

Women's Access to Land and Utilization Patterns Case of Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

This is an extract from a field work report for a project which is being implemented in Zimbabwe under the regional project '[Securing Women's Access to Land: Linking Research and Action](#)', a three-year project supported by the International Land Coalition and implemented in collaboration with two regional research institutions, MISR (Makerere Institute for Social Research, Uganda) and PLAAS (Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, South Africa), which aims to learn from women and their lived-experiences at the grass roots, and to respond to their needs through action research. The Zimbabwean project is being implemented by the Women Farmers Land and Agriculture Trust, in collaboration with the University of Zimbabwe. The main purpose of the research is to generate knowledge about the linkages between access, rights, and security, and barriers to access land and its productivity, that are faced by women beneficiaries of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme implemented from 2000 to 2007 so as to identify opportunities arising for economic, social and political empowerment of women farmers, and to draw conclusions that can contribute to the wider dialogue on securing women's access and rights to land.

Women constitute about 65% of the rural population yet they accessed less than 18% of the land that was distributed during the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. Under this programme there were two different models for resettlement: A1 villagisation and A2 commercial. Women face a whole set of obstacles to viable farming, due to a number of reasons, many of which are gender-specific.

This project carried out action research with women farmers in two Districts of Zimbabwe, namely Goromonzi and Vungu-Gweru, to examine problems women encounter when accessing land.

How women accessed land

Women's access to land was a process, starting with spontaneous land invasions or occupations which became known as '*Jambanja*', followed by the official Fast Track Land Reform Programme, where access to land was regulated through application procedures. Some women went on to access land under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and their experiences are recorded below. The research, as well as previous literature, indicates that a significant number of women who took part in the *jambanja* did not access land. The pattern of access to land by women who participated in *jambanja* varies greatly throughout the country and reasons for failure to access land under the subsequent Land Reform Programme are many and complex, meriting further research. However, there are cases where everyone who participated in *jambanja* were resettled, as illustrated by Ester's story in Box 1, and this research focused on women who accessed land by formally applying for the Fast Track Land

Reform Programme for land. These women were allocated plots of land by the authorities, either through the District Administrator or the Ministry of Lands, depending on the type of resettlement. The research analysed the allocating processes and authorities, as well as resettlement patterns under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, including details of the resettlement model, land size, and date of access to the land. Women's narratives illustrate the difficult process of access, characterised by perseverance, determination and often conflict. A case study shows the on-going and dynamic nature of access, together with its associated problems of insecurity of tenure and conflict. It also shows that informal *jambanja* and the official process of resettlement are interconnected.

***Jambanja* Land Invasions**

In Goromonzi District, those who invaded commercial farms were a mixture of peasant farmers from adjacent Communal Areas and Ex-combatants. Initially, more women invaded the farms while their husbands stayed at home. However, as period of waiting for user permits got longer and conditions got tougher and more difficult, most of the women who participated at first gave up. About 90% of these *jambanja* invaders, of which only about 10% were women, were allocated land under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. There is anecdotal evidence of in Goromonzi District that 30% of married couples successfully fighting together for the land, but the woman losing her access to the plot following divorce from her husband. There are, however, some women who fought and were able to get their own plots, such as Susan (see Box 1).

In Lancashire Farm, Vungu-Gweru, the settlers invaded the farm in 2000 and divided the land amongst them. The white farmer, who had five farms in the District tried to chase them away and went to court to try and get them removed to no avail. He eventually was given one of his farms to stay on. In 2001, 27 new plots on Lancashire farm were officially pegged by the Ministry of Lands and each new farmer got 25 hectares of arable land which has been described as the one of the best soils in the District. Of the 27 plots, 21 women are married and stay at the farm with their husbands, in whose names the farms are registered; 3 married women stay at the farm alone, but the farm is in their husband's name; and 3 women have farms registered in their own names.

Box 1: Susan's story of determination, hard work and conflict

I am a 60 year old women farmer. I have an A1 farm and the user permit is in my name. On June 15, 2002 as a group we invaded a farm and on June 20, 2002 we were officially allocated pieces of land on the farm that we had invaded. The allocation process was by way of picking a piece of paper from a ha which had numbers on it. The number that one picked was the number of the plot you would be allocated. That same day we selected our Committee of Seven which acts as the village level authority as well as the development committee. I took an axe that day and went and built a shelter from tree branches (kutema musasa) on my plot. I went back home and brought a pot and a blanket, from that day I have not left the plot. Sometimes the white farmer would come and threaten us to leave the farm as we suspected that he was conniving with the then District Administrator, at one time in circumstance which we did not understand, he gave the land back to the white farmer. The District Administrator told us if we did not want to leave we were going to be arrested. I was so angry that day I messed my pants. Through the Committee of Seven, we reported the District Administrator to the authorities and to the party leadership. He was immediately transferred from the District's office. The white farmer did not stop there as he would let his cattle destroy our maize crops. I thought enough was enough and I confronted the farmer and told

him I wanted my maize that his cattle had destroyed. The white farmer ended up buying me two 50kgs of fertilizer and 25kgs of maize seed as compensation'.

Land Utilisation

Although the research did not involve a production survey, some indication of production levels amongst the women farmers was obtained, illustrated in box 2 below. In all cases, there is a gradual, but marked increase of production over time. It was also observed that most of the women farmers were not utilising the land optimally. The reasons given and those observe for low utilisation of land were lack of/access to inputs, access to drought power hence they ended up cropping late, shortage of skilled labour and extension services. This was also compounded by lack of skills in farm management and cropping particular for the A2 women farmers most of who are professional women.

Box 2 Farm production in Goromonzi

Chipo plants mainly maize and her production record indicates that there has been a gradual increase in both area planted and production of maize over the three years of resettlement. Apart from maize, Chipo also planted 0.5 ha of sugar beans.

| Year | Area planted with maize (ha) | Yield (tonnes) |
|------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2006 | 0 (clearing and land preparation) | |
| 2007 | 1 | 4.5 |
| 2008 | 3 | 9 |
| 2009 | 6 | 18-30 (expected yield) |

Jane is currently cultivating 10 ha out of 20 ha of arable land. In 2008, she cultivated 3ha. She grows maize and winter wheat and also does some horticulture. Last year she planted peas under a contract with a private company, but at the time of the study had not yet been paid, which made it difficult for her to purchase inputs on time and to pay for labour used. An additional problem is that most women farmers do not have knowledge on contract farming and how to negotiate a contract. She has also cultivated 1 ha of potatoes, which she proudly talked about as she had made a profit.

| Crop | Area planted (ha) |
|---------|-------------------|
| Maize | 10 |
| Tobacco | 3.5 |

Alice's narrative in Box 3 illustrates how a women farmer progressed from a small plot to a large farm with high yields in a region of relatively low agricultural potential. She has become a role model inspiring and assisting other women farmers in the area.

Box 3 : Successful Woman Farmer : When hard work pays

'My name is Alice, I am a single mother of 3 daughter aged between 8 and 15 years. I am proud owner 150ha farm which is in my name. My year of success was 2008/09 farming season. I produced 55 tonnes of maize, sold to the Grain Marketing Board 45 tones and kept 10 tonnes for household food consumption, 4 tonnes ground nuts, 2 tonnes round nuts, 6 bags rapoko, 6 bags sugar beans and plenty sweet potatoes'.

I made people realize that poverty can be alleviated through farming and their standards of living can improve through hard work and practice of good farming methods.

It was in February 2000 when I went to jambanja (farm invasions). I stayed at the farm for two years until demarcation started in 2002 and I was allocated an A1, 50 hectare plot. That year I planted 5 ha of maize with seed procured from a government programme that was meant to assist resettled farmers in the form of a loan where repayment was to be done after harvest during 2002/03 season. I produced 7 tonnes maize, 5 bags sugar beans, 10 bags ground nuts and managed to pay back the loan.

During the 2004/05 season I ploughed 10 ha maize and I produced higher yields than before with 15 tonnes of maize and 5 tonnes of small grain. In the 2005/06 season I produced 25 tonnes of maize and sold 20 tonnes to the Grain Marketing Board. This gave me confidence to apply for an A2 farm. The Land Committee considered my application after seeing the Grain Marketing Board receipts (produce selling record) which were attached to my application. In December 2006 I was allocated an A2 farm of 150 hectares, a sub-division of a former commercial farm.

The farm was virgin land so I had to start from scratch; I sold my house in town to pay for clearing the land in preparation of the rainy season. Unfortunately the 2006/07 season was not favourable and the rainfall was erratic. However I managed to produce 10 tonnes of maize and 5 tonnes was sold to the Grain Marketing Board. I exchanged 2.5 tonnes with 4 heifers, 2 goats and 10 chickens.

Since the farm had no infrastructure I had to make arrangements with my neighbour, a male farmer who had a borehole, to fetch water for household consumption r from his borehole. In 2008 my neighbour changed his mind and refused me to take water from his borehole, because I had harvested more than him. This made me work hard to raise funds for drilling my own borehole, with proceeds from the sale of my farm produce. I am looking forward to buying an engine/pump from the next harvest so that I can embark on an irrigation project to produce leave vegetables which have a huge market in our district.

Through the government's farm mechanisation program was given a tractor and all its accessories. This has contributed to my success as I am able to crop on time and I have also been helping other women farmers in the neighbour with the tractor.

A common thread running through most of the women's narratives is that of determination and commitment in acquiring and utilising land. Women like Alice have been able to make investments and increase their yields. Nevertheless, even Alice also experiences a lack of water as a major setback.

Determination

'... I exaggerated (on the application form) as I actually had nothing, but am very capable and was determined to get some land to farm on'.

'I went back home and brought a pot and a blanket, from that day I have never left the farm'.

'I sold my house in town to pay for clearing the land'.

Constraints to production

The majority of the women farmers are experiencing viability problems as most of the A2 women farmers interviewed in both Districts were not commercially viable, with the exception of the case of Alice above (Box 3). Few, if any, realised profits; at most access to land has enhanced food security for their families. There is a common misconception that all farmers are men which affects women farmers negatively when it comes to government support programmes. Specifically, some of the problems encountered are listed below:

1. Lack of farming equipment

Most of the women farmers' interview do not have tractors and have to rely on ox or donkey drawn ploughs. Some hire tractors, either from the District Development Fund or privately from other farmers, this depends on the availability of funds.

In 2007 the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on a mechanisation project which was managed by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to distribute farm equipment, including tractors, harrows, planters, hoes and other equipment to newly resettled farmers. The programme was ad hoc, insensitive to gender, distribution was not systematic and the criteria for entitlement unclear. As a result, most women farmers did not get access to equipment, which negatively impacted upon their productivity.

Several women indicated that a tractor would make a significant difference to increasing production. One woman pointed out that *'it takes five days to plough (with an animal-drawn plough) a field which would take only a few hours with a tractor. The donkeys that we have are slow and very stubborn; this is a major challenge to our farming activities'.*

Asked what in their opinion could be the reason for them failing to access the equipment, women farmers gave varied reasons such as; corruption (*"we are not financially empowered to give kickbacks"*) general misconception that a farmer is a man (*"we believe that were segregated because of gender"*), and culture and tradition (*"we are not recognised as women farmers, they do not take us seriously"*).

2. Lack of inputs: seeds and fertiliser

In the last few years, both seed and fertiliser have been difficult to procure, either because they were not available or due to prohibitive prices. In particular, the women complained that fertiliser is very expensive. They had compared the cost in Zimbabwe with other countries and found that the cost of one bag of seeds was almost five times more than in neighbouring countries. The women pointed out that it was actually cheaper to buy maize from South Africa than to grow it in Zimbabwe. There was a government farmer input support program which provided for seed and fertiliser, with the distribution handled by the army. This automatically disqualified the women farmers as most of them are afraid of soldiers, who did not even consider women as they would start distribution at 6pm in the evening up to early hours of the morning.

3. Problems with labour

Labour is in short supply or expensive. Ex-commercial farm workers are employed on a temporary basis. Weeding is the most labour-intensive farming activity. Because of lack of knowledge, women farmers do not know how to use herbicide to kill weed, hence they depend on labour. For those who have the knowledge, they did not have the money as there was a time in the country when there was a shortage of money in the banks. This was due to the hyper inflationary environment that the country has been facing over the past years.

4. Lack of water for irrigation

Vungu-Gweru is in an agro-ecological region deemed unsuitable for rain-fed agriculture. Rainfall patterns are erratic even in Goromonzi District which has relatively higher rainfall. Because of climate change, rainfall patterns have shifted and become unpredictable and unreliable. All women farmers in the study relied on rain-fed agriculture none had working irrigation on their farm plots, though some had non-functional irrigation equipment or boreholes without pumps. The unavailability of irrigation negates the land reform program, in particular, the access to land by women and increased food security. For farming to be viable, one needs to cultivate throughout the year, not just in the rainy season.

5. Problems with marketing

The women farmers in Goromonzi lamented that the marketing of their crops was very frustrating as prices for produce were low, while inputs were expensive. The money received from the produce is less than the cost of inputs. They cited that in the current situation, 4 tonnes of maize were needed to buy inputs for 1 ha, while their yield per ha, well below 4 tonnes, is more like 1-1.5 tonnes.

END