamento da* Terra (DUAT), which outlines the public consultation and negotiation with residents. In case of a positive response, the applicant finally obtains the government's approval of the DUAT. The company then moves to the next stage - compensating and resettling residents - before commencing its operations.

Portucel Moçambique received a 50-year DUAT approved by Mozambique's Council of Ministers. The company has been gradually expropriating land from rural households to plant approximately two-thirds of the area. Until 2019, around 3,500 families have had shares of their land "transferred" to Portucel (with some exceptional cases of total land transferred). Portucel has planted 13,500 hectares of eucalyptus (Portucel Moc, 2021). The company plans to integrate the local population into rural development programmes based on employment creation and provision of agricultural inputs and technical assistance (Portucel Moc, 2021).

However, Portucel's model of land acquisition excluded resettlement. Instead, they negotiated with the Council of Ministers to implement Portucel's Social Development Plan (PSDP). In the company's narratives, the local population would benefit from the social and community development projects outlined in the PSDP. The stated goal of the PSDP was to create and share value and prosperity with local communities through investments in forest plantations. The PSDP constituted a set of projects to be implemented to compensate for rural households' loss of land and forest resources. These included food production and income-generating projects to overcome food access and production challenges. These projects were expected to: (1) provide technical assistance and training on farming techniques (following Climate Smart Agriculture guidelines); (2) distribute agricultural inputs such as livestock and seeds; (3) construct barns; (4) provide water holes; and (5) construct and rehabilitate roads and bridges, among other smaller related income generation projects (Portucel Moc, 2021).

Before the company's arrival, households were mostly subsistence producers with some market integration. They relied on precarious production techniques, mainly rain-fed and labour-intensive techniques, using tools such as hoes with no fertiliser application. Households provided the labour force. They mainly produced maize, peanuts, beans, and cassava (INE, 2012). Thus, it was the expectation that the implementation of PSDP would promote agrarian transformation in terms of mechanisation and use of improved farm practices and inputs. A company representative reported that about 5,800 families and 115 communities in the Manica and Zambézia Provinces had received benefits since the PSDP was implemented in 2015. However, designed in a top-down manner, the PSDP's planning and implementation were insensitive to smallholder viewpoints and the livelihood concerns of affected households, especially women. The PDSP did not fully consider the priorities and aspirations of the local population.

There were crucial distinctions in the experiences and outcomes of the neoliberal land grabbing processes. More broadly, regarding global processes, pre-existing inequalities within rural societies shape the dynamics of incorporation and condition the experiences of each segment of the working people. At the same time, the segments of working people are not delimited and segregated. The categories present grey boundaries. Factors external to the land grabbing process may move households into other social categories. In some instances, they might simultaneously belong to multiple categories. The affected rural households did not constitute a homogeneous class. On the contrary, factors such as class, gender, kinship, and age differentiated the working people into distinct groups that went through differentiated experiences, terms of incorporation, and outcomes regarding the process of land grabbing.

The data analysis identified patterns of household segmentation based on gender and the land size holdings of family heads before the project's inception. I thus outlined four household groupings based on their experiences and terms of incorporation. They were households headed by women and those headed by men. The male-headed households were further differentiated into three based on the socio-economic statuses of the heads. The first obtained direct benefits from the company like waged employment, and the second were poorer male household heads deriving benefits from the PSDP but outside the company's

employment. The final grouping was also under male heads, the local elites, who gained permanent employment and were more incorporated into the PSDP.

Gender inequalities were apparent and culturally present in this study community, subjecting women to multiple forms of marginalisation. Most women household heads interviewed were unmarried, divorced or widowed and belonged to poorer segments of the communities. Very few women household heads belonged to the rural elite either directly or indirectly through marriage. The first group of men household heads interviewed was made up of the local elites, community leaders, public officials, and politicians. The second group comprised company workers with permanent employment, and the third consisted of men heads of households who often earned lower income through non-permanent waged work. The situation of unmarried, divorced, and widowed women heads of households was particularly accentuated, making it imperative to understand how such women experienced Portucel's compensation packages associated with land grabbing.

Portucel's land acquisition process and compensation adequacy

This section presents the generalised implications of the land grabbing process and the convergent implications for rural livelihoods. The gender-differentiated implications will be explored in subsequent sections. Compensating for land expropriation was done through two main mechanisms: the PSDP package and employment creation. Two problems identified throughout the process of compensating households were unfulfilled promises and unsatisfactory compensation mechanisms. A consistent feature emerging from the interviews with all research participants was that Portucel had failed to keep its promises: providing employment, distributing seeds, and improving the overall livelihood conditions of affected households. Most women and men household heads interviewed stated that they had failed to protest and had allowed their land to be "transferred" to Portucel because there was a general notion during the consultation phase that the company would provide permanent employment for at least one member of each affected household. They felt assured that permanent employment would allow fixed monthly income to compensate for losing their land.

Not all affected household heads obtained employment from the company. Around 80%, according to Bruna (2021), worked for a couple of months or received no employment opportunities from the company. Most interviewees who had access to casual work said that the earnings did not compensate for the loss of their land. They had to work on average for one to two months, earning 170 Meticais a day (around 2 to 3 USD):

> Yes, I worked there, maybe for a month or so. With the money, I bought salt and food. I could not even buy a bicycle because the money was so little. … Life got worse; before we could produce on our farms, even sell produce. After Portucel came, everything stopped, [I] cannot even produce cassava, cannot get any money, nothing. Before, I could even buy clothes for my children, buckets, plates, and pots (Woman Head of Household, Ile, 2019).

The second problem revolving around dissatisfaction with services provided was the inefficient compensation mechanisms. Some households reported receiving seeds and technical assistance from the company. They complained, however, that the seeds were insufficient for their needs, distributed late in the season, and inappropriate for the edaphoclimatic conditions of the region:

> Yes, they distributed seeds, including beans and maize. However, because the soil is incompatible, they must change to other seeds here; … most of us are asking for seeds compatible with our land. For example, peanuts and beans [would be better] because maize does not grow here, maybe with manure (Male Community Leader, Ile, 2019).

The compensation was considered insufficient because it did not cover income and subsistence deficits from the loss of land. They faced a food production shortfall. The deforestation caused by the company's turn to plantation agriculture meant a loss of forest resources such as mushrooms and small animals, which contributed to meeting their dietary needs, firewood for cooking and even grass to construct their homes. The project implementation thus curtailed access to such resources, which were critical determinants for their social reproduction.

According to the data collected, most households, unable to survive on their farm incomes, engaged in livelihood diversification. Men sought casual employment in neighbouring towns, and women brewed and sold alcoholic beverages, producing and selling charcoal and offering traditional health

services. The following section focuses on differentiated implications for, and responses by, distinct segments of the working people, with a particular focus on how women's productive and reproductive labour within peasant production modes make up for the losses in household provisioning.

Local elites: intensification of social differentiation

Not all rural households were affected in the same way. Thus, even though many stated that the compensation received was insufficient to cover their expenses and provide them with general well-being, the local elites appeared not to have been affected similarly. Local elites, mostly male influential members, are likely to constitute the better-off segment of the working people, retaining power nowadays because of localised historical dynamics.

I distinguish the local elite as community leaders (by lineage and kinship) and their relatives, 'richer' peasants with larger plots of land and livestock, and local government officials. They are usually very influential within the community and are at the forefront of decision-making and negotiation processes with external actors. This puts them in an advantageous position regarding access to information and eligibility for external programmes. It enhances their opportunity to receive benefits deriving from such programmes. This group of individuals is a product of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence rural structures and traditional native leadership. They have access to conditions for accumulating from below based on owning large plots of land or advantageously taking over the remaining colonial investments in the post-independent period after the Portuguese fled the country or even links to Frelimo, the party in power since independence.

The local elites derived benefits from the PSDP. They were appointed group leaders for demonstration plots. Their eligibility to hold leadership positions was due to their possession of the national identity card and their prior experience with the commercialisation of surplus production, which gave them a firmly established market network. They also possessed large tracts of land and had enough to carry out farming activities even after they had ceded land to the company. Opportunities available to them from the PSDP were access to inputs and technical assistance. The interview with one of the

elected leaders, who previously owned the community mill, revealed certain advantages of being a group leader, such as receiving more agricultural inputs and technical assistance:

> I did not get employed. My benefit is to be the group leader. With the income, I managed to buy a motor pump to irrigate my farms using a solar panel. I thank Portucel for these improvements… (Male Demonstration Plots Leader, Ile, 2019).

Besides having the privilege of accessing inputs and technical assistance, they had the financial resources to hire labour on their larger farmlands, where they also applied these new agricultural practices. Labour availability was crucial in applying the new techniques, which were labour intensive. The other smallholders could not deploy additional income to pay for hired labour. As one demonstration plot leader highlighted:

> I was chosen to be responsible for a group of 24 farmers. I am responsible for taking care of the demonstration field by introducing new farming techniques I have been taught. The other 24 hardly make it. Maybe they can apply these new techniques in smaller areas because it is hard work. To do half a hectare or one hectare is challenging work. I have at least six to eight people working for me, and I pay 50 meticais per day (Male Demonstration Plot Leader, Ile, 2019).

The efficiency of these demonstration plots had been questioned because most smallholders could not apply the new techniques. Also, it was clear how unevenly distributed these 'benefits' from PSDP are on the ground. In some instances, some local elites have benefited both by being employed and at the same time holding a demonstration plot, which will further allow accumulation opportunities, thus intensifying social differentiation.

Permanent waged workers: more land, more benefits

Permanent workers were usually men with larger plots that were not under use before the project's inception. Because they owned larger plots of land, they could transfer larger plots to the company and retain enough to support their subsistence. The project prioritised households according to the land size they gave up; as such, these household heads were first to be offered permanent

jobs, mainly as guards, "*agentes de ligação*" (i.e. liaison officers, between the community and the company). or seasonal workers for the plantations. They received seeds and technical assistance for their farms under the PSDP. They could secure regular income, which they invested in farm inputs and labour, enabling them to produce adequate food and cash crops to sell in the markets. They hired labour, usually women and men from poorer households, in addition to relying on the labour of their wives.

Despite the benefits derived from PSDP interventions, interviews with permanent workers did not confirm significant life improvements. These wage workers acknowledged the benefits of a monthly salary but complained about the burden of work versus the amount of money they received. A permanent worker – a guard – oversees 48 blocks of eucalyptus and controls fires. These workers need a cell phone and a bicycle, which they must purchase from their wages, in order to carry out their tasks. Those unable to do so have to walk long distances to take care of the blocks of eucalyptus. One guard highlighted:

> Since I started working in the company, my life improved, not totally, but at least the minimum. However, the negative part is the working time [the workload]. We cannot add our value to the community and have businesses that help the community grow… I was working in the field and lost my phone. It costs 600 Meticais, and I receive 500 or 400 Meticais. I am not going to be able to buy a new one. We want a salary that enables us to grow. It is hard to wake up, go to my farm from 4 am to 7 am, and then work for the company the rest of the day (Male Portucel Worker, Ile, 2019).

Although they had access to more money, the overall household expenses were still not fully met. They must compensate with overexploitation of their labour, including their wives' and the latter's contribution to social reproduction. They survived due to the female labour tied to the land for subsistence farming. So, they end up subsidising capital via self-exploitation:

> My life has gotten better. Now I can buy things for my children that I could not before, like a radio and a bicycle... Before, I was working with no formal contract until 2018. However, I have received the same monthly salary since 2018: 4,200 Meticais [around USD 62]. They say the salary depends on the government; [my salary would improve] if the government

> raises the salary [official minimum wage]. However, as my wife works on the farm [the guard's land] with some people we hired, we manage to get products to sell in the market (Male Portucel Guard, Ile, 2019).

Although many permanent wage workers have connections to local elites by kinship, most do not own enough means of production to easily accumulate from below. They might be better off than other groupings, such as poorer peasants and women household heads. They struggled, however, to fulfil their livelihoods and social reproduction needs. They did this through further self-exploitation. They claimed that they wanted better terms of incorporation, but their current economic status inhibited any struggle on their part against dispossession or protests against Portucel. The labour of their wives on the land they retained was critical to making ends meet.

Peasant male household heads: intensified drudgery and self-exploitation

This group of respondents included male household heads who owned relatively smaller land without links with local elites. These household heads engaged mainly in subsistence agriculture and occasionally sold the surplus in the market. In response to the promises made in the project, most transferred their land to the company. Those who failed to do so had theirs forcefully expropriated and ended up with either insufficient land to survive, or no land at all. Some were employed as casual workers, but even they reported labour exploitation:

> They want us to work from dawn to dusk. It is backbreaking work. The wages are low and do not compensate. We are unhappy with that; the money is so little. They hire us to work only a few days and then try to make the most of our work each day from dawn to dusk (Man Household Head, Ile, 2019).

This segment of working people was experiencing low incomes and severe food deficits, and had to adopt alternative livelihood strategies for survival. The most common strategies were: (1) selling labour to better-off households (permanent waged workers or rural elites); (2) borrowing or renting land from family or other members of the community; (3) engaging in seasonal migration to work in nearby cities or towns, as construction workers; and (4) migrating permanently. In their absence, their wives took over as heads responsible for

ensuring household survival through subsistence production and waged work on the farms of the rural elite and permanent employees.

Gendered implications and reactions of the working people

Women-headed households: exclusion and labour exploitation

Female household heads had no occasion to consent to "transfer" their land to the company. This situation is derived from rural Mozambique's gender exclusionary traditional and customary cultural practices (Agy, 2018). The interviewed women stated that it was mainly men and local elites who were invited to the initial meetings with the company. They, the women, were left out. Thus, women are excluded from participating and presenting their opinions and aspirations in meetings with investors and government representatives to decide the community's future. One of the women that were interviewed explained the exclusion process:

> We were not consulted at all. We would just see machines coming and clearing our land for their ends. If you complained, the leader would come and tell you that the land is not ours. The land belonged to the government and God. They would come in, cutting down everything…even if you protest, they will not accept (Woman Household Head, Ile, 2019).

Women in the study, whom the company employed, were casual workers. In some cases, male members of their families (husbands, sons, nephews, sons-in-law) were employed even though the women were the actual owners of the land. A community leader in Ile explained that older women usually transferred their casual job opportunities to young men, who split the remuneration with them fifty-fifty. Citing one instance by way of explanation:

> She and her daughter gave their land [to Portucel]. Because they are women, they cannot handle this job; only men can handle [it]. After the men got the job [casual employment], they shared the income in half. One half for them [women] as land owners and the other half for the men that worked… For the other one [another woman that was present at the meeting] as well, because they do not have sons, do not have men in their families, it was the same process (Male Community Leader, Ile, 2019).

Many women complained about food-related issues. Most expressed that food production was a higher priority to the community than the eucalyptus the company was planting. In the words of one of the women interviewed, "*eucalyptus does not kill hunger*". As mentioned earlier, poorer male peasants were migrating to peri-urban areas in search of employment. Meanwhile, their wives assumed full responsibility for household social reproduction and farm work. For example, before Portucel expropriated their land, Dona Deolinda and her husband worked on their farm with help, remunerating their workers with farm harvest. After they lost their land to Portucel around 2009, her husband went to the city looking for jobs in construction while she assumed the household headship, farming on borrowed land and hiring out her labour to better-off households in the village. Dona Deolinda and other women heads of households experience significant burdens and precarious existence. She lamented:

> It is bad. I have nothing, not cassava, nothing. I do not understand why cassava and beans do not grow next to the eucalyptus; it absorbs all the water. My husband had to move to the city to work in construction, and he sent me a little money that was not enough. I must work on other people's farms to earn money (Expropriated Peasant Woman, Ile, 2019).

As a kind of ecological rupture, women spoke of their small plots and gardens right next to the eucalyptus plantation and how this remaining small plot of land could not produce adequate food for subsistence. The predominant understanding of the interviewees was that the eucalyptus trees exhaust soil nutrients, including groundwater. Another ecological rupture, as noted, was the lack of access to forest resources, including mushrooms and other edibles.

Generally, women heads of households were keen to have their land back so they could farm again and get their food and life back. These women were not interested in struggling for better terms of incorporation into the PSDP or other forms of compensation. As Dona Zita claims: "*I would rather have my land back. They took over our land in vain!*" Another woman noted:

> Nothing got better. We are here crying. We want our land back to farm because we see nothing now. They fooled us and brought nothing that they had promised. They said they would bring zinc plates for our homes, that we would benefit from this company for 50 years and so on. Nothing was done. That is why we are crying. Even the seeds they promised, they do not bring them anymore. And then I think, "Why did I accept this transfer of land in the first place?" (Expropriated Peasant Woman, Ile, 2019).

The exclusion of households headed by women follows the argument of Tsikata and Yaro (2014) that if pre-existing inequalities are not addressed, female access to opportunities, such as permanent jobs and PSDP, are limited. Women household heads present higher risks of being excluded and suffering accentuated adverse effects of land grabbing even if compensation mechanisms are implemented.

Conclusion

Corporations have been implementing compensation mechanisms, such as job creation and social development plans, to incorporate rural households into the expected process of rural development and thereby improve their livelihoods without considering pre-existing rural structures and inequalities. Trends indicate that such mechanisms are not improving the livelihoods of affected rural households. Most end up adversely incorporated, ultimately resulting in the inclusion of a few and the exclusion of the majority, particularly households headed by women.

My discussion so far shows that social development experiences derived from the projects rolled out by Portucel Moçambique differed for the participating community members depending on their gendered positions within their households and the size of their land. The pre-existing structures and inequalities conditioned the differences in experiences within the rural setting. In this way, intra-community relations and inequalities exacerbated the impact of land dispossession and expropriation. Local elites could be incorporated insofar as they got opportunities to accumulate. Male workers, heads of poorer households and women household heads underwent exploitation of their labour to feed the company and, at a considerably lower rate, the local elite's accumulation.

The weight and costs of social reproduction were further transferred to, and ultimately carried by, women belonging to poorer households and households headed by male workers, as noted by Fraser (2016), Tsikata (2016) and to some extent, Shivji (2017). Overall, it is crucial to underline that both pre-existing structures and inequalities and the mechanism of incorporation heavily condition the outcomes of land grabbing and the reactions from below. This is because they determine the level of exclusion that each segment experiences and the compensation for the losses resulting from expropriation.

This article demonstrates the various degrees through which the working people in their heterogeneity experience land grabbing processes in ways that intensify their exclusion and social differentiation in the rural world. By examining the different forms of labour undertaken by the household head, I discerned the various levels of incorporation, from the petty commodity producers to the fully proletarianised waged workers through to the semi-detached casual workers and seemingly detached peasant farmers subsisting on the land for their needs. I argue that they all constituted part of the company's exploited labour, contributing to its wealth generation. This was made possible by women's productive labour and reproductive labour tied to the land. The nature of the exploitation experienced by the various women depended on the household's incorporation in the company's production processes. The critical feature here was the sex of the household head and the size of land owned. In all this, women's productive and reproductive labour played a key role since such labour provided the fallback survival strategy for households living within the land area that Portucel obtained. Portucel's wealth accumulation is thus only possible due to existing forms of patriarchy that give men unquestioned access to women's labour, productive or reproductive. Undermining patriarchy becomes critical for reversing rural communities' exploitation in large-scale land acquisitions.

Endnotes

1 https://landmatrix.org/map/

2 'Rights to use and benefit from the land'. The DUAT is a statutory land use permit.

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Women and Land Ownership in Zimbabwe: A Review of the Land Reforms with Particular Focus on the Fast Track Land Reform Programme

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Abstract

Mainstream scholarly debates on land ownership in Zimbabwe have long focused on racial and political divides, highlighting, in particular, the injustice and marginalisation of the black majority Zimbabweans against the white minority. For an equally long period, women's rights to land ownership were limited by the land reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, and the periods before when women could only access lands through their male kin. Given the recently implemented Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), the researchers wondered to what extent women participated in the programme as well as the extent to which they benefited or failed to benefit from the FTLRP. Motivated by how fast the value of land is appreciating, especially in the peri-urban areas, and how much women and their households could benefit if they owned lands, the researchers carried out a review of over 60 peer-reviewed articles, books, and technical publications to explore answers to these questions. The analysis revealed that women had very limited land ownership rights in the periods preceding the FTLRP, but that land ownership increased marginally to over 15% of women beneficiaries since the FTLRP. Whilst this constitutes an improvement over the status quo under previous reforms, there is still a lot to be done to bridge the land ownership gap between men and women. Women should be placed at the centre of future land redistribution programmes to enhance not only women's contributions and development but also that of the household and the economy.

Keywords: land ownership; women; land reforms; Fast Track Land Reform Programme; Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Land issues in Zimbabwe have attracted global attention largely due to their political and racial dimensions. Previous scholars have focused on the injustices and inequalities in the proportion of lands owned by the black majority compared to the white minority (Moyo, 2013; Hove, 2012; Cliffe *et al*., 2011; Southall, 2011; Pasura, 2010; Moyo and Yeros, 2007). As important as these debates seem on the surface, another level of injustice and inequality, which has been overlooked for so long, grows right under the surface, namely, women's limited land ownership rights relative to those of their male counterparts. According to Ossome and Naidu (2021), Bhatasara (2011), Pasura (2010), and Geobel (2005), the question of land in Zimbabwe is no longer simply a racial or political question but rather, a gender issue. Land reforms in sub-Saharan Africa have been critiqued for failing to pay attention or paying little attention to the role of gender in women's productive and reproductive activities as well as their marginalisation from the distribution of productive resources (Tsikata, 2016). Thus, women are considered to have very limited land ownership rights under existing land tenure systems.

Zimbabwe has implemented three different land reforms over the years (Moyo, 2011b). The FTLRP is by far the most successful of all land reforms to date. This land reform has been justified as a moral right to redistribute land and increase equality among land-deserving Zimbabweans (Thomas, 2003). However, there have been claims that men benefitted more under the FTLRP compared to women (Musemwa *et al*., 2013; Matondi, 2012). This has generated criticisms from some researchers (Chipuriro and Batisai, 2018; Matondi, 2012; Musemwa *et al*., 2013; Gaidzwana, 2011; Chingarande, 2008; Goebel, 2005,) who have argued that gender was not considered during the land redistribution process. For example, Matondi (2012) stresses that the FTLRP in Zimbabwe was unsuccessful in changing women's land rights and that instead, it led to their marginalisation in terms of land access and ownership. It is thus critical to assess progress made in ensuring women's access to, and

ownership of, land under the FTLRP to inform policy decisions through a gender-inclusive approach.

The central questions we ask are, to what extent did women participate in the land redistribution under the FTLRP, and how did they benefit or fail to benefit from the programme in terms of land ownership in Zimbabwe? The aim is to emphasise the importance of emancipating and empowering women through future policy instruments to be able to own lands, such that growth, poverty reduction, and development can be all-inclusive. Land value appreciates over time, spurring massive accumulation and sale of these lands by family and village heads as well as chiefs in Zimbabwe, particularly around peri-urban areas. The effects on women are two-fold. First, women are robbed of access to, and ownership of land. Second, women are denied the opportunity to sell land for their livelihood improvement. Such limited opportunities and disempowerment leave women more vulnerable, less endowed, and less resourced, characteristics which are detrimental to development (Todaro and Smith, 2015). In this article, we offer some insights into land reform in Zimbabwe, including the FTLRP and its implications for women's livelihoods. We reflect on the gendered nature of land access and ownership following the FTLRP, and on issues concerning gender where further commitment and actions are needed. We argue, among other things, that land reforms have varied outcomes for different categories of women and these outcomes are usually mediated by customary and traditional patriarchal arrangements as well as structural systems.

There are five sections in this article. It begins with a brief introduction, followed by a discussion on Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) as the theoretical underpinning for the paper, highlighting its suitability and applicability. The third section outlines the methodology employed for the review whilst section four discusses the findings from the review. The last section concludes the article, proposing ways in which land ownership can become more inclusive in Zimbabwe.

A Feminist Political Ecology Approach

In Southern Africa, Zimbabwe included, traditional laws and attitudes are not in harmony with human rights. This presents a challenge for women, who are usually at the receiving end of violations of such rights, particularly where land rights and use are concerned. Feminist perspectives on power and politics, and how they define people's unequal access to, and control over, environmental resources are therefore necessary to analyse pertinent issues related to land access and ownership. We situate our discussion within the perspective of FPE (Harcourt and Nelson, 2015; Rocheleau *et al*., 1996). Gender is considered a key variable of analysis, given its role in socio-ecological transformation as well as how it interacts with class, race, age, ethnicity, nationalities, and other forms of identity (Fordham, 1999; Sundberg, 2016). The study by Rocheleau *et al*., (1996) for example, sheds light on gendered knowledge, gendered environmental rights and responsibilities, and gendered environmental politics and grassroots involvement.

In addition to gender, FPE emphasises and legitimises everyday experiences as a key point of departure, since this is where social reproduction takes place, and where subject identities and social orders are manifested and challenged (Sundberg, 2016). Beyond micro everyday experiences, FPE also considers the macro level, such as the national or global political economy (Sundberg, 2016). FPE scholars argue for the acknowledgment of social norms, relations, and disparities in access to resources, which are shaped by state-level and political-economic dynamics as well as environmental changes (Rocheleau *et al*., 1996; Vercillo, 2021). Literature has emerged over the past decade suggesting that gender equality in agriculture could be advanced if gaps in access to farm resources between women and men are reduced. This paper examines gendered farm resource entitlements in northern Ghana. Based mainly on six months of immersive qualitative research, this case study draws from and contributes to FPE scholarship. FPE scholarship challenges the conceptions and widely accepted notions of patriarchy in favour of ways that promote social and ecological justice for women and other vulnerable groups (Elmhirst, 2011; Rocheleau *et al*., 1996). Although FPE offers an important theoretical lens for environmental justice dialogues, it has been critiqued for overly emphasising gender as an analytical tool, while overlooking other aspects of identities (Mollet

and Faria, 2013). Nevertheless, the explicit focus on context, culture, and the environment makes FPE an appropriate tool for analysing environmental issues.

Key to our discussion in this article is an understanding of gender categories that goes beyond a singular focus to examine the intersection of multiple social categories such as class, political affiliation, age, and place of residence. All these shape who does what, how, when, with what resources, and for what purposes (Vercillo, 2021). Literature has emerged over the past decade suggesting that gender equality in agriculture could be advanced if gaps in access to farm resources between women and men are reduced. This paper examines gendered farm resource entitlements in northern Ghana. Based mainly on six months of immersive qualitative research, this case study draws from and contributes to FPE. Despite the vital role that women play in farming and food security in Zimbabwe, the 'woman and land' question seems to have been ignored. Thus, acknowledging environmental politics in the country can help us better understand how the FTLRP has affected women's land ownership. In our discussion of women's land access and ownership in Zimbabwe before and after the FTLRP, we attempt to unpack new forms of power that emerged during the reform and how women utilised these to access and own land. The discussion also highlights the implications for those women who did not have access to existing sources of power and their participation in the land grabbing that characterised the FTLRP. This approach offers insights into the interactions among men and women within a structured system of social norms and institutions which are mediated by individual agency (Nyantakyi-Frimpong, 2017).

Methodology

The task of writing this article began with a search for literature from several databases such as JSTOR, EBSCOhost, Sage, Science Direct, Elsevier, Taylor and Francis, Africa Journals Online, and Google Scholar. Google Scholar has a combination of peer-reviewed and other literature, whilst JSTOR contains some older content that precedes the current peer review process. The remaining databases contain solely peer-reviewed articles and books. Article snowballing was also employed through a search in the bibliography of cited articles to

obtain additional literature. Various selection criteria, as shown in Table 1, were adopted to facilitate a focused search of the literature for this article.

When carrying out the search, certain keywords were entered in the "advanced option" of the various databases. Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" were used to combine keywords and to include or exclude some words that were not of interest to the search. Examples of key terms and words used in the search include "Fast track land reform programme" OR "land reform" OR "land redistribution"; "land ownership AND women/gender"; "land access AND women/gender"; "Gender" OR "Women"; "Zimbabwe"; "sub-Sahara Africa";"land tenure systems AND women/gender". Individual names of some of the countries in the sub-region were also included in the search. This search yielded a pool of articles after which abstracts were read carefully to ascertain the relevance of the content to the review. Materials that were deemed relevant were downloaded and saved in a folder on a computer as well as in the Mendeley library for review. At the end of the search, at least 60 peer-reviewed articles, books, and technical reports on the subject matter were reviewed and discussed.

Table 1: Criteria for the Inclusion and Exclusion of Articles and Other Literature

Criteria	Excluded	Included	Justification
Type of text.	Thesis, web articles, and online essays.	Peer-reviewed articles, books, and official documents.	Peer-reviewed texts are subjected to scrutiny by experts in the related disciplines to ensure that they adhere to standards accepted internationally. Such articles are deemed the 'gold standard: and are thus preferred in academic writing.
The language used in publication.	Articles and literature published in languages other than English.	Articles and literature published in the English language.	Articles, books, and documents published in the English language are accessible to the authors, enabling an understanding of the arguments being made.
Country or region of study.	Any article, report, or book that focused on developing countries outside the sub-Saharan region.	Articles, reports, and books that focused on Zimbabwe and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa.	To make sound arguments that are relevant to the topic under review.
Thematic areas addressed by texts.	Articles and literature whose focus was outside land ownership, access, land reform, gender and women, and articles outside the Social Sciences/ Humanities.	Articles and literature that focused on land reform/ redistribution, women/ gender, and the Social Sciences/ Humanities.	Literature that focused on the issues under review were the key sources for analysis and arguments made by the authors.

Land Governance in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the State retains power and control over all land through the 1992 Land Acquisition Act (chapter 20:10) and therefore it can promulgate such legislation to regulate all tenure systems as it deems fit. Generally, there are four types of land tenure in Zimbabwe. These are freehold tenure, encompassing private land ownership, leasehold tenure including the 99-year lease to use state-owned land, and customary land tenure, system in which land is traditionally owned by communities through traditional leaders. The fourth system comprises state land and applies to all state lands held under law or in terms of specific statutory provisions, such as national parks and game reserves (Matondi and Dekker, 2011). Land tenure arrangements, access to, and ownership of, land has traditionally been and remains the preserve of men, which manifests in the observed gender-differentiated disparities in land ownership in Zimbabwe (Mujeyi, 2021; Mutopo, 2011; Chingarande, 2008; Alice, 1992; Gaidzanwa, 1988). Women face challenges in access, control, and ownership of land in their own right and often realise usufruct land ownership rights through marriage (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019; Gaidzanwa, 2011; Matondi and Dekker, 2011; Goebel, 2005). The inheritance of land by male heirs tends to exacerbate women's restricted land rights. Most women, particularly in rural areas, find it hard to sustain their livelihoods due to limited land access and ownership (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019; Chingarande, 2008; Pasura, 2010; Moyo, 2008). This points to the largely unaddressed land question in Zimbabwe, which no longer relates solely to racially skewed distribution, but to gender and equity issues as noted by other scholars (Bhatasara, 2021; Chipuriro and Batisai, 2018; Gaidzanwa, 2011; Mutopo, 2011; Chingarande, 2008; Goebel, 2005; Alice, 1992).

Weak land governance systems also pose a land tenure security challenge for women who own land, as they can be victims of evictions and displacements at any time (Mujeyi, 2021; Mazviona *et al*., 2020; Chiweshe, 2017; Mutondoro *et al*., 2016). Recent evictions across the country, including evictions from the settlements of Chisumbanje and Chilonga, tell a wider story of land tenure insecurity where women and indigenous communities are disproportionately affected (Marewo *et al*., 2021; Matondi and Rutherford, 2021; Chiweshe, 2017; Mutondoro *et al*., 2016). Furthermore, land tenure insecurity has generally

been associated with low investment in land improvements and new technology which is necessary for sustainable agrarian transformation in Zimbabwe (Chavunduka *et al*., 2021).

Traditional systems of leadership, including chiefs, village heads, and family heads, often act as a conduit for excluding and marginalising women in access to, and ownership of, land (Gaidzanwa, 2011). The allocation and distribution of land in the commons by traditional structures has yielded very little in terms of allocation and distribution to women because preference is given to male members of the family (Gaidzanwa, 2011, 1988; Goebel, 2005; Alice, 1992). Women can, however, negotiate these structures by using different ways to access resources and reposition themselves, thus altering the status quo (Kesby, 1999). To this effect, Mkodzongi and Lawrence (2019) note that the FTLRP made provisions that allowed women to access land but through patriarchal structures such as chiefs, village heads, and male relatives, which presented challenges that impeded effective access and utilisation of land. Some evidence exists that the political elites dominate spaces where negotiations regarding resource distribution take place, without the contributions of the resource-deserving population (Mutopo, 2011). As a result, women tend to bear the brunt of poor land administration and governance systems, as well as patronage dealings (Chipato *et al*., 2020).

History of land access and ownership systems preceding the FTLRP in Zimbabwe

Since the colonial and post-colonial eras, Zimbabwe's agrarian relations have faced unequal and repressive land policies that threatened the livelihoods of indigenous people (Moyo and Chambati, 2013). Zimbabwean indigenes were dispossessed of their land and natural resources by the colonial government, thus creating land tenures that were considered racist and discriminatory (Moyana, 2002; Palmer, 1977). The land was divided between the Europeans and the Africans, and the black majority were allotted Tribal Trust Lands, currently known as communal areas (Shivji *et al*., 1998; Tshuma, 1998). A dual land ownership system backed by law existed during the colonial and post-colonial eras, with white settlers enjoying titles and access to land while black Africans

continued to live under the governance of customary law (Tshuma, 1998). Individual ownership of land was not possible; rather, chiefs oversaw land distribution and use through village headmen. Male members of the lineage, however, had authority over land (Marongwe, 2003). Women's linkage to land was made possible through marriage, with unmarried and divorced women accessing land through maternal ties (Mutopo, 2011; Goebel, 2005; Sachikonye, 2005; Peter and Peters, 1988; Gaidzanwa, 1988). Thus, women needed to have strong ties with male kin such as husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers to avoid "economic and social marginalisation" from land (Sachikonye, 2005; Gaidzanwa, 1988). Generally, women had user rights but lacked ownership rights and typically farmed on small plots of lands called 'tseu' in Shona, which were in the vicinity of the homestead (Pasura, 2010). These parcels of land could be retained by a woman in the event of widowhood, but could also be lost in the case of a divorce (Goebel, 2005). Women's rights to access, own and use the land were not protected by law and thus their fate rested on the compassion of male kin (Peters and Peters, 1998).

During colonial times in Zimbabwe, the imposition of hut taxes pushed men into forced labour in farms and mines (Thomas, 2003). Women were left behind as heads of households but still could not claim full land rights. Gaidzanwa (1988) emphasises how colonialism amplified the dependence of peasant women on men, as they needed financial support from men in the absence of women's land ownership rights. Implementation of the Land Apportionment Act in 1930, a law that governed land allocation and acquisition, and which segregated the black majority from white settlers, led to the establishment of native reserves (Thomas, 2003; Schmidt, 1992). This essentially paved the way for differential production in agriculture between the black majority and white settlers (Sers, 1998). Some scholars (Gaidzanwa, 2012, 1988; Alice, 1992) argue that these laws curtailed women's rights to land since registration was allowed only in the names of male household heads. This worsened the misfortunes of women, in particular unmarried ones, as they could not access land for use (Peters and Peters, 1998). Schmidt (1992) notes that the patrilineal and patriarchal structures under colonialism treated women as inferiors, diminishing their economic status and land rights. By the end of colonialism, most of the land had been expropriated with the black

majority occupying only about thirty per cent, while white settlers occupied about fifty-one per cent of the total fertile land (Moyana, 1984; Palmer, 1977).

After independence in 1980, the new government started reclaiming land for the black majority who lacked land through land reforms, basically to redress the injustices created by previous laws in land access and distribution (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019; Moyo; 2013; Thomas, 2003). Land resettlement schemes were initiated where the government anticipated acquiring and allocating unused lands owned by white farmers to black Zimbabweans, based on a 'willing seller, willing buyer' principle. This initiative failed woefully due to several factors, including a lack of funds to acquire the land from white farmers as well as land pressure that had been simmering since colonialism (Alexander, 1993; Moyo, 1995, 2000). The government was only able to acquire 2.6 million hectares of land to resettle 52,000 families between 1980 and 1989, compared to the targeted 8.3 million hectares of land for 162,000 families (Alexander, 1993; Potts and Mutambirwa, 1997). Lending support to the above, Moyo (1995, 2011b) noted that the two decades of land reform (from 1980 to 1999) only resettled 72,000 families out of the set target of 182,000; this left many Zimbabweans and the government very frustrated.

Given that the prime land suitable for agricultural production is becoming increasingly scarce, it is important to address the gender and youth imbalances related to land ownership. Available literature before and after independence shows that there still exist gender imbalances with regard to land access and ownership in Zimbabwe (Gaidzanwa, 2011; Zvokuomba, 2019; Bhatasara, 2011; Bhatasara *et al*., 2021). Women's access to, and ownership of, land is largely still through marriage (Shumba, 2011)"whether inherited, allotted, purchased or seized, land remains the most basic resource of agricultural production". This study recognizes the importance of land to the Zimbabwean as it is considered to be the identity of the people as well as the very life of the rural Zimbabweans who make up 86% of the population (SARDC/ ZWRCN, 2005). Even post-independence land policies were failing to adequately address the gender dimensions of land ownership (Scoones, 2015; Chipuriro and Batisai, 2018).

The emergency of the FTLRP

After the first two attempts at land reform, the government commenced the FTLRP to accelerate land acquisition and distribution. The domestic political conflict had been brewing for years after the failure of the first two land reforms. Poor economic and social conditions created by the structural adjustment programme also fuelled displeasure among the populace. Moyo and Yeros (2007) and Sadomba (2008) argue that the emergence of the opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), as well as internal tensions within the ruling party, contributed to the pressure leading to the emergency of the FTLRP. On the other side, pressure from war veterans and indigenous Zimbabweans to return the land to the people, as promised at independence, forced the government to embark on the accelerated land restructuring and resettlement policy, beginning in the year 2000. For Matondi (2012), the FTLRP was revolutionary because it radically altered commercial agriculture and land redistribution in less than 10 years. The programme's long-term goals have been to address inequalities in access to land while reducing pressure on communal lands, including the expansion and improvement of the smallholder sector's agricultural production, as well as putting underused lands into full productivity (Chipenda and Tom, 2022; Moyo 2011a; Goebel, 2005). The FTLRP was characterised by illegal, sometimes violent invasions, and confrontation of large farms by landless indigenous people. Although it was considered unplanned, the FTLRP led to a successful land redistribution of 13 million hectares of land to 180,000 indigenes (Moyo, 2013; Helliker and Bhatasara 2018) to legitimise the occupations of farmlands and stimulate more land seizures and redistributions.

Women's Participation and Benefits within the FTLRP

The FTLRP offered myriad opportunities for women in terms of land access and ownership. It is during this time that more women got access to land compared to the previous two land reforms of the 1980s and 1990s (Moyo, 2011a; Scoones *et al*., 2010). During the FTLRP, women participated in various capacities, from the performance of activities necessary for daily living such as cooking, washing, and sweeping base camps, to active campaigns. Bhatasara and Chiweshe (2017) argue that, during the land invasion that preceded the

Zimbabwean government's FTLRP, women opened up spaces for themselves to accumulate and produce as active participants and not just passive observers. Scoones *et al*., (2010) reaffirmed that women's participation was of great value during the land invasions under the FTLRP, through the performance of tasks such as cooking and singing to boost the morale of the comrades. They further assert that women did not occupy important positions such as base commanders, but could be appointed as secretaries and treasurers (Scoones *et al*., 2010). Sadomba (2008) found that women were active participants in campaigns to mobilise people for land invasions. The process and participation of women under the FTLRP offered women, mostly widows, divorcees, and the marginalised, the opportunity to break down barriers to land acquisition and ownership, to be able to own land in their own right (Chingarande, 2008; Scoones *et al*., 2010; Moyo, 2008). The FTLRP, therefore, appeared to have liberated certain categories of women from cultural boundaries, especially in the communal areas where land access and ownership are largely mediated through males. However, Mutopo (2011) found in her study that few women acquired land individually, with the majority obtaining land through men, in particular through marriage and cultural contracts.

The best statistics available to date from the African Institute for Agrarian Studies' (AIAS) baseline study across districts gives a general overview of land redistribution under the FTLRP (Moyo *et al*., 2009). Figures from the study show that more than 82% of people benefitted from land redistribution. About 15% acquired land through illegal land invasions, of which some were formalised and others not formalised. A small number of beneficiaries, about 2.9%, had purchased their plots. The AIAS baseline study also indicated land sharing among relatives, friends, and neighbours from those who had benefitted. Largely, the FTLRP has resulted in over 70% of land ownership by communal farmers, A1 farmers, and farmers in informal resettlements, while only 11% is in the hands of large farm estates (Moyo *et al*., 2009). This is considered to be a great departure from the pre-1980 and pre-1990 periods when agricultural land was concentrated in the large-scale commercial farming sector.

In terms of access and ownership of land by women under the FTLRP, some figures show that 14% benefitted countrywide (Moyo, 2011a). Other figures show that of all the women, those who benefited from A2 plots totalled 8%; for A1 resettlements, 14%; for A1 self-contained plots, 13%; and unofficial sites which were not formally registered, 15% (Scoones *et al*., 2010). Data for various districts also indicate that women obtained land in Mazowe district, and in Zvimba district, 25% benefitted from A1 plots and 22% from A2 plots (Matondi, 2012; Murisa, 2007). Chingarande (2008) asserts that about a fifth of women have independent access and ownership of land following the FTLRP. Among the women, some benefitted more than others, as demonstrated by Mazhawidza and Manjengwa (2011) who found more women household heads accessing and owning land compared to married women, who could not access land on their own. Additionally, rural women from the communal areas who lived close to the farms benefitted through land seizures (Mutopo and Chiweshe, 2014). Overall, between 12% and 18% of women are now landowners (Utete, 2003; GoZ, 2007). Chingarande (2008) and WLZ (2007) peg this figure at between 10% and 28% in total. These figures imply that the number of women benefitting from land redistribution through the FTLRP has increased, compared to previous years. Zvokuomba (2019) and Zvokuomba and Batisai (2020) observed a marginal increment from 5% to 12% and 27% of land ownership by women. In addition to other factors, this was most likely driven by the support of notable advocacy groups such as the Women's Land Lobby Group (WLLG) and other NGOs who rallied and supported the land reform (Moyo, 2011b). Since there is no clear breakdown of the categories of women who benefitted, there have been assumptions suggesting that the beneficiaries were mostly elites, ex-combatants, and those affiliated with the ruling party, ZANU PF (Matondi, 2012). However, Moyo (2011b) debunked this claim through his findings showing that many people benefitted regardless of their political affiliation, particularly the rural unemployed at about 70%. This has given women some share of the most valued resource in the country, thereby increasing their chances of being able to secure their livelihoods.

For some women, the land redistribution process accorded them freedom from the customary tenure rules prevalent in communal areas (Moyo *et al*., 2009). It is plausible then to argue that earlier land reforms in Zimbabwe had

little or no positive impact on women's landlessness; some even argue that the situation worsened (Bhatasara and Chiweshe, 2017). The most recent reform, the FTLRP, facilitated greater empowerment and livelihoods through land acquisitions (Addison, 2019; Bhatasara and Chiweshe, 2017), especially in resettlement areas and A1 farms. In light of this, Mutopo and Chiweshe (2014) argue that, unlike the colonial dispossession along racial lines which worsened women's subordination, the fast-track land reform, by de-racialising land access and ownership in Zimbabwe, has afforded women many possibilities for livelihood enhancement. Mutopo (2011) and Moyo (2011b) conclude that the FTLRP enabled and increased access and ownership of land for women. Although this is laudable, it is evident that the numbers are still marginal. The expectation is that since women are in the majority in Zimbabwe, about 51%, they should have greater access and ownership, necessitating further interrogation of land reforms and redistribution in the country.

Success stories of women benefitting from the FTLRP were not without challenges. This is because even though the FTLRP addressed some land inequities in Zimbabwe, difficulties concerning land acquisition by women and other marginalised groups, such as the youth, remain (Chipenda and Tom, 2022). Among these challenges are patriarchal structures that favour men, and gender insensitivity, which are difficulties commonly faced in land reforms across countries. We argue that culture was used as a vehicle for exclusion, to discriminate against women in terms of access to land. A great deal of open opposition in some cases emanated from the state and other leading patriarchs, including traditional authorities who felt that land should be given to the men (Moyo, 2011b). Gender stereotyping and lack of decision-making and bargaining power among women are huge impediments to their access and ownership of land. Men in Zimbabwe are still biased when it comes to land redistribution and security of tenure (Mutopo, 2011). Despite the important role that women play in productive and reproductive activities, they received the least land during resettlement (Moyo, 2008). These barriers are made worse by the Constitution, which lacks clear provisions for women as far as land is concerned. To some extent, the Constitution of Zimbabwe allows discrimination against women where family issues are concerned, and this includes land regulation which is navigated through customary law (Article 23 (3)). Most women beneficiaries of

the FTLRP acquired the land as spouses because it was difficult navigating the male-dominated redistribution process (Moyo, 2011b; Midzi and Jowa 2007). Consequently, as argued by Schmidt (1992), the patrilineal and patriarchal structures existing in Zimbabwe function to subordinate and erode women's land rights, economic standing, and human rights.

Social categories and their intersections can also be used to analyse women's experiences of land access and ownership under the FTLRP. Scholars have argued that women's struggles to access land are rooted in, and mediated by social categories and location, including marital status (i.e., married, divorced, single, widowed, etc.), in addition to diverse social identities such as political affiliation, class, ethnicity, and age (Ingwani, 2021; Bhatasara and Chiweshe, 2017; Mutopo and Chiweshe, 2014). For instance, women heads of households benefitted more from land redistribution under the FTLRP, compared to married women (Mazhawidza and Manjengwa, 2011). Women elites and those living close to invaded farms were greater beneficiaries than those who did not fit these categories (Matondi, 2012). Such findings have prompted many researchers to conclude that gender was overlooked and that women were not specifically targeted by the FTLRP (Mpahla, 2003; Bhatasara, 2011; Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019). This assertion should however be taken with caution since women's experiences under the FTLRP yielded varying outcomes based on their social standing (Mutopo and Chiweshe).

Progress towards inclusive land ownership

Zimbabwe has made some significant strides, in general, to promote gender equity as various policies and strategies are being implemented to empower women and girls. Some of these strategies include the establishment of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission and Zimbabwe's Women Microfinance Bank (Tarinda, 2019). The Constitution, the supreme law of the country, states that everyone has the right to procure, hold and dispose of all forms of property, including land, irrespective of their sex, gender, or marital status. The country is also a signatory to several conventions and protocols which aim to ensure gender equality on all fronts, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979, the Beijing Platform for

Action of 1995, the Southern Africa Gender and Development Declaration of 1997, and the Maputo Declaration on Gender Mainstreaming and the Effective Participation of Women in the African Union (Tarinda, 2019; ZGC, 2021). These show the country's commitment to regional and international obligations to promote, enforce, and advance gender equity. Nevertheless, gender disparities in land ownership remain a challenging policy issue (Zvokuomba and Batisai, 2020; Bhatasara., 2021, Mujeyi, 2021).

Given that the responsibility for producing most of the food consumed in Zimbabwe rests on women, since 56% of communal farmers are women, increasing land ownership among women is tantamount to furthering women's rights (WCOZ, 2021). The country's food security depends on ensuring that women have equitable access to, and ownership of, land. In pursuit of fairness and the transparent administration of agricultural land, the Zimbabwe Land Commission Act was passed in 2017 and land audits were conducted (de Satgé, 2021). However, the report of the land audit exercise is not yet publicly available and the recommendations have yet to be implemented (Dube, 2019). As such, gender disparities in land ownership and the marginalisation of women, as far as land access and ownership is concerned, remain a cause for concern. The land audit report must pass through the validation process and its recommendations put into practice to improve the well-being of women. When women are equipped with productive assets such as land, their socioeconomic status is significantly improved, leading to more sustainable development (Tekwa and Adesina, 2018; Todaro and Smith 2015). Hence, the importance of inclusive land access and ownership for sustainable social and economic transformation cannot be overemphasised.

Conclusions

This article has focused on land access and ownership by women, following the FTLRP, with special attention to participation and benefits derived by women from the land reform programme. Through a review and analysis of existing literature, we found that women did benefit from the FTLRP in different capacities, although the majority are still secondary beneficiaries of the land. We estimate, based on figures from the literature (see Utete, 2003;

GoZ, 2007; Chingarande, 2008; Women and Land in Zimbabwe (WLZ), 2007), that more than 15% of women are now landowners in Zimbabwe. The FTLRP has therefore benefited more women than the previous land reforms in the country, possibly due to its radical nature, the active participation of women in invasion campaigns, and advocacy from women's groups and other NGOs who supported the land reform with women in mind.

Given FPE's emphasis on women's everyday experiences, our discussion highlighted how participation and contribution by women in land invasions in various forms resulted in successful land acquisitions and ownership by some women in Zimbabwe. We also found that gender, in association with other key variables such as age, class, and area of residence, played a key role in women's access to and ownership of land under the FTLRP. The progress made thus far is encouraging but not sufficient, because women are the majority (51%) in Zimbabwe, relative to men (49%). More needs to be done concerning land redistribution to women, particularly women heads of households, widows, and unmarried women. There are still difficulties ahead for women in terms of land acquisition and ownership, including the security of tenure, due to the patriarchal structures that continue to exist in Zimbabwe. We conclude therefore that women's land tenure insecurity in Zimbabwe is an ongoing source of struggle, despite the accomplishments of the FTLRP.

We propose that the implementation of the land audit recommendations should be expedited to address the identified challenges of the land reform. Through the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Fisheries, and Rural Development, the government needs to put in place robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress toward inclusive land ownership in Zimbabwe, ensuring that no one is left behind, regardless of social divisions. A review of customary law, including the Communal Land Act, expanding the rights of women and girls, has become a great necessity to readdress the patriarchal institutions which limit and deny women access and ownership rights of productive resources such as land and other property. The Gender Commission and advocacy groups have a critical role to play in this regard, through human rights campaigns, awareness creation, and capacity-building for women in Zimbabwe. This calls for a new agrarian structure where access and ownership of land and other productive resources are not underpinned by

relations of class, gender, ethnicity, age, marital status, and political affiliation but rather, by providing equal opportunities for all.

Endnotes

1 All communal land falls under customary tenure. It comprises about 50% of arable land and is where communal farmers practice subsistence farming. Farmers live in villages and have lands for cropping and common grazing.

2 A1 farms are small-holder farms granted to farmers during and post-2000 under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. They consist of six hectares of land with common grazing land for livestock given to individual families.

3 A2 farms are commercial models given under 99-year leases by the government. These farms were granted to farmers during and post-2000 under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme.

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Challenging Gender Orders? Small Ruminant Husbandry Interventions in Ghana's Upper West Region

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Abstract

This paper undertakes an institutional analysis to determine how rules, regulations, and norms guiding gender relations in four institutions - the state, market, community, and households - were affected by an intervention designed to increase women's ownership of small ruminants in Ghana's Upper West Region. Drawing on information from case farmers and key persons through structured individual interviews and focus group discussions, the paper notes that some existing norms and rules were challenged at the household and community levels. First was the norm of household heads being the automatic target of interventions. Women's involvement in the intervention increased their livestock asset base, challenging the rule that set men as dominant owners. The intervention drew more women to seek solutions to livestock health problems and even encouraged females to deliver health care to small ruminants. The changes in rules and norms, however, did not extend to all small ruminant production activities. Males retained the hold over animal sales and critical spaces in decision-making in all the critical stages of the intervention; they set the rules and ensured enforcement. Women still needed their husbands' permission to offer services to other farmers, especially men. Targeting women in agriculture production can initiate some alterations in gender relations, particularly in the area of resource ownership. The extent to which these can alter crucial markers of women's subordinate positions however requires the systematic engagement of institutional rules and norms that support unequal gender relations.

Keywords: small ruminants; sheep and goats; gender relations; technology adoption; gender division of labour; rural women.

Introduction

Small ruminants (SR) such as sheep (*Ovis aries*) and goats (*Capra hircus*) serve as a source of income and wealth accumulation and are considered a pathway out of rural poverty (Amankwah *et al*., 2012; Adams and Ohene-Yankyera, 2014). They are described as 'quick cash', 'bank on hooves', or 'walking banks', because of their easy conversion into cash to provide financial security in times of crop failure. They allow rural households to purchase food items and farm inputs as well as pay school fees and hospital bills (Dossa *et al*., 2008; Quaye 2008). Due to their small size, SR are considered suitable for home consumption, for meeting the animal protein requirements of poor households (Adams and Ohene-Yankyera, 2014; Davendra, 2002; Rahman, 2007). Their use for performing rites during festivals, funerals and settling bride wealth also highlights their cultural importance (Adam and Boateng, 2012).

Women's ownership and management of SR is considered even more critical for sustenance since they often fall on proceeds from their sale to take care of household needs like payment of medical bills and school fees (Aboe *et al*., 2011; Duku *et al*., 2011). Yet globally, livestock ownership and production are highly gendered with men inclined to own and manage large animals and women predisposed towards small species (Jin and Iannotti, 2014; Oladeji and Oyesola, 2008). This situation was confirmed in Ghana by a 2011 FAO study which reported that men owned three times as much cattle as women. Research in Ghana's Upper East Region, the country's hub of livestock production, has found that male household heads dominate SR ownership (Adams and Ohene-Yankyera, 2014; Turkson and Naandam, 2006). Women are not expected to publicly claim ownership of livestock; at marriage, they are expected to hand over all their animals to their husbands while unmarried women usually leave their animals in their brothers' care (Aboe *et al*., 2013b). Husbandry tasks are also gendered.

Ghana's failure to realise the full potential that livestock holds for household income security and domestic meat consumption has been attributed largely to weak husbandry practices such as poor housing and feeding, especially during the dry season (Adam and Boateng, 2012; Dossa *et al*., 2008; Quaye 2008). Additionally, the livestock breed has also been identified as contributing to low yields (Mwangi and Kariuki, 2015). Generally, SR production is undertaken by smallholder subsistence farmers in extensive mixed crop livestock systems and seldom develops into commercial levels of production (Amankwah *et al*., 2012; Turkson and Brownie, 1999). Many point to this situation as an additional factor accounting for the failure of several initiatives geared at enhancing livestock production in Ghana's northern regions to yield desired outcomes (Adams and Ohene-Yankyera, 2014; Amankwah *et al*., 2012).

Over the years, the government of Ghana has tended to target women in a bid to increase agricultural production. This has been a response to studies that show that dealing with women's gendered access to production resources could improve farm household income and welfare (Ayalew *et al*., 2013; Doss and Morris, 2001; FAO, 2012). One such initiative was that of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), with Canadian Government funding from the Food Security and Environment Facility, seeking to increase women's income for household provisioning through small livestock ownership. The NGO, Tumu Deanery Rural Integrated Development Programme (TUDRIDEP), responded to the call. The TUDRIDEP project aimed to enhance women's knowledge, management, and environmental practices for sustainable husbandry technologies using improved breeds. It also focused on increasing women's ownership of livestock as assets that could be converted into income for household provisioning. An appraisal of the TUDRIDEP project reported high adoption levels of the SR husbandry technologies introduced.

There is the long-held assumption that institutional rules and norms underlying gender orders guide women and men in SR production and marketing. Considering the male dominance in SR ownership, mentioned earlier, clarity about how gender relations play out in SR husbandry technology adoption is critical for shaping the content of subsequent development interventions. We present in this paper the outcome of an investigation into the gender dynamics among farmers who participated in the SR husbandry technology adoption

introduced by TUDRIDEP in the Wa East District of the Upper West Region of Ghana. Our interest was in how institutional rules and norms operating within the household, community, market, and the state influenced the highly gendered practices around SR ownership and production which affect the adoption of SR husbandry technology in an intervention that targeted women as livestock owners.

The first part of this paper gives a general introduction to the issues under contention, which is gendered SR production and management. The second section, which covers the analytical framework, outlines the tools we utilised to understand how institutions produce and reproduce social relations underlying gender inequality expressed around SR ownership and production. We dwelt on Kabeer's definition of institutions as quoted by March *et al.* as the "… framework of rules and regulations for achieving certain social or economic goals" (March, et al., 1999:103). The third section discusses the outcome of our investigation using the tools to capture changes in institutional rules and norms around SR production and marketing that can be attributed to the TUDRIDEP intervention. We first present the norms or rules in the existing institutions and then later describe changes introduced or triggered in other institutions. We conclude the paper by drawing attention to the fact that an increase in women's livestock ownership, though significant for household provision, did not alter rules on decision-making and control over women's rights to determine whom they supply health support to, outside their households.

Analysing the gendered institutional context of small ruminant husbandry

Laying the blame of low livestock productivity on problems of breed type and husbandry practices, new technologies are proffered as the solution. The introduction of new technologies is associated with reduced production costs, rising outputs, increased farm income, and reduced poverty as well as improved nutritional status (Jain *et al.*, 2015; Udimal *et al.*, 2017). The process of developing and passing on innovation for carrying out productive activities, we are told, involves handing over to the receiving community a package of technical devices, ideas, organisational arrangements, and social relationships

(Leeuwis and van den Ban, 2004). Innovations then embody the concurrent operation of devices and the new knowledge required to run them, as well as the social institutions in which they are located. It is this observation that has led some to conclude that the adoption of new technology extends beyond individual free will decisions and is shaped by institutional rules and norms in which people operate (Leeuwis and van den Ban, 2004).

Authors such as Kabeer (1994), Moser (1993), and Oakley (1972), criticising liberal feminist women in development interventions, call for a shift away from the women-only approach to focus on gender relations underlying women's subordination. This observation has currency since women's gendered situation is relational and located in social systems and structures. The tools they evolved to assist in this effort include Naila Kabeer's Gender Analysis Framework, Caroline Moser's Gender Needs Assessment as well as Sarah Longwe's Empowerment Framework. They have been useful analytical framing for ensuring that development planning and research focus on social structures and not on individual capacities.

In our bid to understand how gender relations influenced the highly sex-segregated practices around SR ownership and production to impact the adoption of husbandry technology, we chose the third of Kabeer's five concepts of the social relations framework: institutional analysis. Developed for community-level assessment, it is composed of tools for examining how gender inequalities between people, resources, and activities are reworked through institutional rules, authority, and control structures (March *et al.*, 1999). For Kabeer, institutions ensure the production, reinforcement, and reproduction of gendered social relations and thereby create and perpetuate social inequality. She concludes that, far from being ideologically neutral, institutions work in tandem to legitimise and reproduce existing gendered inequalities.

According to Kabeer's social relations approach, all social institutions, irrespective of the culture in which they are located, embody five distinct and interrelated dimensions: rules, activities, resources, people, and power. These five dimensions of social relationships, when used to unearth the gender dynamics at play within institutions, are referred to as institutional analysis. Rules – either officially documented or expressed through norms, values, laws,

traditions, and customs – are the accepted principles regulating what is to be done, how it is to be done, who does it, and who benefits. Rules allow everyday decisions to be made with minimum effort and as a result, entrench ways of doing things to the extent that they seem natural or unchangeable. Activities, be they productive, distributive, or regulative, are undertaken by people within institutions that are governed by rules. Existing rules determine who is expected to carry out certain tasks, leading to groups becoming associated with certain activities over time that seem to be their 'natural' work. Gender differences created in societies usually determine how tasks are assigned and rewarded. Such distinctions attached to women's and men's activities reinforce gender inequalities.

The mobilisation and distribution of resources are governed by institutional rules. Institutions tend to be selective about who is included and excluded, who is assigned various resources, tasks, and responsibilities, and their position within the existing social hierarchy. Power, another aspect of institutions, is concerned with who decides and whose interests are served. The official and unofficial rules which promote and legitimise unequal resource distribution and responsibilities, ensure that some institutional actors have authority and control over others (March *et al*., 1999). Such privileged individuals tend to promote practices that end up entrenching their position and may resist change that undermine their interests.

Our interest in undertaking the institutional analysis was to uncover the roles that the institutions involved in the delivery of the TUDRIDEP project played in challenging or perpetuating existing gender orders around SR production. The institutions we identified were the household (SR farmer households), the community (traditional authorities, elders, networks, associations, TUDRIDEP and Community Livestock Workers), the state (the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development [MLGRD]) as well as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), through its extension agents), and the market (SR traders). It is with this lens that we sought to gain an understanding of whether the TUDRIDEP project altered the rules, practices, people, distribution of resources, and power in terms of how women and men performed SR husbandry tasks (TUDRIDEP, 2012).

The TUDRIDEP programme in the Wa East District of the Upper West Region of Ghana, as mentioned earlier, was a response to a call offering to fund Ghanaian organisations seeking to increase the use of environmentally sound agricultural technologies and practices to support food security and sustainable agriculture in Ghana's northern regions. One of the goals of the programme was to enhance women's income for household provisioning through increased goat and sheep ownership; it required up to 80% female participation in funded projects. To meet this requirement, TUDRIDEP targeted 70% women participation in their project (TUDRIDEP, 2012).

This study derived information from all the 161 TUDRIDEP farmers, 113 of whom were females and 48 males. Quantitative data, which was drawn by a census covering all project participants, was facilitated by a structured interview schedule and qualitative data was derived from focus group discussions (FGDs) with an unstructured FGD guide. The selection criteria for the FGD participants, in addition to owning and keeping SR, was age. 'Age' enabled data collection across generations, while 'ownership' and 'involvement' in SR-keeping were criteria used to help understand the 'with and without gendered experiences' of farmers who had participated in the intervention. Key persons covered were women and men with knowledge about the rules and norms of the communities, and who were experienced in SR production and marketing (SRPM). Secondary sources used were the project proposal, organisational profile, gender policy, operational guidelines, as well as quarterly and annual project reports of TUDRIDEP.

Gender and small ruminant husbandry

In rural Ghana, SR husbandry is undertaken by household members with minimal involvement of hired labour (Ayalew *et al*., 2013; Duku *et al*., 2011). Tasks are divided along gender lines, guided by informal household rules and norms regarding SRPM activities. Studies show that men tend to handle activities such as the building of pens, SR health care, identification, and marketing (Aboe *et al*., 2013b; Adams and Ohene-Yankyera, 2014; Bacho, 2004). Housing SR is uncommon in most Ghanaian rural communities; animals sleep in the compound at night. When used, housing usually stops at sheep since they are

perceived as more delicate and less hardy than goats (Aboe *et al*., 2013b). Lack of pens has been noted to be a recipe for animal loss from theft and road kills (Aboe and Ameleke, 2008; Aboe *et al*., 2013b). When women want to house their sheep and goats, they request for land from men, usually their husbands. However, it is men who build pens (Amankwah *et al*., 2012).

Cleaning waste generated by SR is a husbandry practice undertaken by household members with no clear gender segregation in task allocation. Aboe *et al*. (2013a) reported instances in some districts in the Upper West Region where men sweep SR pens, while in others women carried out this task. It appears that where the animals are housed sometimes determines who undertakes this task. A study by Adams and Yankyera, (2014) found situations in the three northern regions (at the time Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions) where women were responsible for cleaning SR waste. Men and children cleaned pens when they were provided, while women carted dung to the family farms. Where they were unhoused and slept in the compound and cooking areas, the women did the cleaning as part of their daily cleaning chores (Aboe *et al*., 2013a).

Feeding and providing water was another husbandry task that escaped strict gender segregation. Adams and Ohene-Yankyera (2014) found in their study that the provision of water was almost evenly shared across the sexes and ages. Thus, the youth (31.7%), men (30.5%) and women (29.3%) were reported as undertaking such tasks in households. Feeding SR, especially providing supplementary feed during the dry season, was reported by nearly 40% of research participants as the task of males, followed by 30% who cited children (aged between 11 and 18), and about one quarter who cited females as carrying out this responsibility. However, where the small ruminant flocks were more than 80 sheep, older men above 60 years herded the ruminants during the rainy season, while children attended school, and younger men engaged in crop farming (Amankwah *et al*., 2012; Aboe *et al*., 2013a).

Rules affect the roles of women and men both in the household and community around SRPM. In the household for instance, selling and purchasing of animals was not only the role of men but also a rule. Since men traditionally handle purchasing and selling of animals, a woman who wishes to sell an animal must seek the permission of her husband, who does the bargaining and selling

(Bacho, 2004). The practice of women seeking the consent of their husbands before selling their SR, and the same husbands selling the animals, was a norm upheld in other parts of northern Ghana (Aboe *et al*., 2013a and Bacho, 2004). The same applied to the health care of the animals, where the women would look out for sick animals and report to the men who then sought veterinary care. Generally, men were said to be supervisors of the rules and were responsible for ensuring that household members performed their assigned tasks.

TUDRIDEP rules and activities

The strategies set out by TUDRIDEP to implement the project were a combination of practices and rules that participating communities and households were expected to follow. The programme commenced with a sensitisation exercise about the content and rationale of the project. The participating farmers had to form mixed sex groups of ten with 70% women and 30% men and were enjoined to attend group meetings for training. A key informant at TUDRIDEP explained that the rationale for using the mixed group method was to develop farmer-based organisations (FBOs) and build their capacities to advocate and lobby the government and other duty bearers for the improvement of their lives and livelihoods. The expectation was that the members of the FBOs would speak with one voice through their executives. The FBOs were also expected to facilitate extension education and implement projects and programmes.

All participating farmers were enjoined to build standardised housing for the SR and they received a 'starter-pack' of five sheep or goats, at no cost to them. Farmers in the first group of ten were each obliged to give five animals back to the project when their flock reached a certain number. Animals given back by the first group were consigned to members of farmers' groups in different communities to avoid inbreeding and prevent weaned animals from returning to their original owners. This 'pass on' strategy introduced by TUDRIDEP created a new avenue for households to acquire SR.

Participating farmers were under obligation to adhere to husbandry practices such as routine cleaning of pens, provision of drinking water, and feeding SR with prescribed supplementary feeds. In addition, they were to adhere to set health practices such as annual vaccination against *Peste des Petits*

Ruminants, using the services of the community livestock worker (CLW) for minor ailments and MoFA's veterinary officer for injections. They were also expected to dispose of their SR through TUDRIDEP's prescribed marketing channels.

The TUDRIDEP intervention gave prominence to the state, which in this instance was represented by MLGRD in collaboration with MoFA, to gain access to the expertise of the district veterinary officers in animal husbandry and health. It must be noted that before the TUDRIDEP intervention, the state was virtually absent in SRPM. Market agents had occasional interaction with SR owners. The main institutions directing SR husbandry practices and their associated rules and norms were households, with some amount of community level engagement. Under the project, however, the state was visible, even though its intervention stopped at providing the vehicle for accessing funding and expertise during the project rollout.

In the TUDRIDEP project, a woman and a man in each group of ten were trained by MoFA personnel to operate as the CLW to offer minor health care to the SR within the community. The CLW was introduced by the government of Ghana after structural adjustment reforms to make up for the shortage of veterinary officers and technicians (Amankwah *et al*., 2012). The CLW were often members of the same ethnic groups as their clients and resided in the communities where the livestock were found. They were able to handle 80-90% of the veterinary interventions in the extensive production systems (Amankwah *et al*., 2012). The project provided each CLW with a free package of drugs to offer veterinary services to participating farmers. They charged a token fee for their services and used it as a revolving fund for restocking drugs. Thus, the CLW formed a bridge between the state and the community.

The project had an impact on community level practices and rule-setting. Organisations that constituted community level institutions were the CLW and traditional leaders, the chief, elders, and the spiritual head, the *Tendana,* as well as the elected representative of the local government – the assembly-person. Before the start of the project, unhoused SR sometimes strayed into compounds and farms in search of supplementary feed and in the process destroyed household items as well as crops on farms and in home gardens. The

new rules and norms set out by the project to guide community level SRPM practices, forbade SR from roaming free range to prevent damage. Another rule enacted by the community was in connection with how SR was to be identified. The traditional practice of identifying SR with distinctive patterns using blade cuts to the ear lobe of SR was reinforced under the TUDRIDEP intervention, with the supply of ear tags to be attached to SR. Men still retained control over the performance of this activity. Other rules barred sick animals from the community, prohibited theft or condoning the act. Spraying weedicide around the homesteads to control weeds in the rainy season was also forbidden since SR have often died as a result of poisoning from the chemicals used.

When asked who set the rules in the community, the response was unanimous: the chiefs, community members, elders, and the *Tendana*. Enforcement of the laws was the responsibility of the assemblyperson in association with the chief, elders, and the *Tendana*. Often, the assemblyperson, the chief, and the elders were positions held by men thus further reinforcing male status in the community. The market in this study was represented by interactions between SR owners and traders. The project assigned two itinerant traders to each group to facilitate the sale of SR. Buying and selling SR in the study communities was the preserve of men, a fact which falls in line with existing gender orders. Itinerant SR traders bought from men at the farm gate. The case farmers hardly sold in the marketplace, citing lower prices since such sales would be driven by distress. One male case farmer explained:

> It is better to call the small ruminant trader to come home, because you can name your price. If he does not like the price, he will go away. If you carry the animal to the market, especially after planting, you will get a lower price because other people would have brought their animals and you cannot carry the animal back home, so you sell at a low price. It is better to sell at home unless there is an emergency (MF).

The TUDRIDEP intervention started a process of change in the husbandry practices of SRPM in the case households, since the animals were housed and required close attention. Before joining the project, most of the participating famers did not house their animals and the few that did, did not use the prototype TUDRIDEP design. In the households, husbandry tasks remained gendered: females in our study communities were responsible for cleaning SR

pens, feeding, and preparation of supplementary feed. Cutting leaves from shrubs and trees to feed SR was a shared role, in that women cut the shrubs and men the tree leaves, while young girls and boys helped the women and men, respectively. The farmers included in our study indicated some benefits derived from keeping their animals in pens. The pens brought farmers closer to their SRs, especially women, who had to observe animals for symptoms of sickness twice daily. Women reported signs of ill-health to the men for them to take action where necessary. The provision of pens ensured that SR drank water at least twice daily. It also kept animals safe at night and reduced theft; farmers could tell when SR were missing since they counted them every morning and evening.

Alterations in household, community, and market-based gender rules

The introduction of the project clearly had gender implications due to the focus on women in an area that was male dominated. Rules, activities, and power relations were affected. The extent to which they affected existing gender relations is what we present in this section. First is the mode of introducing the project to the community to facilitate its acceptance. The objectives of the intervention, the strategies, the components of the technology package, and the benefits, were explained to community members during the sensitisation exercise. Its acceptance was facilitated by men. One male key informant in Tuassa commented:

> If we the men had not agreed, this project would not have come to this community. The people who brought the project called all of us and told us [men] about the benefits of allowing the women to also receive the animals and be trained. We realised that we are one family. If the animals increase, we will all benefit. If we did not agree, we would not have built the pens for the women. Over here, it is the men who build pens not the women (MKI_5).

The free 'starter pack' of sheep and goats given to women farmers as well as the later distribution through the 'pass on' strategy affected the household gender orders around SRPM. The SR resource base of the targeted women farmers

increased, challenging the gender order of men as the main owners of SR in the household and community. The SR husbandry intervention was introduced to the case farmers in mixed sex groups. The group method of training and information dissemination to the case farmers was to increase women's access to extension information. The key informant explained that they encouraged mixed groups to empower women by breaking down cultural barriers that discouraged women from speaking in public in the presence of men. He noted that "there is faster adoption and projects are more sustainable because the farmers own the projects and programmes" (TUDRIDEP key informant).

New rules on animal health care were introduced by TUDRIDEP. The norm was for women to observe the animals closely and report ill health to men who would seek either orthodox veterinary or ethno-veterinary care. Involving women as a policy in animal health care as CLW, which was contrary to the existing norm, facilitated building women's capacity in that area. During the period of data collection, the female CLW we interacted with in Chaggu was very much involved with the provision of health care. When asked how she operated, she explained that she worked by herself without her male counterpart.

> Both women and men in the group come and ask me to treat their sick animals. All they need to do is to tell my husband that they need my services. If the farmer is male, it is important they seek my husband's permission…You understand what I mean… (smiling). Farmers who are not in the group also call me and I charge them double what I charge my group members. Some also come for advice, and I show them what to do (CLW_3).

Breaking the existing norm of attending to SR health however, was still under male authority as the statement above from the female CLW shows. She brings attention to the rule that she needed the permission of her husband before she could attend to her clients, especially male clients.

The introduction of the two itinerant traders assigned to the case farmers resulted in a more regular and assured market for both farmers and traders. The gendered market norms about negotiating the price and actual sale of SR changed only slightly. Even though women could decide when to sell their animals without their having to ask permission, they still needed to inform their male household heads, usually their husbands, about their intention to sell

their SR. It is the men who would call the traders, bargain and sell the animal. During the intervention, both women and men called the traders but their male household head, usually their husbands, were responsible for bargaining and selling. Both traders confirmed this in the case communities. Trader 2 noted, "Over here it is the men who sell the animals, not the women. The women call me, but it is the men who do the bargaining and selling" (Trader 2 Bulenga area). However, both traders noted that after the project was initiated more women were calling them than before. Trader 1 stated, "Because of the project I now have more customers calling me. Even now, more women are calling me than before the project. I am now very busy buying and selling" (Trader 1 Funsi area).

The traders' comments attested to the fact that although more women were disposing of their animals due to an increase in animal numbers – sheep and goats – the intervention did not affect the norm. Sale and purchasing of animals were still the preserve of men in the case communities. However, linking the case farmers with the itinerant traders guaranteed regular and reliable marketing outlets for the case farmers. They did not have to carry their animals to the market to sell and engage in 'distress' selling in the lean season. The arrangement also resulted in the traders securing more clients. The rule-setting structures that evolved around the TUDRIDEP project did not alter male power in the household or the community decision-making.

Conclusion: institutional interrelatedness and gender orders

The gender sensitivity and gender ideology of the organisation influences the kind of gender policy intervention it implements. A gender aware organisation may implement a gender aware intervention that may improve the livelihood of the target group and their families, but may not change the subordinate position of women in the household. The preceding discussions have revealed the interrelatedness of the four institutions – state, household, community, and market – in this study. The state was represented by the MLGRD which put out a call with a policy to target 80% female farmers and TUDRIDEP, representing the community, set rules for 70% female participation. The patriarchal norms that privileged men as owners of livestock had to give way due to the rule of high female participation demanded by TUDRIDEP. Since TUDRIDEP did not

have expertise in animal husbandry and veterinary care, they collaborated with MoFA and this brought about a direct connection between the two institutions, state and community. TUDRIDEP linked the case farmers to traders, ensuring a regular market for the farmers and customers for the traders. The market was therefore affected positively.

The CLW introduced by the intervention made health care accessible to case and non-case households. Health care of SR improved, income increased, and livelihoods improved. Although the action initiated by the state resulted in some changes in the main institutions, norms such as men seeking health care and men selling and buying animals remained unchanged. What changed was the acceptance of females giving health care because of the CLW concept. The initial rule set by the state sparked changes in the other institutions. However, the rule change was insufficient to spur alterations in existing gender orders to upset patriarchal relations around women's rights.

The extent to which interventions can challenge gender orders is, amongst other things, influenced by the criteria, strategies, and methods used in transferring technologies. The study showed that gendered rules and norms in institutions – households, market, communities and the state – were subject to change. At the same time, whilst rules, norms, and practices that perpetuate gender relations in institutions like the household and community are amenable to change, this does not come easily. Market norms and practices such as men selling and purchasing SR remained unchanged. Although not every norm changed, however, the study confirmed that institutions are not independent or separate entities but are interrelated. Hence, interventions introduced in, or by, one institution are able to set off changes in others.

Endnote

1 "*Peste des Petits Ruminants* (PPR), also known as sheep and goat plague, is a highly contagious animal disease affecting small ruminants. Once introduced, the virus can infect up to 90 percent of an animal herd, and the disease kills anywhere from 30 to 70 percent of infected animals." FAO. https://www.fao.org/ppr/en/

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Bridging Development Interventions and Women's Empowerment in Ghana: Reflections from Radical Feminist Perspectives

Loretta Baidoo

Abstract

The popularity of development interventions as a tool for women's empowerment, notwithstanding their ability to achieve targeted goals, has come under scrutiny. Some researchers point out that interventions targeting empowerment tend to address women's practical rather than their strategic needs, resulting in such interventions falling short in their attempts to transform unequal gender relations. This paper seeks to uncover the nuances of such outcomes through an autoethnographic account of two gender-specific interventions. The main findings reveal that, of the two interventions, one held the potential to transform gender relations, and the other set out to integrate women into the existing system. The paper concludes that interventions can realise the goal of empowerment if gender-sensitive tools and actors are integrated into their design and implementation, and if markers that target gender transformation and redistribution are employed.

Keywords: sustainable development; women's empowerment; development interventions; radical feminism; autoethnography; gender.

Introduction

Women play a critical role in smallholder agriculture in Ghana (Ankrah *et al.*, 2020). Okali (2011) explains that, relative to men, women make essential contributions to the agricultural economies in all developing countries. Yet within smallholder agriculture, some women are significantly challenged regarding access to secure land and other critical productive assets. This is due to multiple reasons, including their class, economic status, and position in land tenurial arrangements (Chigbu *et al.*, 2019; Baidoo, 2018).

Several international organisations assume that an increase in agricultural productivity correlates directly with progress in women's empowerment (FAO, 2011; World Bank, 2012). This argument is used to justify the intent of different interventions and programmes in rural agricultural livelihoods which target women as beneficiaries. Some development agencies move a step further by including empowerment as an objective and adding gender equality staff in the project implementation to guarantee their desired outcomes.

In all the actions taken to ensure women's empowerment, there are still indications that interventions are far from empowering women, as their outcomes are usually unsatisfactory or non-sustainable (Baidoo, 2018; Britwum *et al.*, 2019). Studies explaining the failure of interventions to empower women allude to factors such as inadequate access to productive resources justified by the low value placed on women's labour (Britwum and Akorsu, 2016; Britwum *et al.*, 2014; Olagunju and Adebayo, 2015). Another reason is the institutionalisation of social norms, where practices of male dominance and unbalanced relations between women and men are internalised and structuralised. Women act in adherence to societal expectations, often against their interests to avoid being sanctioned (Britwum and Akorsu, 2016).

The reasons advanced by various studies for the failure of interventions to empower women brings up the persisting question of the failure to adopt remedies that avoid the known flaws (Britwum and Akorsu, 2016; Britwum *et al.*, 2019; Byerlee *et al.*, 2009). Some believe that it is because interventions adopt an economic integrating outlook, as facilitated by the Women in Development (WID) approach, which ends up reinforcing women's disempowerment. The general observation is that the WID framework overlooks

the difference between women and men, and amongst women (Byerlee *et al.*, 2009). It is therefore theoretically pertinent to explore how interventions can be shaped by alternative feminist approaches, such as those from radical feminist perspectives, to realise more transformative outcomes. This article searches for a deeper understanding of the benefits and flaws in development interventions targeting women. The idea is to examine the formulation, implementation, and outcome of interventions, using personal lessons learned regarding gaps between interventions and empowerment in the project cycle. This provides an opportunity to explore how recent projects operate, especially ones that seek to address the non-transformative shortcomings of the WID approach.

Regarding methodology, most of the literature reviewed is produced from an outsider position as researchers study the reasons for the failure of interventions in achieving women's empowerment. From the positionality of a local implementer within development interventions, however, I use my experiences to carry out a comparative analysis of two interventions. I use gender analytical tools to document how a gender transformative intervention intended to empower its women participants should proceed. From this theoretical and methodological viewpoint, I respond to the question of why interventions continue to fail. I use a retrospective outlook assessed through transformative gender tools offered by radical feminist perspectives, and autoethnography to inform the significance of locally or co-conceived interventions based on personal observations and my experiences. The use of multiple frameworks, from an outsider-insider position as a researcher, but with relations as a local officer in international development interventions, and identifying as a third-world woman from Ghana, gives a different perspective to the discourse of non-sustainability of development interventions.

The two interventions were implemented within the space of the last five years (2018-2022). The interventions examined are targeted at the economic empowerment of women processors in the agricultural value chain. Although both interventions are gender-specific, the study interrogates their depth of empowerment, addressing the extent to which they seek to empower women, and how they target the dismantling of social norms that subjugate women's positioning. Based on the analysis, conclusions are made to propose working recommendations for intervention designs and project implementation.

This article is organised into five sections. This introductory section has set the scene by briefly presenting the existing discourses accounting for the failure of development aid to achieve women's empowerment and highlighting the issue further. The next section focuses on explanations of development interventions and women's empowerment from a radical feminist perspective. This is followed by a section explaining the choice of the research methodology and introducing the gender analytical tools that were employed in the study. Section four introduces the interventions through the researcher's reflections, after which the tools are used to assess gendered dimensions in the design, implementation, and outcome stages of the interventions. Conclusions and recommendations constitute the final section.

A radical feminist perspective on development interventions and women's empowerment

Theoretically, development programmes, mainly Western-driven, are underpinned by liberal feminist tenets, which seek to empower women economically by integrating them into development spaces without necessarily considering their social positioning (Baidoo, 2018). Such interventions, therefore, tend to isolate women from the social relations formed, losing sight of influencing factors like culture and class, and ignoring differences in the needs of women. Women's practical needs – comprising all material challenges like the lack of water, basic services, and opportunities for an income earning activity – are addressed without much attention to changing women's subordinate position (March *et al*., 1999).

In Africa, the WID theoretical framework, which has its origins in liberal feminism, dominates the framing of development interventions. Introduced in the 1970s, the WID approach called for the inclusion of women's issues in development projects (Parpart, 1993). The approach aims to integrate women into production by introducing women-oriented policies to increase project efficiency and enhance economic development (Parpart *et al*., 2000). Such policies derive from neoliberal tendencies that do not necessarily disrupt existing social relations. Although Western-driven, the WID approach to development planning is well embraced and adopted by African development workers, as well as governments, mainly to meet donor demands.

Gender inequalities and women's disempowerment still prevail after more than 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and numerous development strategies targeting gender equality and women's empowerment. Moser (2017) has noted the need to address the persistence of gender inequality with new approaches that target gender transformation. Alternative theoretical frameworks like the Gender and Development (GAD) framework, spearheaded within radical feminism, recommend that programmes respond to women's empowerment needs instead of reinforcing unequal relations. In Moser's (2017: 223) words, gender transformation "is widely recognized as…an inherently political act, and closely associated with changing social or gendered power relations…it questions the status quo and in so doing alters the underlying power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality." Development programmes are therefore expected to recognise the differences in women's needs, as opposed to the general one size fits all approach adopted. They are expected to target resource reallocation to favour women and balance the unequal relations between women and men.

Radical feminists argue primarily that patriarchy is the main cause of women's subordination. They advocate an approach where both women's material conditions and class position, and the patriarchal structures and ideas that define and maintain women's subordination, form the focus of change (Hartmann, 2010). Radical feminists also stress the need to avoid treating women as a unit due to contextual or ideological differences in their material conditions, noting that patriarchal structures differ by geography and class. They advise a more critical approach to women's empowerment to avoid the situation where policies are designed for women without questioning the domination they suffer, or any chance of social redistribution.

Based on the above discussions, this article proceeds from the perspective that development interventions should increase women's capacity to think critically and act autonomously, independent of prescribed social norms and values (Britwum *et al*., 2019). The outcome of empowerment, therefore, should be an enhanced sense of self-efficacy where individual women and groups exercise agency to gain control over their lives and external resources. A development intervention that is essentially empowering should reflect transformation – challenging the existing social status, and targeting the inequities amongst women.

The research, methods used, and analytical framing

For this study, the choice was to focus on generating in-depth insight into why development interventions that usually accompany the discourse of empowerment, do not have a significant impact on women's empowerment. The study's research methodology, a qualitative design grounded in the epistemic interpretivist tradition, was chosen to explain how meanings are socially constructed, interpreted, understood, experienced, and redeveloped. The flexibility and sensitivity to contextual factors that the qualitative design provides, created a space for developing empirically supported new ideas using multiple methods. The article is broadly exploratory since it sought to provide alternative tools to address the question of why development interventions do not make the difference they promise, regarding the empowerment of women.

I use autoethnography, which Eliason (2016: 137) describes as a "… form of self-reflection used to explore the researcher's personal experience with the study..., and connects that experience to broader historical, cultural, and social tropes." As a comparatively recent method relative to other traditional qualitative methods, autoethnography provides a space for readers to reflect on and empathise with the narratives presented (Méndez, 2013). Through my positioning as a Ghanaian female development worker and young feminist, I draw from the tenets of autoethnography to present a self-reflection, highlighting the lessons I learned regarding gaps between interventions and empowerment. This was done through a gender analysis of the two livelihood interventions which I explored in my capacity as a development worker. Thus, I connected directly to the research topic, using my personal experiences to reflexively describe my experiences during the implementation of two interventions, outlining observations as well as the intervention outcome.

By reflecting on my experiences, I hope to reveal the realities that should serve as a starting point for development implementers, state actors, and international donor agencies to consider in their bid to tackle the actual needs and interests of the development participants they propose to empower. I expect to hone in on the valuable insights that autoethnography as a form of inquiry, offers to development practitioners, to bring their attention to realities hitherto not considered. In so doing, I aim to create a platform for women to "tell their truth

as experienced without waiting for others to express what they really want to be known and understood" (Méndez, 2013: 282). Highlighting women's voices, I believe will lead to the creation of a positive relationship between development interventions and women's empowerment. Since I recount certain periods in my life where I compare different organisational dimensions, names and key details are pseudonymised in the section on reflexivity, in keeping with ethical considerations. Although potentially emancipatory in nature, autoethnography is criticised as being self-indulgent, introspective, and individualised (Atkinson, 1997; Coffey, 1999). I address this challenge using specific gender analytical tools as a collective lens to interpret my observations.

The study used analytical tools derived from radical feminist perspectives located in the GAD theoretical framework, to reflect on how to fill the gaps in intervention design and implementation. The selection of tools was derived from three gender analytical frameworks: Moser, Social Relations Approach, and Women Empowerment Frameworks. The tools were used to examine the approach used in the two development interventions, and the extent to which these approaches addressed women's practical and strategic needs.

The first perspective, the Moser Framework, aims to set up gender planning to emancipate women from their subordination, and achieve equality, equity, and empowerment (Moser, 1993). It opposes the integrationist approach embedded in the welfare, anti-poverty, and efficiency approaches, which focus on women as a marginalised group (Jahan, 1995). Gender planning, in the Moser Framework, is not a technical exercise of dispensing resources to those who lack them but rather, one that ventures into political spaces to address systems and structures because empowerment and equality are political constructs that operate within political structures. Moser's Framework highlights the sense in which development interventions impinge on women's triple role and their time use constraints. It interrogates whether the adopted approaches are emancipatory or just directed at integrating women in the development sphere, irrespective of unequal relations.

The Social Relations Approach is used to analyse existing gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, responsibilities, and power for designing policies and programmes. Like the Moser Framework, it draws its concepts from

the GAD theoretical framework. The Social Relations Approach is useful for determining whether interventions provide women opportunities to be agents of their development. The framework also allows for determination of the levels of gender awareness of interventions. Thus, it provides tools for assessing whether development interventions were gender-blind (able to acknowledge gender differences in project design) or gender-aware (recognised the different roles played by women and men). The gender-aware categorisations further outline the levels of recognition of gender inequality: whether a strategy focuses on addressing practical needs only (gender-neutral); or practical needs of one sex alone (gender-specific); or was aimed at being redistributive by transforming existing resource allocations to create more equal gender relations.

The final analytical framework I employed was the Women Empowerment Framework advanced by Sara Hlupekile Longwe (1991), which provides tools for questioning what women empowerment means in practice. It allows a critical assessment of the extent to which a gender-aware development intervention supports empowerment. Longwe's framework directs attention to conditions that enable the resolution of inequality, discrimination, and subordination. According to Longwe, empowerment should extend beyond increasing the number of women relative to men in conventional spaces such as employment and education. Empowerment should involve measures that move women from a state of subjugation to a state of conscious decision-making and control over resources. In this respect, Longwe (1991) highlights five hierarchical stages characterising different levels of empowerment, beginning from the lowest which she calls welfare, through to access, conscientisation, participation and, the highest, control. An intervention is deemed ultimately empowering when it recognises women's issues and seeks to improve their position relative to men.

The first tool that I used in my analysis, derived from Moser's Framework, was the gender needs assessment, which highlights the identification and incorporation of women's time use burdens in intervention planning and design. I used it to interrogate how women's existing work and domestic responsibilities had been considered in the planning of the interventions and how women were involved in the planning process. The kind of approach used was also assessed to establish the intent of the intervention, whether it seeks to integrate or empower.

The second analytical tool adopted was from the Social Relations Approach, which I used to examine the gender sensitivity of the two interventions in relation to unequal gender relations. After establishing the intent of the intervention, and the involvement of women and their needs, the social relations approach was used to assess whether the implementation of the intervention was gender neutral, specific or, redistributive. My objective was to highlight the recognition of women's different needs (practical or strategic), to point out the efforts at redistribution in the assessed interventions. I used this tool to explore the spaces that the two interventions granted, beyond enabling women to access productive resources such as credit, land, information, and knowledge, to increase women's awareness of their gendered situation.

Finally, using the Longwe Framework, I explored how the two interventions facilitated women's control over resources and decision-making in the development process. Were gender sensitive interventions negative (i.e. not recognising women's issues and leaving them worse off); neutral (i.e., recognising women's issues but leaving them either worse off or static); or positive (i.e., improving women's position relative to men). The Women Empowerment Framework was therefore used to critically assess the level of empowerment targeted by the intervention and the actual outcome of the intervention on the women it targets. Table one illustrates the preceding discussion.

Table 1. Analytical framework of the study

Operationalising selected gender tools in the paper			
Framework	**Moser**	**Social Relations**	**Longwe**
Stages Used	Goal Planning/ Design	Implementation	Outcome
Indicators	Focus on women's needs? *Practical/ strategic and time use?* Involving women? Gender planners? Goal intent - *integrating/ transformative?*	What is the orientation? *Gender-aware; specific or redistributive?*	Level of empowerment? *welfare; access; sensitisation; participation; control?* Depth of gender sensitivity – *negative, neutral or positive?*
Operationalising analytical outcome	Highlighting transformative goals and inclusive planning *(women and gender-aware planners.)*	Gender-aware processes Transformative approaches - *(standardised? gender specific? Or targeting resource redistribution?)*	Impact assessment Resolving vulnerability and inequality Level of transformation.

Source: (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999)

As elaborated in Table 1, I selected gender analytical tools from three different frameworks to assess my experiences with the two interventions. Each stage of the intervention was assessed from the perspective of a specific gender analytical framework. Despite the overlap of some specific tools, the Moser Framework was used to focus on project planning, the Social Relations Approach on implementation, and the Longwe Framework on the outcome (both realised and projected).

Researcher's reflexivity: an autoethnographic account

I use this section to introduce the projects, adopting pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Experiences and observations made from the two projects are compared along the lines of gender planning in the design, gender awareness in the approach employed, and the extent to which empowerment is targeted. I also elaborate on the implementation and compare the outcomes and challenges. The interventions are named Project March and Project May.

Introduction to projects

Projects March and May were both agricultural development interventions targeting women in the processing value chain. The goal of Project March was to empower women through improved health, nutrition, and better economic living standards. At its planning stage, it involved both international and local experts located in nutrition, public health, climate change, and microcredit financing. A baseline study was conducted to ascertain women's conditions before project implementation. The implementation included training on nutrition, public health, climate change, microcredit financial skills, and gender awareness. Project participants were also introduced to ways of gaining access to updated market information and other forms of medical monitoring.

The goal of Project May was to improve the economic living conditions of targeted women by transferring more power to them in economic decision-making processes in their households, and along the agricultural value chain in businesses. Additional goals were to derive the support of traditional authorities for women's economic empowerment, promote agricultural post-harvest production adapted to climate change, and reduce women's time use burdens. Like Project March, this one also involved experts in gender equality, climate-friendly agriculture, and organisational development, at the planning stage. A baseline study conducted prior to project implementation included a gender analysis to design a gender strategy for the project. A women empowerment index was conducted to assess the needs of the women and ascertain their level of empowerment before the project. Indicators measured were decision-making, resource allocation, financial knowledge, time use, and control of income. The project's implementation reflects the expertise of the partners involved i.e.

regarding gender equality, the environment, and organisational development. It is an ongoing project, and therefore the outcome is projected based on project assessment of participation in the project (documents not disclosed due to the need to maintain anonymity). According to the project evaluation, most of its short-term goals had been achieved by May 2022. Testimonials gathered from both female and male participants indicate an improvement in the economic and living conditions of targeted women.

Women-targeting projects: design, implementation and outcomes

At the planning and design stage, Project March involved experts in nutrition, public health, climate change, and microcredit financial skills in the project formation. There was no indication of a conscious attempt to ensure that any one of these experts was gender-aware or came from institutions that were pursuing a gender agenda. The baseline study conducted showed no clarity of women's involvement in decision-making and project formulation; women only participated in the survey as respondents. The project planning did not highlight the need to transform existing unequal social gender structures.

Project March sought to empower women through behavioural change communication and improved technology use in agricultural processing. It also aimed to strengthen women's engagement with markets through a group-based microcredit scheme, providing training in entrepreneurship and financial skills and facilitating enhanced access to market price information. Project March presented itself as empowering as it sought to foster women's self-reliance by introducing various life skills to economically empower them. Thus, it focused on integrating women into economic spaces and capacities and did not aim to transform their subordinated position. It did not set out to address the implications of women's triple role for their participation in the project. The project targeted women's practical needs by introducing them to financial and entrepreneurial skills, with no strategies targeting their social positioning or unequal gender relations.

Project May, as part of its planning, identified the different roles played by women and men in the project area. It also assessed the needs of women during post-harvest processing; it attempted to highlight and disaggregate the control of resources and decision-making at the household level. Women and gender-aware planners were drafted to assist in the project design. Women's triple role was also recognised, especially regarding their time use, and technologies that reduced processing time were introduced.

Project May acknowledged the social positioning of women and paid attention to the unequal relations between women and men. This was done by first engaging in activities to sensitise both women and men in the project communities in order to deal with male resistance to female participation in the project. This can be interpreted as dealing with women's strategic gender needs. Project May adopted the empowerment approach by first undertaking an assessment of women's existing levels of empowerment, using indicators to measure inclusion in decision-making, income, access and control of resources, and time use. The process, therefore, went beyond integrating women into the development sphere. This was addressed by building women's capacities to form a producers' cooperative so as to have better access to the market, while strenghtening their governing skills in decision-making and resource allocation. The intervention paid attention to the political context of the beneficiaries, planning within which specific space to address unequal gender relations.

Gendering interventions: inclusion of a gender lens

Here I employ the Social Relations Approach as an analytical lens to determine the projects' ability to recognise differences in the gender needs of the targeted beneficiaries. During the implementation, I observed that Project March was not context-specific and made no attempt to distinguish between the specific needs of the beneficiaries in small and large-scale producing communities. There was, as a result, a persistent refusal of project beneficiaries in a particular large-scale producing community to use the improved technology, and this stance did not change until the project's completion. The main reason was that the new processors required more energy; in addition, there were complaints that operating these processors took more time rather than reducing the time

use burden. The rejection of the improved processors was also reflected in participation in training programmes, an important aspect of the project. I observed a blunt refusal of uptake as they did not see the relevance and perceived the intervention as a nuisance. In communities where there was some level of uptake of the new technologies, a few women were reverting to the existing processing technology. Regarding financial skills, a few other women resisted by refusing to access financial institutions due to their apathy. They preferred to keep their monies at home, a method which was significantly unsafe and presented the tendency of mixing business and personal monies. Project March was gender-specific, but it only addressed women's practical needs; it was not gender-transformational.

Applying the Social Relations Approach to Project May, I discerned some levels of gender-aware and redistributive potential. The project, in its implementation, recognised the differences in women's and men's gender roles. It included activities that targeted women's strategic needs with discourses on shared decision-making, income control, asset ownership, and power-sharing at the household and community levels. Thus, even though the targeted beneficiaries were women, training on gender equality was held with both women, as the primary participants, and men, as secondary beneficiaries. The logic behind this was to address systemic inequality by sensitising both genders and introducing them to the importance of positive masculinities and joint decision-making. The implementation was also done involving women at every point of decision-making, building their confidence and leadership strategies through fortnightly engagement in developing a cooperative and field school training.

Level of women's empowerment and depth of gender-sensitive interventions

Here my interest was to examine the levels of empowerment addressed by each project using the Longwe Framework. My observations revealed that Project March attained the welfare and access levels of the Women Empowerment Framework. In the main, the project set out to improve beneficiaries' economic status by providing them with market access and information, financial and entrepreneurial skills, and knowledge. This was done through the provision of

supporting facilities like soft loans. The immediate outcome was an improvement in beneficiaries' welfare regarding basic needs like feeding and clothing. The project defined women's empowerment mainly as access to resources like health, financial access, market and entrepreneurial skills, and climate-friendly processing practices. The intervention is gender-neutral according to the Longwe Framework since it targeted women's practical needs and neglected to address their strategic needs. There was no attempt to make women aware of their social positioning and how that could be addressed. The women beneficiaries blamed their resistance on their lack of ownership of the intervention and the absence of opportunities to discuss the project context. Thus, even though project activities served women's practical needs they were not necessarily emancipatory and reinforced women's subordinate position.

Project May appears to respond to all five empowerment requirements and attained the highest level in the hierarchy of equality, which is control. Project May can be said to be gender positive as it sought to improve women's position relative to men, promoting their control over decision-making processes. It increased women's access to productive resources, conscientising and mobilising them through field schools and other community engagements. Women were enabled to participate in, and lead, all the organisational development processes to build their confidence and self-worth, and validate the essence of the campaign for equality. The process established a sense of commitment and responsibility of women to the project. Women gained some measure of space to display agency in project implementation.

Although Project May was empowering, I observed a few challenges. For instance, involving the women in decision-making at every stage in the project lengthened the project life. There was also a challenge where the project failed to conduct intersectional analysis to distinguish the differences among women beneficiaries, such as when addressing the practical needs of post-harvest processors. I realised that women of different age groups had different needs, even though they operated under the overall umbrella of post-harvest processors. Seasonal and full-time processors also had different needs, and therefore an intersectional lens would have sharpened the gender transformative potential of the intervention.

Project May appeared to be comparatively more gender transformational than Project March. Employing the various gender analytical tools to assess the projects, Project May was gender-inclusive i.e. involving women and gender-aware organisations and planners in the planning and implementation process; gender aware, and redistributive, as it sought to transform existing resource allocations to create a more balanced relationship between women and men. In the end, although Project March purported to realise its goal of empowering women based on their health and economic status, its intent was only to integrate women into the economic space, and therefore was not transformative. This did not do much to actualise a transformative outcome for women, which according to Moser (2017) seeks to address unequal gender relations.

Conclusion

This study sought to respond to the question of why interventions continue to fail in empowering women. With this in mind, the gap between women's empowerment and the intent and implementation of development intentions was explored. A comparative gender analysis of the selected interventions showed how an intervention targeting empowerment may not necessarily be empowering, but rather reinforce women's subordinated position. Whilst both interventions examined were gender-sensitive, Project May was found to be more potentially transformative as it sought to disrupt the existing unequal gender relations and build the autonomy of participants.

A reflection on my experience highlights a few important details that will serve as a backdrop for recommendations to development practitioners and state actors in designing and implementing interventions. The comparative experiential narrative indicates the flaws and strengths of the two distinct but similar experiences. They were distinct because of the approaches used, and similar because they targeted processors in different agricultural economies. Based on all the discussions, particularly the experience from Project May, the study recommends that even before designing any intervention that targets women as beneficiaries, policymakers and development workers should go through the processes of involving gender experts and the potential women

beneficiaries, right at the project planning stage. This initiative serves as a useful starting point for successful project implementation.

All stakeholders, including the targeted participants, should agree on what indicators of empowerment should look like. With this, a clear picture and distinctive road map are created. The success of an intervention will then not be measured by the number of people accessing the programme but rather, the changes that have occurred based on the assessment of the conditions of beneficiaries before interaction with the project.

Empowerment aims at building capabilities, having access to resources, being able to make important decisions; development workers should be able to build these qualities during their encounters with women. Even if the intervention is economic-centred, inclusive participation and efforts to conscientise both women and men would go a long way to ensure intervention uptake and sustainability. Interventions may be gender specific, in that they target women. However, women do not live in isolation and so it is important to sensitise men, who are favoured by the patriarchal systems, to understand the need for empowerment. Tackling interventions in that manner reduces the challenges that men who are in contact with the women beneficiaries may pose, along with other actors who safeguard existing unequal structures. Such sensitisation also takes care of resistance to uptake as there is a social understanding that an equal society is beneficial to both genders and not just women. The elimination of resistance, therefore, facilitates both uptake and ownership of the intervention. Although Project May is a gender-specific initiative, men were involved as secondary beneficiaries. Women in this project recounted a change in the attitude of their partners and a willingness to assist in reproductive work, living up to the messages received during conscientisation sessions.

An intervention that seeks to be gender transformative may have its challenges, like process delay, as was the case with Project May. The involvement of women at every point of decision-making slows down the length of time that the project is expected to take. But this delay is worthwhile, as beneficiaries subsequently make personal and communal efforts in ensuring their empowerment, exhibiting autonomy rather than dependence on project staff. This growth of autonomy and other remarkable qualities is not restricted to the project but also appears in other aspects of the lives of beneficiaries.

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Improving Rural Women's Access to Productive Resources: Are the Low Hanging Fruits Too Low to Make a Difference?

Faustina Obeng Adomaa

Introduction

The percentage contribution of rural deprivation to national poverty is high. In Ghana, it is above 70%, and rises to about 90% in the northern parts of the country (FAO and ECOWAS, 2018). Poverty is a rural phenomenon and women in rural areas are the face of poverty, especially less resource-endowed women. In rural communities, land-based livelihood is dominant (Jarawura and Smith, 2015) and access to land and associated resources for agriculture is crucial. Family or household production dominates in such areas, amidst strict gender and household hierarchical divisions of labour (FAO and ECOWAS, 2018). Rural women live and work in contexts where poverty and deprivation are rife, livelihood options are limited (De La O Campos *et al*., 2018), and gender norms and their associated differential access to resources are entrenched (Ajadi *et al*., 2015; Cheteni *et al*., 2019). Lifting rural women, especially the poorest of the poor, out of poverty to the level where they can live and thrive, demands placing special emphasis on areas that have the strongest potential to improve their livelihoods.

The ability of all persons to live and thrive has been at the core of research, activism, and interventions around empowerment and inclusion for many decades. Globally, rural women have been a target group in the empowerment and inclusion discourse due to the many constraints they face in accessing productive resources. Rural women live and work in specific social and economic contexts. The conditions prevailing in these contexts influence their access to productive resources. Therefore, questions examining rural women's social and economic contexts, finding their sources of deprivation, and unravelling constraints to their access to, use of, and control over productive

resources, have been at the heart of development studies. From the Women in Development (WID) era to the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), scholars and activists have dedicated attention to unearthing the dynamics of the constraints that rural women face, and designing and implementing interventions to improve their livelihoods.

Research and interventions to improve rural women's livelihoods have proliferated over the decades. Influenced by an economic outlook, researchers have examined challenges that rural women face, and have recommended areas of intervention to improve their access to income as a means of securing basic necessities. Donor organisations and implementing partners have taken up some of these interventions. Many of these have focused on "women's crops" and have introduced new crops, especially vegetables and legumes, and improved access to extension services and inputs for women cultivating these crops. Some interventions have also trained women on income generation activities (IGAs), established women's groups to mobilise labour and capital for these activities, and connected these groups to value chains where applicable. Many decades and several interventions later, the persistent deprivation and discrimination that rural women meet in accessing productive resources is a recurring finding of recent studies on rural livelihoods and gendered access to productive resources (see Ajadi *et al*., 2015; De La O Campos *et al*., 2018; FAO and ECOWAS, 2018). Are the many interventions targeting low hanging fruits only, and are these low hanging fruits too low to make a difference?

In September 2018, I met a 54-year-old widow called Hawa during field research in a cocoa farming hamlet in the Bia West District of Ghana's Western North Region. I had a discussion with her concerning a women's empowerment intervention in her community. In the course of our discussion, the complexities of Hawa's life and, by extension, the lives of rural women, became manifest. In this Standpoint, I take a dive into Hawa's life and use it to situate the dynamics of the constraints that rural women face in accessing productive resources, and how they experience livelihood interventions differently at distinct phases of their lives.

The lived experience of Hawa, a rural woman.

Hawa is a native of a farming community in the Sissala East District of Ghana's Upper West Region. She got married at 22 to 34-year-old Adamu in 1986 and subsequently moved into Adamu's family house. Adamu did not have his own land for farming; he worked on the household yam farm. Hawa joined the household labour for the yam cultivation, and joined two other daughters-in-law in the household and their mother-in-law to cultivate groundnuts (peanuts) on the family's fallow land. Hawa indicated that, because the household did not have large parcels of land, sons could not have individual farms. Thus, it was impossible for daughters-in-law to even dream of accessing separate fallow lands to cultivate their own groundnuts. Although Hawa worked on the household yam and groundnut farms, she did not receive any part of the income from the sale of farm produce, not even groundnuts, the income from which was supposed to accrue to women in the household. Her mother-in-law controlled the sale of groundnuts and the resulting income.

In the early 1990s, the three daughters-in-law, together with their mother-in-law, joined an intervention that mobilised women for shea butter processing and connected them to buyers in the southern regions of the country. Hawa indicated that women in one household usually registered as a group in the intervention, and that it was common for daughters-in-law to work under their mother-in-law in the processing activities. The daughters-in-law primarily picked the shea fruits in the wild and processed them into butter. However, their mother-in-law fronted transactions with the buyers, and thus, controlled the income from the shea processing. According to Hawa, her mother-in-law considered this income, and the income from the groundnut sales, as household income and used it to buy household consumables.

In 1997, Hawa, her husband, and their four young children migrated to the Bia West District, where I met her in 2018. The couple settled to work as "*abusa*" sharecroppers, popularly called caretakers. They took care of a five-acre farm. Prior to receiving their first payment, they had taken a loan from the farm owner, and thus their net income after loan repayment was low. They had to take another loan to survive for that crop season. Hawa said, "The income after the loan payment was so small that I did not even expect

my husband to give me some of the money" (Personal Interview, September 2018). After four seasons of taking care of the five-acre farm, and living in a cycle of loans and repayments, Hawa's husband took on another seven-acre farm. Hawa was a crucial source of labour for activities in the 12 acres of cocoa farms. She weeded, fetched water for pesticide spraying, gathered and carried cocoa pods, cooked for pod breakers, carried fermented beans from the farms to the hamlet, and dried the cocoa beans. For nine years, Hawa and Adamu worked solely as caretakers, and Hawa was as much involved in the farm activities as she was in taking care of their five children by then. Hawa indicated, "I worked in the farms every day except on market days... I never held some of cocoa money in my hand. I could not complain. Cocoa money is a man's money" (Personal Interview, September 2018).

In 2006, the family obtained land to cultivate cocoa under an "*abunu*" sharecropping arrangement. Adamu passed away three years afterwards, and Hawa decided to continue both the *abusa* and *abunu* arrangements on her own account. Hawa said, "The farm owners said I was a woman and could not work as a caretaker. The owner of the land we had for *abunu* also said the same" (Personal Interview, September 2018). Hawa was, therefore, about to lose both sharecropping arrangements. Other male caretakers intervened, and the owners accepted to continue the sharecropping arrangements, but with Hawa's then 22-year-old son instead. "Thank God I had a son; all our arduous work would have been in vain," (Personal Interview, September 2018) was what Hawa said, relieved that her household kept the sharecropping arrangements. Hawa continues to work on the household's farms, now under the control of her son.

Hawa has been an active participant of trainings on IGAs in her community. From soap and detergent making, to beekeeping, and vegetable cultivation, she has joined them all. Nevertheless, she has been unable to start any of the activities by herself because she does not have enough capital. Instead, on one occasion, she joined other women to mobilise their resources for a group soap-making venture. She, however, said that their capital was low and thus they could only afford to buy low-quality materials. The quality of the soap was, therefore, low, and could not compete with other bar soaps at similar market prices; this led to the collapse of the venture after seven months.

Hawa indicated that the same group of women, largely wives of migrant caretakers, approached the leaders of their community to secure land for vegetable production. The community gave the women an acre of land as an experimental plot during the intervention phase, but they were unsuccessful in getting lands along river bodies to cultivate the vegetable all year round. Thus, they could not embark on the vegetable production. Hawa indicated that, although vegetable cultivation has taken off as an alternative livelihood in the community after the intervention, "the men have taken over; they own the lands along the rivers and they have the money to cultivate vegetable" (Personal Interview, September 2018). Ending our discussions, Hawa said:

> I have always worked hard, yet people do not think I am strong enough to work as a farmer by myself. I have never had land of my own to farm. I have never had capital to start any business. There is not much work to do in villages aside farming, and only men can even get the opportunity to be called farmers (Personal Interview, September 2018).

Hawa, however, added, "My daughter-in-law and I burn the cocoa husks to get potash for sale at the end of each season. It is not money [not enough to be recognised as income], but it is something" (Personal Interview, September 2018). When asked if she shares the income from the potash with her daughter-in-law, Hawa indicated, "I use the money to buy soap, body cream and a few things needed in the house; it is not a lot of money to share with my daughter in-law" (Personal Interview, September 2018).

The complexities of rural women's lives and the place of interventions in their lives

Hawa's life brings to the fore the old question of gendered access to productive resources in rural agrarian communities. Constraints to rural women's access to land, labour, and capital, for instance, is undergirded by gendered norms that govern who gets what, when, and how. Concerning land, for instance, women are perceived as people who lack the strength to put land to productive use (Higgins and Fenrich, 2011). Thus, rural women are confronted with gender-based discrimination in accessing land for farming, despite the enormous labour they provide in household farms. Although rural women, such as Hawa,

can work and succeed as own-account farmers, gender stereotypes continue to present hurdles to their access to agricultural productive resources, especially land on their own account. These women live in the shadows of men – husbands or sons. In the case of Hawa, she had lived in the shadow of her husband, and then, after his demise, in that of her son, who stepped in to keep existing sharecropping arrangements. While Hawa's life manifests constraints with regards to land, the few rural women who get access to land also face constraints with labour, inputs, crop extension service, and markets (see Kumase *et al*, 2010; Hill and Vigneri, 2014).

Rural communities have rarely considered women as having the right to access productive resources, even when such resources are abundant. For rural women, the persistent constraints surrounding access to land, labour, and capital seem to be worsening due to scarcity. For instance, many rural areas are facing land scarcity from population increase and competition from non-farm uses (Bugri *et al*., 2017). And amid this scarcity, there is an invoking, reawakening, and deepening of gender-based discrimination in access to, use of, and control over land. Furthering the notion that women cannot put resources to productive use, when such resources are scarce, it is considered an imperative to give them to men who will put them to productive use. This notion seems to be internalised by women such as Hawa, who invariably indicates that the reason she did not have access to land or income was because those resources were not abundant or enough.

Many rural communities live and thrive on land; thus, interventions have also focused on land-based agricultural livelihoods. For many decades, however, land-based agricultural interventions meant to improve rural women's lives have been less impactful than expected. Even when interventions have provided labour, capital, and extension services, women's inability to break constraints to accessing land have made such interventions unsuccessful. In some instances where new or upgraded land-based agricultural interventions have showed commercial viability, men have captured such activities. As Hawa highlighted, interventions to upgrade vegetable cultivation (which has been a female activity in many rural communities) from the level of subsistence to commercial production, has seen a de-gendering and re-gendering of vegetable cultivation into a male activity when the commercial viability became eminent.

Such instances further widen the gender gap as an unintended consequence. Although interventions sensitise rural communities to the collective good that women's access to agriculturally productive resources can generate, the persistent gender-based discrimination in accessing land, for instance, and its further deepening due to impending scarcity, make land-based agricultural interventions less appealing for rural women, who are the intended beneficiaries.

In other instances, interventions have focused on non-farm livelihood activities such as agro-processing and small-scale manufacturing of household consumables. In these interventions as well, women, especially less resource-endowed ones, have consistently faced constraints to mobilise capital to start these IGAs without consistent external support. Many of such IGAs collapse a few years after the active interventions fade, as in the case of Hawa and her group's soap-making venture. In these interventions, little attention is given to distinct categories of rural women, their social statuses, and resource endowments and hence to their differential access to the material outcomes of such interventions. Few women have been able to take advantage of such interventions. These few women sometimes derive power and access to resources through their relationship with men, such as mothers-in-law who have access to the labour of daughters-in-law through their sons' marriages. The achievements of the few resource-endowed women are trumpeted, and this often obscures the realities of many deprived women who are unable to access the material outcomes of such interventions.

Rural women are not a homogenous group (CEDAW, 2016). Relational hierarchies exist among them in households and communities, and these engender differential access to resources. The norms governing relational hierarchies among women and the associated discrimination against more deprived rural women seem entrenched. Yet, they are so subtle that rural women themselves often internalise and perpetuate these norms unconsciously. Interventions that focus on households as units, for instance, unconsciously empower women at higher hierarchical levels, reinforce differential resource access, and widen existing gaps between the more and the less resource-endowed women. Thus, more deprived women in rural areas not only live in the shadows of men, but also in the shadows of socially and economically powerful women.

For the few women who take advantage of interventions to improve their incomes, their achievements also seemingly further the course of gender norms and the ascribed uses of women's income. Women's income is labelled as household income and women seem to have internalised this role. In the case of Hawa, for instance, although she bemoaned working with her mother-in-law in the shea butter processing activity, and not having access to that income which was used to buy consumables for the household, she conceived her experience as a norm. Thus, two decades later, she works with her daughter-in-law to process cocoa husks to potash, but does not share the income with her. Instead, Hawa also considers the income as household income, and uses it to buy household consumables. For many rural women, their access to income reinforces their socially ascribed roles, constructed in ways that further the course of patriarchy. Thus, for even the socially and economically endowed mother-in-law who is able to "exploit" the labour of her daughter-in-law, the power she derives from patriarchy is limited in its potential for empowerment, and even more so for other, more deprived women.

Conclusion

The lived experiences of rural women, such as Hawa, epitomise the complexities of their lives. These are fashioned around a configuration of multiple sources of discrimination entrenched in socially constructed gender norms and relational hierarchies that still constrain women's access to productive resources, and impede their ability to take advantage of the material benefits of interventions aimed at improving their lives. While providing rural women with inputs and extension services for agricultural activities, and training them on IGAs may be easy solutions to problems, may appear to be easy solutions to problems, and appear to improve their livelihoods, the fruits of these interventions may hang too low to make a difference in their lives, especially for more deprived women. For instance, interventions that give inputs, extension services, and labour for land-based agricultural activities without tackling structural discrimination in land access are unable to improve the lives of many deprived rural women, who still face persistent discrimination in accessing land. Also, non-farm interventions on IGAs that are insensitive to relational hierarchies among women empower

fewer women, who mostly derive their power from patriarchy, which appears to give them privilege over more deprived women. The empowerment of these few women does not benefit deprived women, and further widens the gap among women created by persistent hierarchical discrimination. Nor does the income of the women at the higher levels of the hierarchy empower them beyond their socially ascribed roles of household provisioning. Finding areas that have the strongest potential to improve the livelihoods of rural women, especially the more deprived ones, therefore, requires going beyond interventions that focus on low hanging fruits, which may be too low to make a difference. It necessitates critically reflective and pragmatic approaches on how to confront context-specific gender norms, household and community relational hierarchies, and associated stereotypes. These gender and hierarchical stereotypes are the underlying mechanisms that get invoked, manifested and magnified, in multiple dimensions of discrimination, and persistently constrain rural women's ability to live and thrive, even when interventions provide productive resources.

Endnotes

1 Hawa and Adamu are pseudo names for the woman and her spouse whose lives I present in this Standpoint.

2 *Abusa* is a sharecropping arrangement in which a farm owner hires a permanent farm hand, popularly called "caretaker,", to provide all the labour needs of a mature cocoa farm while the farm owner provides the chemicals needed to prevent pests and diseases. The caretaker receives one-third of the annual proceeds from the farm as payment.

3 *Abunu* sharecropping is an arrangement in which a landowner agrees to give land to a tenant farmer to start a new cocoa farm. The tenant farmer is responsible for all the capital and labour investment in the farm until the cocoa trees are mature and start bearing pods. This is usually between four and five years after establishment. The landowner and the tenant farmer then divide the farm into two equal parts and manage their farms separately. The land used by the tenant farmer reverts to the original landowner when the cocoa trees die. This is usually after about 35 to 40 years.

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Working with Rural Women to Secure Resource Access

Akua O. Britwum speaks with Fati Abigail Abdulai

Akua Britwum spoke to Fati Abigail Abdulai from Ghana, in a virtual interview on Sunday the 2nd of May, 2021. Fati Abdulai is the Director of Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM) of Ghana. She has held her position since 2013, when Fati's mother, the founder of the WOM, retired. Fati had been supporting her mother in her work. The interview highlights the struggles for women's rights in the daily and institutionalised expressions of class exploitation and patriarchy. In this case, it concerns the struggle for access to resources, generated by women's economic dependence on their husbands in a predominantly subsistence production rural setting.

Akua Opokua Britwum: Tell us about the WOM – how it started and how you became its director.

Fati Abigail Abdulai: The WOM was started by Betty Ayagiba, my mother, after she lost her husband in 1988. My mother, a nurse then, was struck by the fact that the women who could not pay their hospital bills were mainly widows. As inpatients they hardly received visitors, and some were suicidal. She decided to bring such women into a group to meet occasionally to discuss their experiences and support each other. The first meeting, attended by over 100 widows, underscored the need to formalise the group. Their initial meetings, spent listening and counselling each other, led to the realisation that most of their challenges emerged from the widowhood rites they had had to perform during their husbands' funerals. Widows in some communities of the Upper East region (UER) of Ghana must take naked public baths and drink ritual brews to prove they were not complicit in their husbands' death. Most women, after

going through these rites, lose their self-esteem. Some self-isolate and others migrate to preserve their dignity. Some develop health complications like liver problems because of the unhygienic conditions under which the ritual brews are prepared.

The organisation has become better structured over the years, working in four major thematic areas. The first is advocacy on women's rights where our key priority is ensuring that the women we work with, live dignified lives. We target the dehumanising widowhood rites, sexual and gender-based violence, unpaid care work, and basic rights. We also work on women's economic empowerment because, over the years, our work has shown that women who are economically empowered can better resist some of the dehumanising widowhood rites. We offer women training to acquire new skills and support others to expand their existing businesses; we also provide microcredit support. We realised that the main livelihood of over forty per cent of the women we work with, was in agriculture so we do a lot of training on sustainable agricultural practices, assisting them to get the most out of their land. Our third thematic area is climate change, which has two components. In the special housing initiative, we support some to reconstruct their homes. Most of the women live in mud houses, which are easily destroyed by annual flooding that plagues communities in this part of the country. Women are forced to migrate and, on their return, find their buildings have collapsed. We also take up general climate adaptation issues like using energy-saving tools. Our fourth thematic area is education, where we support orphaned school dropouts to return to school and, for those who cannot, to acquire income-earning skills.

AOB: Well, you have covered the events leading to the formation of your organisation. How does WOM reach the widows who are potential members?

FAA: The very first meeting was by word-of-mouth invitations, no radio announcement. Over the years we have formed groups in the communities and usually the standard is that, once members of the group grow to more than 30 persons, then the group must split into two. These days, communities invite us. Sometimes the widows form a group and then invite us, and sometimes the

local assembly would form the groups and invite us; sometimes the chiefs form the groups and ask us to come over. So they have probably seen the work we have done in other communities, and they invite us to help them go through the processes of how they can stay together. When we respond to such invitations, we tell them what we do as an organisation, train them in group dynamics, help them select their leaders, and prioritise their economic activities. In addition, we support individual women who are experiencing violence. If a widow has a case and comes to report it, it does not matter whether she is part of a group or not, we help her seek redress.

AOB: So how many women do you cover in total?

FAA: Currently we work in 160 communities in the UER, and this translates into a little over 12,000 women.

AOB: How prevalent is this situation of widowhood and the attendant problems?

FAA: Just in 2019, the Ghana National Household Registry published data that put the number of widowed persons (both women and men) in the UER at around roughly 68,000, and out of this number, 92% are widows. So, what this means is that, in the UER, we have 92% of the widowed persons being women. Again, out of this number, seven out of ten of them are poor or extremely poor. Traditional norms prescribe the rites every woman must undergo when she is widowed. The first is a test to clear her of witchcraft and the second, [to ascertain] whether she had a hand in the death of her husband.

All widowed women have to be inherited by a male relation of their husbands. Due to our work, some women can resist, but those who do face different forms of abuse. Those who refuse to forcefully marry a male relative of their deceased husband are considered difficult women. They are denied land to farm or are abandoned by the families; some are even beaten, and some have their properties destroyed. They sometimes face verbal and emotional abuse because it is understood now that, if you beat somebody physically, the law will get you, but emotional or verbal abuse is somehow very difficult to prove and get witnesses for. Widowhood rites are still prevalent. Even last year, part

of a festival celebrated in Talensi district had some widows dancing naked. It was a big issue, but they cover it in the name of culture and tradition.

AOB: What are some of the laws that you have used to protect these women?

FAA: We use the Intestate Succession Law, which determines how property is shared when someone dies without a will. Most of these women themselves are considered property for somebody to inherit. The Intestate Succession Law helps people to understand that the woman and the children are entitled to part of the deceased man's properties. Another law we use is the Domestic Violence [DV] Act and its Legislative Instrument (LI), which we use a lot because most of the abuses meted out to the widows are usually done by family members. Another is the Marriage Act, because we have had cases where our use of the Intestate Succession Law has been contested by family members who claim that the woman was not the legal wife of the man. So, we use the Marriage Act, even to educate married persons and those yet to be married about the kind of choices they make, and to seek redress when needed. We have not yet used the Land Act that has been passed recently; we are doing more of sensitisation about it, but it will equally help going forward.

AOB: How will this recent Land Act help?

FAA: The [Act provides] that property acquired by any of the spouses is considered joint property until proven otherwise. Most of the cases we have, the families will usually claim it as family property, aware that the court cannot grant ownership of family property to the women. Once the land is registered in the name of either of the spouses, the Land Act removes this ambiguity. Again, this means that we have a lot of work to do sensitising people on the need to register their lands. There is another provision that makes it wrong to deny somebody's inheritance based on the person's gender or sex. We have a lot of the women being denied the property just because they are women.

AOB: Why?

FAA: They just say that as a woman, you belong to your husband's house and your husband's house does not count you as part of the family. So hopefully the law helps, but there is a gap in terms of what the law says and how to seek redress.

AOB: What are some of these gaps?

FAA: One is ignorance; some people do not know about the law at all. For those who do, the cost, in terms of the time and resources for seeking redress, is a disincentive. In the UER, for instance, most of our courts are in the municipalities, so seeking redress means commuting from the village to the town, which is quite expensive for most of these women. The other is legal representation; though we have legal aid, the system is overwhelmed and cases pile up, leading to hearings getting postponed. There is a woman who has been pursuing a case – she lost her husband, and the family rejected her child as his biological child. It took two years to prove that the child was the biological child of the dead man. This is the fifth year, and they are still struggling in court contesting her legal status as a wife; they claim that the man failed to complete the marital rites for her before he died. In the five-year period, she has changed lawyers thrice. The judges also keep changing and they have to start all over anytime there is a change. The last time we met, she told me she wanted to withdraw the case. Just in November 2020, we had to help one widow with about GHS 700 to file her case because her land was being taken away by the family members. The courts consider land as a huge resource, so they must pay money. She cannot afford the amount of money she must pay, and this is after one year of trying to seek redress at a lower court. Then the court finally ruled to move the case to a different court due to the size of the land. At the community level, once you try to seek redress, you are seen as an evil woman, trying to destroy the family, and people shun your company; nobody wants to associate with you. In some instances, the widows just migrate or, even if they stay, they stay in isolation. So those are some of the challenges with seeking legal redress, that discourage people who know about the law to seek redress.

AOB: What personal challenges have you faced? What about your mother and all the things she has been trying to do?

FAA: We are seen as people inciting families against one another and they say this is their family issue and we should not interfere. Some traditional leaders see our work as a threat, and some openly warn us to stay out of their communities because they do not have any problem. We have had issues with the legal system. DOVVSU [Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit] is unhappy with us because they think we are overstepping our boundaries. I remember there was one boy who kept beating two old ladies who were his stepmothers. The case had been in DOVVSU for over a year but it was not going to the court and was not being solved. The women came to report to us, and we wrote to DOVVSU. They did not respond; they said it was none of our business. So, we wrote to a higher authority, the police commander, who gave them three days to process the case for court. They were forced to send the case to court. At that time, we were seen in a bad light. It looked like we had reported them to their bosses. During that period, [with] other cases that went to them, if they found out that it had come to us first before getting to them, they were a little sceptical in handling it.

So, we ourselves are targets, and we are seen as inciting the women against their families. In fact, some people even tell us that we are encouraging women to kill their husbands to come and join the movement. The death rates among the men are higher and over here too, because of polygamy, when one man dies, you have maybe four widows, so it [elevates] the number of women that are widowed. People somehow believe that there is no natural death! Even when people ride their motorcycle carelessly and get accidents, it is still assumed that it is the woman that caused the death of her husband. We get attacked. But we continue because we know the focus and I always say that we will fight along the way. That is normal. The struggle makes us understand better that we want the best for the women. Sometimes it is ignorance, because most of the officials charged to handle such cases are mostly not trained so their own biases come in the way of handling the cases. Over the years, we have also offered training for some of these departments to understand their role and to be able to offer the best service to the women they are working with.

AOB: Have you been involved in any legislative reforms, or in the passing

of legislative instruments like the DV Act, the Land Act, and, recently, the Affirmative Action Bill?

FAA: Yes, we actively participated in the passage of the Land Act. We did it together with NETRIGHT [Network for Women's Rights in Ghana]. We also participated in the Affirmative Action Bill in the past. But the recent ones, I would say we have not actively participated in them. We equally participated actively in the LI of the DV Act. There are others we participated in, but I think we have not yet had any positive results, like the DV Fund. This is something we actively participated in, but we still have not had a positive result.

AOB: So, you are talking about the women's ability to benefit from the various laws that are set in place. Do you think that additional legislation will help?

FAA: Though I think additional legislation will help, I strongly believe that, if we are able to work to ensure that the existing laws are implemented as they ought to be, we will make more headway. So, for instance the Affirmative Action Bill, we need it urgently. But even as we work on that, we also need to ensure that a lot of people are using the existing ones and testing them to serve as a deterrent to people that have made up their minds that they will never change, in terms of abusing others. For me, when we do that, it will really be helpful.

AOB: Regarding the political environment, I mean here, one person has a strong lead and is starting something with people who are already vulnerable. What were some of the initial challenges? What was the turning point for you?

FAA: For the initial challenges, I remember that when the WOM was becoming more formalised, it was published in the newspapers and it said that "widows too are meeting", as if widows were not a group of people that were allowed to have their own meeting. It became a laughingstock, that "… they have killed their husbands and now they want to have an association." It is difficult to say that the political environment has been unsupportive, but there have been challenges. We had instances where chiefs have been perpetrators and then there are political interferences. Even in instances where an influential political

member is involved in a case, political divisions come in as persons on each side of the divide seek to make political capital out of the case. Some people see the movement as a state organisation, and they invite us to their communities as a way of getting political points. Assembly members or a member of parliament would invite us to their community to help them start a women's group, and because of our work on economic empowerment, they would use that in their political campaign and say, "Oh you see, we even brought this NGO here to help you." I would say that the political environment has been tricky, one that my mother struggled daily to navigate. Sometimes these parties try to use the movement to win political points. Sometimes it takes a lot of extra effort and communication to place ourselves in an environment where we are not seen as favouring one political party or another, or being used to settle political scores.

AOB: I want to know the high point in this work for you, something that happened and turned everything around for you.

FAA: For me, the high point is when the women come back with success stories. That is the high point, because this work we do is full of negatives so when we get the few successes, then it gives us a reason to continue.

AOB: What is the lowest point for you – something that happened and made you sort of want to give up?

FAA: Yes, just the other day, I was telling my colleagues that some of the women we have worked with over the years, we see their children going through the same difficulties, and we wonder whether we are really making any headway. Because one would have expected that, as we progress, this thing does not become a generational cycle. That can be very depressing.

AOB: How do you think you can work around this problem? It does seem you are getting successes in terms of individuals but then the system remains.

FAA: We think about this every day, how to ensure that we have systemic change. Increasingly, personally, what I think is that we need to make our leaders see how this is a developmental issue. Because most of these cases need

different support systems to be able to overcome, and with the different support systems, we need more hands on deck than just our office.

AOB: Any examples?

FAA: For instance, there is this widow who lost her husband when she was very young. She has three girls. The last time we met, she was talking about how her first daughter became pregnant when she was a teenager and two years down the line, the second one is also pregnant as a teenager, and she is thinking about her third. I look back at all the help we granted her to have access to her property and protect her from abuse. But her children need reproductive health information, which should have been provided either by the school or the state. So now she has more mouths to feed. The last time I spoke to her, even the room they live in had collapsed and they needed to find a new place to live. So, the state must provide some special housing initiatives for vulnerable groups of this sort. That is why I say that it needs a whole lot of systemic reforms. Everybody must play their role to ensure that the same people get the most services. I think that one of the best ways to stop this cyclical experience is to get more people to talk about the issue, how these abuses happening in the name of widowhood rites are impacting the development of the people in general.

AOB: You were talking about how some chiefs have invited you to their communities – what has accounted for this success? Whereas others warn you to stay out of their communities?

FAA: There are several reasons for the successes with some communities. What we have done as an organisation over the last ten years is to institute an award scheme for chiefs that support our cause and publish it. People get to know that we are appreciating or honouring this chief because of what he has done. This award scheme pushed some of the chiefs to show interest in our work. Some of the chiefs genuinely see that some of these things are wrong and they want to address it and so bring us to help them because they have come to understand the work we do. But being alone makes it difficult because they work with a Traditional Council. They rely on us to convince their Traditional Council as

to why there is a need to change. If it is a chief that has influence over other chiefs, then it helps. I remember that the former president of the Regional House of Chiefs here really supported our work. His people said one of the things he did was ask community members to give the farmlands around the homes to women to farm and give those that are far off to the men, because women always grapple with the challenges of care work and are constrained for time. Since he was the president of the Regional House of Chiefs, it meant that he had a lot of influence, so when he instituted something, people quickly accepted it and used it. He also challenged the prevailing belief within his own family, which barred widows and their children from eating all the food items belonging to the deceased man, claiming that if they did, they would die. He interpreted it as one of the ways of preventing widows from having access to these things. So, he asked his people to allow widows to eat the remaining food items and hold him personally accountable for any deaths that would occur. People ate the food, and nothing happened to them, so that made people aware that that belief had no basis.

AOB: What in your life would you want to share with young persons working in this area or those who would like to work on what you are involved in? Which category is your age bracket?

FAA: I am 34 years old. For young people, if they decide to go into this area of work, they should know that they would need support, and when I say support, I mean friends or family that can always encourage them. Because, sometimes, it is really depressing, and you would ask yourself, "Ah, why don't I join my other colleagues who are having fun, why should I stay here?" They should know that it is doable, but they would have to build some safety nets to cushion themselves. I would like to also say that we need more young people supporting, to bring different perspectives, to bring new ideas about how we can be more impactful.

AOB: What is your wish? What is your vision for ten years from now?

FAA: Ten years from now, I am hoping that there will be a lot of combined efforts to address issues of gender-based violence holistically, where people are not seen as evil for seeking justice. I would like to see a funding regime that has some flexibility in allowing women's rights organisations the actual support that most of these women need. I would like to see more young people taking action.

AOB: Any last words to us?

FAA: Just to say, thank you for listening to me and I hope that this encourages more people to continue the good work they are doing.

AOB: Thank you very much Fati, I am really very grateful to you for giving your time.

Endnotes

1. Intestate Succession Act, 1985 (PNDC Law 111)
2. Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732)
3. Domestic Violence Regulations, 2016 (L. I. 2237)
4. Marriages Act 1884-1985, Cap 127
5. Land Act, 2020 (Act 1036)

Working with the State to Secure Rural Women's Rights

Akua Britwum Speaks with Rizwana Waraich

Akua Britwum speaks with Rizwana Waraich of Pakistan virtually, on Tuesday the 4th of May 2021. Rizwana is a board member of the Lok Sanjh Foundation, an NGO based in rural Pakistan, and also works as a freelance consultant. In this interview, she reveals the struggles with contradictions within state support structures that are supposed to defend women's rights, in a situation where the players themselves are steeped in patriarchal values.

Akua Opokua Britwum (AOB): I would like to ask you to talk about yourself and how you became involved in gender activism and what you are doing now.

Rizwana Waraich (RW): Yeah! Mine is an interesting story. Right after getting my masters in English literature in 1991 from Punjab University, Lahore, I started my career as an English teacher in a private school in Lahore. There, I met Asmar Janvir, a famous human rights activist of Pakistan who introduced me to Chandhi Joshi, the regional director of UN Women in Pakistan. After two and a half hours of our first meeting, she asked me to join UNIFEM. It was a surprise because I had no idea about UNIFEM, or the UN system. So, I said, "What job do I have to do?" She said, "You have to work for women.". Then I said, "Oh, I cannot work for women!" She replied, "I saw something in you and if you like, we would like to hire you." I didn't take it seriously, but in February 1992, I was appointed to the position of Community Organisation Officer in a UNIFEM and UNDP joint project with the Department of Fisheries in Punjab, titled "Integrated Development of Women and Youth of Fisherfolk in Punjab.". That was the first time I came to know about women's issues.

When I started work with UNIFEM, I had no gender awareness due to my feudal background. The women's issues I came across inspired me a lot and many people I met sensitised me and changed my whole life. Initially, it was quite difficult for me, but gradually, I started taking interest. My first project, a one-and-a-half-year project, was the most successful and after that I did not go back to teach.

I have worked with a lot of organisations, INGOs, NGOs in almost all sectors – humanitarian and development, agriculture, health, HIV and AIDS, water, transportation. I am a member of several national and international human and women's rights groups, and a supporter of the MeToo campaign. I have contributed to events such as playing a lead role and providing the required technical support information for the institutionalisation of Gender and Child Cell (GCC) in National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Pakistan, in three provinces –Sindh, Balochistan, and Punjab – and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. I was also involved in events conducted under Ending Violence Against Women/Girls Alliance, Pakistan.

Most of my work is in collaboration with state departments where I try to ensure that all the government-oriented projects adopt a gender-inclusive approach. Although they have adopted several international programmes on gender and acknowledge them, in actual fact, they just put a chapter in the project document and stop there. I am trying to ensure mainstreaming gender at every step in the project document and still I am struggling about that, and they are always saying, "Oh, why are you doing this?" Then I say, it is not understood that women are there, women must be mentioned in the project document and in the implementation process. Sensitising the state officials, initially, was very hard but now they are accepting, and encountering me in different stages. I am not alone here, most of Pakistani feminists and gender experts are facing this kind of problem.

AOB: What is the situation of Pakistani women in relation to the issues that your work addresses?

RW: Unfortunately, in Pakistan today not all men enjoy the rights and facilities they are entitled to; women are, however, doubly disadvantaged by poverty and gender. Demographically, females are 47.5% of the Pakistani population, but they have a lower life expectancy of 54 years compared to 55 for men – a reflection of the poorer nutrition, hard physical labour, and high levels of maternal mortality. Pakistan has adopted several key international commitments to gender equality and women's rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Pakistani women were granted suffrage at independence in 1947 and have participated actively in parliamentary politics. There were reserved seats for women in the Parliament from 1956 to 1973 and they can contest elections as independent candidates, or into the reserved quota.

Gender issues are being gradually addressed and there has been some change. Thus, women's position is gradually improving; a lot of women are on top. Women are increasingly participating in the political system at all levels. In Senate, national assembly, provincial assemblies, even at local bodies, [but] their number remains lower than men. Achieving their goal in a patriarchal Pakistan society remains a challenge; it is not easy in an Islamic country like Pakistan. The men are very sharp. I don't mean clever, but if they have justification for women's empowerment, they listen to us. What they do not like is a woman who confronts them, questions them, and is trying to work for women's empowerment.

AOB: What legislations have had a direct impact on the work you do?

RW: Some national commitments in place include National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women, National Plan of Action on Human Rights, Gender Equality Policy Frameworks, and Women's Empowerment Packages and Initiatives. Till the 1973 constitution, most of the laws were constituted on an ad-hoc basis. The constitution is the major legislation that affects women's legal rights in Pakistan. Some of the major laws that are used to promote women's rights nowadays are those regulating dowries and bridal gifts, sexual harassment in the workplace, anti-women practices, and domestic violence. Pakistan also has laws protecting the rights of transgender persons.

Despite all these commitments, Pakistan's ranking for gender equality remains one of the lowest in the world.

AOB: Have you been involved in any legislative reform in Pakistan?

RW: In Pakistan, I took part in passing of laws for the:

- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill (2009);
- Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act (2010);
- Protection Against Harassment of Women in the Workplace Act (2010);
- Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act (2011).

However, I and other women's rights activists and bodies are still working on the implementation of these laws, on some further changes to make them more appropriately applicable.

AOB: What are some of the challenges with the law that your work has had to deal with?

RW: Women's status in Pakistan is still disappointing due to the inadequate implementation of pro-women legislation. These laws are very useful whenever they need to be used. The issue is their proper application. The national data on violence against women in Pakistan remains gloomy. There are many reasons. First, the people are not aware of the laws; they are not properly sensitised. Most of the implementation bodies – especially law enforcement bodies the police, the judiciary, and other law enforcement agencies – are not aware of women-friendly laws and regulations and are not that much gender sensitised.

One of the main problems is that Pakistan is a multi-cultural society, so different anti-women practices exist. In Pakistan, religious practices and cultural norms exist that hinder the achievement of women's rights. All of these practices and norms have their own explanations, so this difference makes the situation complicated in the context of women's rights. As a religious society, different kinds of techniques must be adopted in order to motivate the people and provide examples. Not all the women activists are well equipped in this.

The role of the media is also not that encouraging. Although some changes in the media's attitude towards women's issues have been observed, it is still not enough. In some instances where gender activists have organised campaigns for women's rights, such as the Aurat March on International Women's Day, social media has been used to spread disinformation against the organisers and their supporters, creating unsafe and often violent encounters for us women's rights activists. They also face extremist backlash, especially during street protests where they are accused of spreading "obscenity and vulgarity.".

I have faced numerous challenges at the workplace and community level, and when working for the enactment of the laws. It is quite difficult for men to give equal space to women; even the highly educated men are equally biased in this regard. The challenges are there but overcoming them becomes your success. Being a women's rights activist is still part of the struggle to achieve women's rights in a real sense; working steadily often wins [in the long run].

We are working on this, and most women's rights organisations focus on raising awareness about these laws. I am part of the campaign focusing on making these laws more implementable. It is not easy; all of us women's rights activists are struggling. It is a gradual kind of thing and steadily, we work with different levels of people at the government level, the private sector, the city level, the village level, and in this way, we convey the message. In Pakistan, we organise different radio programmes although radio is not that much in practise nowadays. Besides, we use television and drama to convey the message. We are working on that, now the situation is better compared to when I started my career in 1992. Now there is flexibility on the side of men but they are saying, "We are being exploited by the women, our wives are exploiting us."

AOB: So, there was an initial resistance, but you won the men round. And now they are pushing back again?

RW: Even today in Pakistan, apparently, men are acknowledging the rights of women. But in practice, there are still several challenges women have to face to gain equal space in the male dominating society. The men are not pushing directly, they are pushing very technically, and you must understand those technicalities.

AOB: How are they doing this?

RW: Okay, we say [we need] community involvement, community participation especially women and minority participation. When you talk about that, they say, "No! Community participation means everyone can participate, there is no need to mention women participation especially." During my study in UN Women, I came to know of a very interesting approach of men and women who are sitting at the high level, in executive positions. One man said that a woman in high position should not need gender sensitisation, she is in that position and it is assumed that she should [already] be gender sensitive. Interestingly the woman said, "Yeah, it is okay [if] we make a mistake, we don't have to do [gender sensitisation]." I said, "No, you are sitting in the high position, you can do what we cannot do. [But] just because you are sitting in a high position does not mean you are gender sensitive, you have to be gender sensitised [i.e. to understand gender issues], and you have to continue your work of gender mainstreaming processes in all the projects of the government.". It does not mean that simply because she is a woman, she is gender sensitive. There are a lot of women in Pakistan who are not gender sensitive. Even the women from the upper class, the high-class women, they are not gender sensitive because they are from powerful families. Sometimes, they use Islam, our religion, sometimes Hindu, to explain religion from their own perspectives.

AOB: Which prime movers of change for women's rights in Pakistan do you consider important for your work?

RW: I have been moved by three prominent women political figures – Mohatrama Fatima Jinnah, Rana Liaqat Ali (the pioneer of feminism in Pakistan), and Benazir Bhutto, former Pakistani prime minister. I am also really impressed by Chandni Joshi, Alice Shakelford, Fareeda Shaheed, Asma Jahangir, Kishwar Naheed, and Khawar Mumtaz because of their qualities and dedication to promoting women and supporting women's rights organisations. Among the African women movements, I am impressed by Maame Afon Yelbert-Obeng from Ghana, as she has been working to improve the lives of women and girls across Sub-Saharan Africa. The famous feminist scholar, researcher, and activist Aisha Fofana Ibrahim's work is also very impressive.

AOB: What have been your high points in the work you do?

RW: My work in the formation, strengthening, and institutionalising of grassroots organisations at the rural and urban level. This includes the formation of Gender Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Networks (GRRN), and the GCC at NDMA. My work with the mobilisation of rural women transforms them into feminist activists. All this work gives me more energy and encourages me to go forward to do something extraordinary for women while working with them.

AOB: What events led to the formation of the GCC group?

RW: The GCC was formed and institutionalised at NDMA and became a platform to ensure gender mainstreaming in the policies, programmes, and work of NDMA. The creation of the GCC helped the government to shift from a policy approach, based on how people cope with GBV in disasters, to a risk management approach focusing on the development, implementation, and maintenance of emergency SGBV programmes. My experience with NDMA has been very challenging and we had to deal with our top civil bureaucracy. I was working with UN Women at that moment, and it was difficult even when we presented ourselves as gender specialists or gender advisers. Do you know how they behaved with us in the Prime Minister's secretariat? They put our seats at the reception, and we had to struggle for three months to get a room for our gender section. The General said, "What rubbish gender equality is this? I have no idea about that." Gradually we motivated him; we talked to him, and finally, after six months, he became one of our advocates of gender equality and those kinds of things. So, you must focus on a powerful person sometimes to convey your message. There are a lot of means that gender experts must adopt. To work on gender mainstreaming, we should work on relations and confidence building, otherwise it will be difficult.

AOB: And your lowest point?

RW: When I feel that I cannot work for women in a particular situation – that brings me down. Recently during Aurat on 8 March 2021, International

Women's Day, the behaviour of media and religious groups brought me to the lowest point. When I was not able to work for women in tanneries, that situation upset me and compelled me to leave that position because of the autocratic behaviour of the personnel of the public sector departments.

AOB: What do you hope to achieve in future?

RW: I have a list of wishes. I want to work for women who are facing war situations continuously, in conflict situations like Kashmir and Palestine – all women who are facing such situations across the globe, without any religious and cultural bias. I have dreams that women will become economically independent and empowered; totally self-made, without any support from and exploitation by men. I want more women's voices and representation in all spheres of life: politically, socially, and economically, enjoying equal wages and respect. There will be a world free of all kinds of violence.

AOB: What do you hope to see in future for women in Pakistan and Asia? What is your most fervent wish for women in Africa and Asia, women everywhere?

RW: I am quoting one of the statements which I heard in Afghanistan, when I asked one woman, "After five years, where do you see you women?" She is a rice farmer. She started weeping and said, "I wish my country would be free from the foreign armies and my male family members would come back home and live with us. Our lives would be saved; we would not be raped. I wish that these foreigners would leave our country so we can live independently, live a happy life and I could go to Hajj." In the same way, I wish women would be saved from all the exploiters; women should be out of all the exploitation. I wish that in future, women would live secure, economically independent and sustainable lives. Women must respect women, women must support women, women should work with women. Today it is not that way, but I wish that it would happen.

I wish that the world would be free, secure, and full of pleasure for all women, especially in Ghana and Pakistan, Africa, and Asia. That women could spend their life according to their will, discrediting all the kinds of

fundamentalist ideology that underlies violence against women and vulnerable people. All international laws and human rights instruments should work to end the discrimination against weak segments of people. Women of the world must provide space to define and shape their own sexuality [in] a society that is free from all forms of violence, where there is access to products and services for women's sexual and reproductive health needs. Women's rights are everyone's business. I also wish that all feminists and women human rights defenders would be more than just numbers and would become a force to confront patriarchy in all spheres of life.

AOB: Let me have your last words.

RW: My message to other women activists and gender specialists is, please support your fellow women and encourage them to be empowered and to be strong. Women have to stand for each other; they have to work for each other. That is the only way we can get results. All women's rights organisations should make weak women strong. There are a lot of religious groups – Hindu, Islam, they are using their women upfront to exploit the woman who is working for women's rights.

AOB: And you think that there is a danger here?

RW: There could be a danger. […] Men are very clever and already men create confrontations among the women. I observed in Pakistan and also heard from my Indian friends and even in Afghanistan, that there are various religious groups and women's rights groups confronting each other. It is everywhere. We women have to be careful in this regard.

AOB Thank you very much, I am really very grateful for your time, and how freely you have shared your experience with me.

A Magnifying Glass and A Fine-Tooth Comb: Understanding Girls' and Young Women's Sexual Vulnerability, by Mzikazi Nduna. Pretoria: CSA&G Press, Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender, University of Pretoria, 2020.

Jamela Robertson

While reading this monograph, one could not help but be taken back to relive experiences as a young woman living in different communities across South Africa. From the outset, the author stirs up memories of adolescent questions and confusions around whether one had free will, through which one made decisions and choices that seemed, almost always, to backfire.

The "magnifying glass" revealed contradictions, illusions, and double standards in my adolescent existence, while the "fine-tooth comb" exposed confusion, denial, and sweeping dirt under the carpet, to the detriment of an adolescent girl and young woman trying to find her way in life. It is hard not to personalise the review of this monograph because it articulates, in too familiar terms, the lived realities of an adolescent girl transitioning into adulthood, particularly in Southern Africa.

Too familiar are the contradictions in the entrenched beliefs of sexual self-preservation and deferred gratification in consumerism, which carry the promise of a good life achievable through education and a free enterprise capitalist system. Omitted in the inculcation of these beliefs are the lived realities of enterprise monopoly in capitalist systems, access to resources and opportunities that are largely shaped by one's sex or gender, sexual identity, race, class, age, (dis)ability, and even language, for example the level of fluency in speaking English. These operate within an environment that is rife with sexual abuse and exploitation of young women seeking educational and career advancement.

The illusions of "choice" and "agency" in adolescent girls' and young women's lives are also too familiar, particularly as they pertain to sexual decisions and choices. The illusions are typified by the seemingly merited blame directed towards women and girls for their perceived unconventional or socially non-conforming behaviours. It turns out that the well documented "self-blame" syndrome in women is not an accident, but a well-orchestrated element of colonial and patriarchal value systems where, instead of seeking justice for being violated, women and girls have to deal with the guilt of wondering whether they deserved to be violated after all.

Patriarchal double standards are another familiar aspect that adolescent girls and young women must contend with. Typically, this may involve situations in which the same behaviour is encouraged for boys but discouraged or even punishable for girls. Promiscuity is a case in point. It is a known fact that women and girls bear socially degrading names for being promiscuous, while men and boys are given affirming names for the same behaviour. Another case in point is cooking, an unpaid home chore reserved for women; but when cooking starts paying, it becomes a man's domain, as demonstrated by the prominence of male chefs in the hospitality industry. These double standards not only perpetuate the sexual vulnerability of adolescent girls and young women, but also their unequal access to economic benefits, even where these were traditionally reserved for them.

The contradictions, illusions, and double standards pervade social systems from the home, educational, religious, economic, and political systems, and are often masked by confusion. These include the questions of who or what is to account for the plight of adolescent girls and young women in our society – a certain level of denial of the existence of the contradictions, illusions, and double standards, and some sweeping of dirt under the carpet. The culture of silence around gender-based violence is an example of the extent to which families will go to preserve family honour, to the detriment of sexually violated adolescent girls and young women.

Looking at the historical, political, and economic contexts, as well as the hostile social environment that African adolescent girls and young women have to contend with, across generations, one cannot help but commend their

resilience. It is evident in their achievements throughout history, where some have overcome all forms of obstacles and demonstrated that females are as (if not more) worthy in any industry or aspect of life as males, despite the males' historical head-start. Interventions should remind adolescent girls and young women of this resilience, as one of the ingredients to affirm them in their journey through adolescence to adulthood.

Furthermore, interventions as well as their funders, should heed the underlying contradictions, illusions, and double standards inherent in settings where the interventions are implemented, and make efforts to address them. Experience has shown that these underlying issues are often dismissed when interventions are designed, since they are regarded as subjective soft issues that may not withstand scientific rigour. This monograph argues that these underlying issues form some of the impediments to the effective implementation of well-meaning interventions.

The author neither rejects the value of education nor the significance of current interventions, but points out key aspects that are essential for more meaningful and sustainable impact. She addresses perpetrators: mainly boys and men who normally exhibit toxic masculinities typical of patriarchal societies; older men, including educators, who prey on young girls' socio-economic vulnerabilities; and social systems that reinforce practices that are harmful to adolescent girls and young women, in the name of culture, religion, and educational standards. Dismissing these factors results in interventions only addressing symptoms, while the source of the problem thrives.

Beauty Diplomacy: Embodying an Emerging Nation, by Oluwakemi M. Balogun. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020.

Sharon Adetutu Omotoso

The book *Beauty Diplomacy: Embodying an Emerging Nation* by Oluwakemi Balogun describes how a nation politicises the body as a soft-power tactic for image laundering. Soft diplomacy is a conscious attempt by state and non-state actors to deploy intangible assets such as personality traits, social values, cultural narratives, and networking to shape the perception and preference of others. With soft power as a means to diplomatic ends, politicians, business institutions, and government officials seek to build the country's infrastructure, boost tourism, and attract global investment.

Balogun stresses how beauty diplomacy is engaged for statecraft, with key actors including beauty pageant contestants, owners, and viewers relying on women's bodies as stand-ins for the nation. Taking an example from the 2001 victory of Agbani Darego, Nigeria's Miss World, Balogun presents the irony of how a woman's victory is leeched on to advance a new image for the nation. Such national gestures for recreating public perceptions of pageantry make it worrisome that the golden jubilee, which celebrated 50 women under the theme *50@50* Nigeria *Women: The Journey So Far*, lacks a 50-50 agenda for women`s development. That beauty diplomacy becomes a tool for women's political communication and reveals the contradictions wherein masculine standards of diplomacy now consider beauty pageants for national development.

Chapter two engages the origin of beauty pageants in Nigeria. Tracing it back to the *Daily Times of Nigeria* newspaper, the official host of Miss Nigeria, the author notes how political instability continued to change ownership and management of the newspaper until it finally lost readership and patronage. This lapse paved the way for Silverbird Group to institute the Most Beautiful Girl in Nigeria (MBGN) pageant, which later roused an ownership tussle with

Queen Nigeria, hosted by Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in partnership with TV Enterprise and Silverstone Communication. That both pageants were closely connected with the media affirms the amount of power they wielded to gain acceptance.

Although the medialisation of beauty was praiseworthy, the author's description of the pageants' affinity with media as a "common vernacular" may be problematic. Could it be interpreted within the context of vernacular cosmopolitanism discussed later in the book? The author's narrative establishes the principle of reciprocity between beauty pageant organisers and government. This seeming reductionism remains unclear as she discussed how organisers sought endorsement, not only from the federal government, but also the "three major traditional rulers." Who are the three major traditional rulers? By what criteria was this determined, considering the vastness of Nigeria and several historical issues surrounding traditional stools? Moreover, as alarming as the irony of private entities revealing more with international reputations than their host country may be, their use of "international legitimacy to build their national reputation" is admirable.

Clearly, the following issues require further introspection: first, the role of advertising as a continuum in promoting consumptive femininity and showcasing value vagaries since the first pageant in 1957; second, the connection of beauty diplomacy with the idea of a global village (p. 55); and third, the baffling concept of "second first lady.". May we surmise that first ladies play a similar soft power role to beauty pageants although the two operate at different levels and attain public recognition by separate means?

Still, Balogun's concept of "cosmopolitan-nationalism" is worthy of further scrutiny, specifically to see how it fits in other contexts of body politics. Would recent hair controversies and intrigues (Omotoso, 2018) which Dosekun (2020) describes as "unhappy technology" equally and positively fit into the cosmopolitan-nationalism argument? While buying hair may be deemed cosmopolitan, will investment of local resources in the purchase of foreign hair enhance nationalism?

Comparing the methodologies of both pageants, the author expresses how the cosmopolitan-nationalism of MBGN is Western-styled and offers

no stringent requirements for state representation, while the cultural-nationalism of Queen Nigeria is keen on culturally authentic depiction and state representation. Whereas the cosmopolitan-nationalism of MBGN seems to be competing with the cultural-nationalism found in Queen Nigeria, I find both pageants complementary on the grounds that national cohesion is as important as international reputation: both are mutually inclusive in achieving common objectives, including the reparative work of national image laundering. However, profit and recognition are usually prioritised above national goals when two pageants compete for one national ticket to a global event.

The third chapter engages with how the aesthetic industry is created as "platforms" to transform the aesthetic industry to aesthetic capital. The author highlights how the beauty pageants may also be called a profession, since contestants become aesthetic labourers who use their bodies in the service of national consumption. Since first ladies and female political office holders invest in their physical appearance using spectacular feminine fashion (Omotoso & Faniyi, 2020), could they also be described as aesthetic labourers? Would this concept be applicable only to women, when research records men with strategic dress sense for political communication? (Albert, 2017).

The aspiration of one of the respondents to appear on the proposed 5,000 Naira banknote reveals the fantasy of pageants, having seen a Miss Nigeria on the national postage stamp. With such illusory mindsets, pageantry becomes a space for contestants to seek political power in their own way. Likewise, the section on "marrying well" affirms women's political communication as "powers behind the throne.". Furthermore, the pageant-market women dichotomy affirms Omotoso`s hairy-hairless analogy (2020) where classism is bred to betray the lip-service commitment of beauty queens (through their pet projects) to grassroots which they have had to deny/decry while climbing up.

In chapter four, a comparison of the tactile approach of Queen Nigeria and the tactical approach of MBGN underscores how both pageants flaunt an array of displays of Nigerian culture to access the global space. Sponsorship of Queen Nigeria by Plateau State exemplifies states' use of soft power in obscuring the ethno-religious violence of that period. Additional perspectives to the discourse on nudity show, on the one hand, that the aesthetic industry is

linked with nudity in a disparaging manner while, on the other hand, audiences become judges of what would pass as nudity in a beauty contest by personal moral standards. How might states navigate the prohibition of nudity in public yet deploy pageantry in promoting a national image?

Chapter five discusses how contestants are often scammed by organisers known for broken promises and *quid pro quo* propositions; how the political economy of beauty pageants hinges on the term "girl capital" (ways in which elite businessmen appropriate bodily labour of attractive women to serve their own ends); and how the aesthetic industry, though largely dependent on female actors, is underwritten by men and masculinity. Describing beauty contestants as "mini first ladies" often drags the competition into partisan politics, thereby resonating with agency theory, where women become agents in their own matters while several male gladiators are principals.

In chapter six, the author's expansion of the concept "global nationalism" with elements in cultural-nationalism and cosmopolitan-nationalism is commendable. Intrigues propelled by religious and cultural nuances against the aesthetic industry in Nigeria represent how the 'personal' is mainstreamed in complicated ways into politics. Perhaps, the idea of "international public relations nightmare" may be deepened to show how it has further played out in the aesthetic industry and among first ladies.

Chapter seven, which is the last chapter, presents recent trends of dichotomised identity: one of certain contestants leveraging their past participation in beauty pageants to improve their public status, and the other, of certain contestants distancing themselves from "the negative perception" that the label entails.

Overall, the book shows how cultural triumph in beauty pageantry becomes a transformatory tool for a nation in a gorge. It interrogates key questions of how beauty pageants link everyday aspirational identities to national global politics; how embodied discourses and bodily practices may be used to engage in nation-building within the context of globalisation; and how categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and class are mobilised through these social processes. Balogun displays generosity with words. Her style of describing respondents, the environment in which discussions are held, and other seemingly

irrelevant settings of her research location will lure general readers to read the book like a novel, yet her academic depth and theoretical grasp call the attention of researchers in gender, media, and political studies to critical underexplored or yet-to-be explored areas. Though rather voluminous for the discourse in focus, the book Beauty Diplomacy: Embodying an Emerging Nation is a good read and a fantastic effort to deepen African feminist scholarship.

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Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon, by Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019.

Monique Kwachou

Patriarchal accounts of history have justified the erasure of women's contributions with claims that women have, for the most part, "played subordinate roles.". It would seem, from such claims, that only overt efforts are worth recording; yet scholars (Nnaemeka, 2004; Nkealah 2016) have argued that women, particularly African women, have historically resisted and rejected dominant oppressions more covertly, by employing negotiative strategies in confronting limitations to their freedoms and powers.

Cognisance of this demands that the tracing and evidencing of African women's efforts – be they efforts countering patriarchy (feminism) or for national liberation and nation-building (nationalism) – ought to be done in a more sentient and encompassing manner. Otherwise, what is recorded in history will remain scanty and biased, continuing to exclude African women whose nationalist and feminist resistance have unfolded in less conspicuous ways. When our foremothers challenged patriarchy, for instance, they often did it in ways that left patriarchy believing it was its own idea.

The significance of the inconspicuous effort and underappreciated contributions of women, specifically Anglophone Cameroonian women, to the nationalist struggle and development of national identity, is what Jacqueline Mougoué highlights in her book *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (2019).

Historical accounts of the role that women played in the Anglophone Cameroon nationalist struggle are rare. Mougoué's work (2019) is even more unique as she goes beyond the typical profiling of a selection of individual

nationalist figures, like Anna Atang Foncha, Gwendolyn Burnley, and Josepha Mua, to demonstrate how Anglophone women generally embodied nationalism in the ideas they promoted and internalised about gender and womanhood. With each of its nine chapters, Mougoué's *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* argues that the engendering of Anglophone women was, and arguably still is, intrinsic to the developing, distinguishing, and sustaining of Anglophone nationalist identity in and out of the public sphere, for better or worse.

Each chapter of the book develops the central argument mentioned above, from a different angle. This ranges from outlining the socio-cultural and political landscape and development of gendered identity therein, to focusing on specific features of such engendering by Anglophone women and demonstrating how these related to the Anglophone nationalist struggle and separatist politics at play nationwide. Although the chapters are not sequentially dependent on each other, some build-up can be observed. The introduction and chapter one offer readers a historical background and sufficient contextualisation to enable an appreciation of both exceptional cases of formal political participation by women like Gwendolyn Burnley at that time, and the relatively informal political participation that Anglophone women generally carried out through everyday activities.

Chapters two to seven each deal with a dimension of Anglophone womanhood, from women's organising (notably through Christian women's organisations) to culinary practice and fashion trends. Using historical data on gendered being and doing during that time frame, the author illustrates the social construction of the "ideal Anglophone woman" as one who is adept at preparing traditional meals although presented in a modern way; one whose aesthetic is native, yet suitably urban; one who depicts 'godliness', 'motherliness' and 'humility', and finally one who exudes 'respectability' by being decently dressed (as per the male gaze) and exercising 'emotional restraint' (despite any affront) for proper comportment in public.

Mougoué's examination of the framing of ideal Anglophone womanhood during that time points to how ethnolinguistic divides were sustained and/or aggravated in Cameroon through Anglophone women's aspirations for ideal

womanhood. The book's concluding chapter indicates the divisive consequences of that to date but fails to emphasise the significance of the book's argument and its contributions for understanding contemporary issues of Anglophone Cameroon identity and the ongoing separatist conflict in the country.

Cameroonian history (as many others) is considerably bereft of the contribution women have made; as such, this work is significant by default for its contribution to abating the lacuna in historical scholarship. What I find most noteworthy is the uniquely African feminist perspective that this historical account offers, as evidenced in its two key takeaways.

The first takeaway is the benefit of employing African feminist theorising in investigations of African women's agency. Where mainstream feminist historians do present accounts of women's efforts in nation-building and political resistance, they – like patriarchal accounts – also indicate that only overt efforts are worth recording. As a result, a handful of prominent events (like the Igbo women's war, the Anlu revolt, resistances led by Yaa Asantewa and Queen Nzinga) where women have joined men to confront oppressive regimes or led resistance under colonial rule are repeatedly used as examples of African women's agency. Contrary to this, Mougoué's (2019) African feminist conceptualisation of "embodied nationalism" establishes African women's agency as more common than records suggest, illustrating how Anglophone women wielded politically significant agency through seemingly mundane gendered beings and doings of that time.

As Nnaemeka (2004) asserts that African feminisms (specifically nego-feminism) evokes dynamism in contesting [gendered] injustices and achieving women's goals, so too Mougoué presents embodied nationalism as a subtle manner of approach by which Anglophone women took part in shaping the nation without passing decrees or using formal nationalist instruments like political parties. In this way, the author rejects the limited historical accounting of nation-building and nationalist resistance as identified by articles like flags, militant activity, and political party membership – accounting which has either dismissed women's contributions altogether or considered only a handful of them as worth recording. In turn, Mougoué's (2019) African feminist accounting affirms that women's social construction of gendered identity through articles of

everyday life, like food eaten and fabric worn, is just as effective in ultimately defining the nation as the articles of the constitution drafted by pen.

Yet another key takeaway, which I feel Mougoué (2019) ought to have developed better and emphasised more, is the subtle argument made about the unforeseen lasting and divisive consequences of the social construction of gender – particularly, ideal womanhood in Anglophone Cameroon. Mougoué's (2019) examination indicates that, with the construction and promotion of "ideal Anglophone womanhood" as, among other things, more diligent and culturally appropriate than, and morally superior to Francophone womanhood, Anglophone women – akin to the Europeans who carved African territories with borderlines – played an indelible role in the delineation of who and what was Anglophone Cameroonian. In other words, they defined the borders of nationalist identity through what they challenged at church group meetings, promoted at beauty pageants, affirmed in gossip columns, and more. As the characteristics of "ideal Anglophone womanhood" were often extrapolated to distinguish Anglophone national identity in general and used as grounds for separatist politics, the construction of gender proved instrumental for separatist politics. In this way, the unrealistic expectations placed on women with the construction of ideal Anglophone womanhood has not only affected Anglophone women, but the nation as a whole. This it does by persistently foiling possibilities of social cohesion for unified movements for change in Cameroon, as bias and stereotypes continue both between and within gendered groups.

Although she identified it as a key takeaway, I opine that Mougoué (2019) could have done more to emphasise the relationship between, and consequences of, the patriarchal construction of Anglophone womanhood in that time and the state of Cameroon today. It is worth recognising that, decades later, the seeds of separatist politics sown in the construction of Anglophone identity have fomented what is observed in hate speech across ethnolinguistic divides and justifications of the secessionist movement for Ambazonia.

Likewise, Mougoué (2019) seemingly declines to compare the ultimate effectiveness and efficiency of embodied nationalism as she outlines it against more overt exercising of agency. Granted, the book's submission of Anglophone

women's participation in nation-building through everyday gendered being and doing is worth appreciating on its own. However, in the light of contemporary criticisms of African feminisms' negotiative strategies as compromises with oppressive systems, the author ought to further clarify whether and why the less conspicuous political participation she reports the majority of Anglophone women to be partaking in at that time should be valued as much as the events of prominent resistance that have thus far made it to historical records.

Ultimately, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* makes a strong case for the application of African feminist perspective to historical scholarship. By demonstrating how women, and the construction of womanhood, made a considerable impact on the development of Anglophone national identity and politics, Mougoué (2019) proves that employing an African feminist lens to analysis enables the uncovering and better appreciation of furtive displays of women's agency in the African context. As Mahmood (2005, cited in Switzer 2018: 5) notes:

> If the ability to effect change in the world and oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes as 'change' and the means by which it is affected), then the meaning and sense of agency [like political participation] cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through analysis of the particular concepts that enable modes of being… in this sense, agentival capacity is entailed by not only those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms.

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