

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-Saharan 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; Zvokumba, 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 benefitted 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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