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Walking where men walk: gendered politics of smallholder agriculture in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Small-holder farmers are the pillars of the rural economy, food security and sustainable livelihoods. As a result of the numerous institutionalized gender inequities that are ingrained in laws, regulations, socio-cultural beliefs, and practices, small-holder agriculture in Zimbabwe continues to be contested and gendered. Exploring lessons from the experiences of women small-holder farmers in fourteen villages in Sanyati District, Zimbabwe, this study examines how the “contours” of gender-political dynamics and relations continue to limit rural women in the mainstream small-holder agricultural sector in Zimbabwe. The study used a mixed-methods research paradigm with which data was collected through purposive sampling techniques, in-depth personal and key informant interviews. The study shows that women farmers in rural communities of Zimbabwe are struggling to control their activities from farmland ownership up to post-harvesting time. Hence, they continue to face discrimination regarding having farmland rights, accessing the markets, financial services, extension services and information. These challenges continue to reveal the existence of an unjust, undemocratic, and unequal space for women in various facets of life at community and household level. Therefore, this calls for the need to spearhead women empowerment and involvement in the agricultural sector. The study further recommends gender mainstreaming within institutions, reforming policies, and laws relevant to small-holder farming and inclusive of women. More so, supporting small-holder farmers is very important in boosting the declining commercial agriculture in Zimbabwe. The study concludes by examining practical approaches in land allocation through gender policy and reforms such as repealing of social practices and customary laws which hinder gender equality.

1. Introduction

Empirical research shows that small-holder agriculture contributes significantly to ensuring food security and improving economic livelihoods in Africa (Kamara et al., 2019). However, as explored in this study, small-holder agriculture in Zimbabwe shows little disregard for gender equality and equity. Agricultural systems are made up of small-holder farms (Wiggins and Keats, 2013) of two hectares and below, and these farms constitute 80% of all farms in Sub-Saharan Africa. Small-holder farmers produce 80 percent of food in Sub-Saharan Africa (Kamara et al., 2019) and yield nine-tenths of the food in Africa at large and nearly 50% of all the food globally. However, women make up 60 – 80% of these farmers across the developing world (FAO, 2011b).

Furthermore, women also constitute most people who suffer from lack of food. This springs from the gender gap in agriculture in terms of land ownership, extension services, government laws and support, and agricultural policies, access to financial credit and access to markets. However, despite the existing gaps, it is apparent that women are the key players in agriculture because they produce much of the world's food (Tirivangasi, 2018). Nyamudeza (2012) argues that the undervaluing and sidelining of women's contribution in agriculture has been due to culture, patriarchal domination, and socialization, which define domestic chores as women's roles. Therefore, this has led to unequal access to the most significant productive resources, profits, and reluctance to implement policies. While women are the backbone of small-scale agriculture, farm human resource base, and day-to-day family subsistence input, they face more challenges than men in gaining access to land, inputs and services. So, the agricultural sector doesn't do as well as it could because women, who are important to agriculture and the rural economy because they are farmers and workers, have a harder time getting access to productive resources than men (Muzari, 2016; FAO, 2011b).

The issue of gendered access to resources in small-holder farming is a contested one in Zimbabwe. Before the land reform process in 2000, which saw about 4,500 white-owned farms handed to black farmers, fewer women in Zimbabwe had land registered in their names (Manjengwa et al., 2014; Goebel, 2005). Currently, 20 percent of women are landholders and leaseholders. It is noteworthy that the resettlement lands are subject to insecurity of tenure because it is provided on a 99-year leasehold which means the land remains the state's property, raising ownership questions. Women should not only have exclusive land control rights, but they must have the ability to have a say on what happens on the land they own (Ferguson and Moosa, 2011). Ensuring that women have access to own land and control of what happens on the land they own is thus a key to unprecedented benefits in terms of food security, nutrition and poverty eradication (Chigwenya and Ndhlovu, 2016; Action Aid, 2012).

By drawing understanding from the experiences of women farmers in fourteen villages of rural Zimbabwe's in Sanyati District, this research sought to look at the "contours" of gender-political dynamics and relations of small-holder agriculture. The research pays particular focus on the challenges, benefits of promoting women's self-agency in small-holder agriculture, gaps that exist in small-holder agriculture between women and men farmers and possible intervention strategies that can enhance the reduction of the gender gaps that exist in small-holder agriculture. For agricultural policies, and programmes by the state and non-state entities to enhance productivity for small-holder farmers, agriculture need to redress gender imbalances through close gender analysis and equity as pronounced by the SDG number 5 (gender equality).

2. Theoretical underpinnings

To understand the gendered politics of small-holder agriculture in Zimbabwe, the study is based on feminist gender analysis frameworks. There are various definitions and views of feminism from different authors (Hoffman, 2001; Jamir, 2022; Delmar, 2018). These include the definition by individuals, researchers, project managers, non-governmental organizations which treat feminism as reduced gender equality and promoting interests of women (Walby, 2011). Gelling (2013) defined feminism as a framework which analyses women's experiences in a naturalist research social setting with the overarching aim to encourage the visibility of them and raise their consciousness and empower them. Delmar (2018) viewed feminism as the discrimination of women because of their sex such that they have specific needs in society which remain negated and unfulfilled. Although there are various definitions and views of feminism from different authors, there is an outstanding theme and commonalities among these researchers. Several researchers converge on the fact that women's rights and opportunities are often negated due to their gender resulting in them excluded in some societal functions and duties (Nyahunda and Tirivangasi, 2022; Tirivangasi et al., 2021).

In the context of this paper, these frameworks give room for a differential analysis of how women compared to men are accessing, owning and controlling land and other resources. Therefore, while women still face several legal, political, economic, social and cultural barriers in relation to land ownership and production (Ravera et al., 2016), feminist gender frameworks allow for in-depth analysis and explanation of relations of production between women and men in different communities.

Many studies have documented the gendered impacts of climate change in Zimbabwe (Brown et al., 2012; Chidakwa et al., 2020; Makura et al., 2016; Zamasiya et al., 2017). In a patriarchal society like Zimbabwe, men assume gender roles such as household head, exercising authority, and the ultimate decision power (Garutsa et al., 2018). On the other hand, in addition to their reproductive roles, women are responsible for household food, nutrition income, water, energy (firewood) security (Dodo, 2013; Mudombi and Muchie, 2013). With the majority (70%) of the rural population in Zimbabwe being women (Zimbabwe Statistics, 2012), whose livelihood heavily depends on nature, the gendered impacts of climate change on women are visible (FAO, 2017). Further, climate-related crop failure increases household food provision workload for women, thus, strengthening the existing gender inequalities in the rural agriculture frontier (FAO, 2017; World Bank, 2017). Furthermore, these structures that shape the livelihoods of rural men and women also contribute to power and resource inequalities as women become reliant on men for access to productive resources such as land.

Thus, due to financial and gender institutional constraints, among others (land, marriage security), women adapt poorly to climate change than men. The lack of resources limits their negotiation power (threat points) within households and communities, further limiting their voices in climate adaptation strategies at both household and community levels. Moreover, the recurrent droughts and floods in Zimbabwe are putting pressure on male members to migrate to better livelihoods, leaving behind women with the sole responsibility of daily household food security. The gender roles and positions of rural men and women in Zimbabwe are a result of colonial history, superimposed in patriarchal culture, aggravated by the national economic doldrums which cause male-out migration for better livelihoods (Cheater, 1986). The continued increase in both frequency and intensity of extreme weather events worsens the already unequal gender and power relations in smallholder communities in Zimbabwe (Chidakwa et al., 2020). Chidakwa et al. (2020) noted the increased vulnerability of female-headed households (both *de jure* and *de facto*) due to climate-related male migration.

Thus, in any form of crisis, women are less capable of dealing with shocks because of material resources and socio-cultural constraints (FAO, 2022). Development interventions like microfinance and climate change adaptation should, therefore, continuously look at ways to ensure women receive gender-appropriate support to strengthen their resilience. Thus, a gender lens is crucial in climate change adaptation interventions.

3. Methodology

A qualitative descriptive research design was adopted in conducting the study to study the phenomenon under natural settings. Data underpinning this paper were obtained from fourteen villages in Sanyati District in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland West Province (as shown in Figure 1) using interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. A total of 65 respondents were purposively selected and structured in-depth personal interview guides and critical informant interview guides were used to obtain data. The interviews were conducted from 20 June 2021 to October 2021.

The interviews that were carried out as reflected in table 1 and the target sample number of participants was 45 and male number was 20, giving a total of 65 targeted sample. From the targeted total sample number of 65, the number of total responses was 61, giving us a women response rate of 100 percent, and men 80 percent,

amounting to the total response rate of 94 percent. The study results are satisfactory, reliable, and therefore apply to gendered politics in small-holder agriculture in rural Zimbabwe. The empirical findings from the fourteen villages in a resettlement area of Sanyati District are categorized into rural women farmland rights, women empowerment, agricultural markets, human and physical capital, and women education and extension services.

Table 1: Response Rate from Interviews

Target respondents	Target Sample	No. of Responses	Response Rate (%)	Place of interviews in Sanyati
Male	20	16	80	Ward 5
Female	45	45	100	
Total	65	61	94	

(Source: Fieldwork, 2019)

From the interview guides the data obtained were transcribed. Then, transcribed data were coded using NVIVO. The data was analyzed based on emerging themes on gendered politics on small-holder agriculture. Observations were also used to understand small-holder farmers' experiences.

4. Results and discussion

The following section discusses the results from the field.

4.1 Rural women farmland rights

Regarding landownership rights, the results were skewed in favor of men owning 90% of the land, widowed women owning 6% of the land as a result of transfer from their deceased spouses. Like in most communal areas of Zimbabwe, women in Sanyati District own land through their husbands. Findings show that women in their own right own only 4% of the land, and these women had total control over the land, and this gave them the power to decide how to use the land, which crops to grow, where and how to sell the crops. However, the widows owned the land as transitional custodians who cannot mortgage the land or take loans using the land. This is because the widows are custodians of the land, which will later be taken over by their male children who are currently working in urban areas. These findings resonate with the findings obtained by Ferguson and Moosa (2011), who found out that women farmers are invisible to policymakers as they are not the most productive farmers because they do not usually own the land they till and produce food for subsistence purposes.

Despite women's increasing engagement in farming and quasi changes of laws and policy favoring small-holder farmers, these farmers are still faced with gender-related hurdles to acquiring exclusive land rights and security of tenure. The failure to own land affects the women's propensity to making decisions in their homes and community. In most cases, their decisions are limited on the crops they can grow. This result in women growing crops meant for household use and may not grow cash crops. The processes to acquiring land titles are not friendly to women. Moreover, women have no financial capacity to purchase land for themselves.

Other research from other parts of Zimbabwe reveal that while married women get small pieces of land for 'female crop' production, unmarried daughters would get land from kin, and older women have land rights to big land and own big livestock like cattle (Bhatasara and Chiweshe, 2017). Women from the Shona tribe possessed some autonomy (usufruct rights) for agricultural production, depending on the nature of their relationship to landowners, age, number of children, and marital status (autonomy increased with marriage, age, number of children and if given by spouse) (Cheater,

1986). Conversely, for Ndebele women, they did not have land rights as they were dependent on men.

4.2 Female Empowerment at village level

Women's empowerment in the rural communities of Sanyati is confined to unproductive assets and resources instead of land and exclusive rights to it. Study results show that although there appears to be more empowerment for men or less empowerment for women from the national government and its departments, women empower themselves through various ways.

The savings clubs and credit groups, stokvel/round (locally known as Mukando), which are very common for women in Sanyati District, leverage poor women's power and control than they would with other institutions in terms of money. Clearly, 25 per cent of women surveyed are members of such groups. Somehow, this has helped them to exercise leadership at the village level. As found, these have to bear to their farming activities. However, it should be stated that there is also unwillingness and lack of commitment among rural women farmers to take part in the process to empower themselves. The study found that there are no land rights and advocacy forums. Women empowerment remains the standing issue. Despite the Government of Zimbabwe's promulgation of the empowerment programs and policies, for instance, the Indigenous and Economic Empowerment laws and devolution policies, the role of women in farming have not been negated. Village and ward development committees (VIDCOs and WADCOs), for instance, created under the auspices of the Provincial Councils Act of 1985 to decentralize functions failed to regard empowerment of women. On the same note, District Development Fund (DDF) and Non-Governmental organizations such as Women and Land in Zimbabwe (WLZ) are not much effective in women empowerment; in fact, they have never attempted to set up platforms and programme to educate women. Arguably this has trickle-down effects in the farming activities of women.

Women rarely have a say in the distribution of farming inputs along political party lines. The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), since 1980, have been making promises for women economic empowerment but never showed commitment to the initiatives. Political empowerment is essential to heap on women's decision-making power at all levels and control for resources such as land, and so increasing their involvement in the critical sectors of the economy and agriculture is no exception. Hence, empowering both men and women equally will make them become better and more successful farmers. Besides that, when women are empowered, the quality of life in rural households is improved as (Tirivangasi and Tayengwa, 2017), confirms that women are known to utilize more resources on their family welfare, health, and education.

The fundamental pre-cursor to empowering rural women is to bolster their education and decision-making power starting from the household level up to the community level by creating local decision-making institutions or bodies and giving women land rights. However, usually, women are empowered to become literate, and lack of functional literacy impede women even from accessing and understanding information such as agricultural extension services and market-related information (Kacharo, 2007). Notably, women need to be empowered in facets of life. According to FAO (2010), women empowerment in the agricultural sector is relatively easy when they can manage resources and make decisions about food production and income. It is crucial to stop rural women disempowerment through broadening and flexing women farmland ownerships.

4.3 Agricultural markets

Results show that the markets for cash crops such as cotton are far away from their home, and most of them are eight kilometers away from the market, and for perishables, some are in major towns such as Harare. Ten women respondents say they walk carrying

beans, maize, vegetables, sweet potatoes, and groundnuts stacked on their heads, searching for buyers and face cut-throat competition from already established vendors and sellers. They then resort to door-to-door selling, offering their “throw-away” prices, and in most cases, potential buyers extort or cajole them through bargaining. This again shortchanges women as they usually do not go to the market to sell their farm products. The issue is aggravated with the absence of cash at the market. Women revealed that even when they had the opportunity to go to the market at times, the non-availability of money complicates the issue as they may not be able to visit the market on consecutive days to wait for cash. Therefore, they send their husbands or male children because of the long distances involved, considering the demanding chores at home. This limits women’s access to the market and leaves men with the opportunity to abuse the income paid for the crop without the knowledge of their wives. Often, there is no competitive and readily available market for other crops except cotton locally, which usually makes it difficult to market the crops. Buyers of crops, grain and groundnuts usually offer bargain-basement prices, and usually, people sell the crops because they will be in dire need of cash.

The lack of fixed markets and price fluctuations are some of the challenges facing women farmers in Zimbabwe (Nyikahadzoi et al., 2012). The study shows that the absence of market training and techniques among women farmers negatively affects their approach and access to markets. Women’s produce from the farms after harvest usually lacks quality due to the post-harvest challenge of poor storage, resulting in pest infestations and rotten crops, thus leaving their households in serious financial and food shortages. Due to the poor quality of the farm products, traders at the markets in Zimbabwe take advantage to offer low market prices- a monopoly against women farmers. As these women lack marketing skills and market information about pricing dynamics and ongoing trends, their negotiation power with their clients is compromised. Then with meagre income for women farmers, it entails that women cannot afford to send their children to school, leading to mass drop-outs from schools with girls becoming housemaids or sex workers or forced into early marriage. It is a vicious cycle.

In the densely populated villages of the Sanyati District, women depend on subsistence agriculture to eke their living; women are vulnerable. A lack of technical advisory services on, for instance, the soil pH, right fertilizers, and seeds according to Agro-Ecological Regions climate and the unreliability of rains exacerbated by poor access to markets are some of the challenges.

Also, the scope and nature of agricultural employment in the case of women in Sanyati District has undergone a huge transformation for the past two decades.

4.4 Extension services

In terms of input credit scheme, it has been revealed that men usually are the ones who are registered as input beneficiaries at most households. Usually, the inputs were said to be utilized in the growing of the most common cash crop in the area which is cotton. Women respondents also revealed that at times the inputs do not reach home as men tend to sell the inputs at the shopping Centre where they receive the inputs and the money is spent on alcoholic drinks, drugs and women. This leaves women with inadequate or no modern inputs to use in their farming activities. Consequently, they tend to grow most of their crops without fertilizer and adequate chemicals. It emerged that this is one of the major reasons why yields in most farms are usually average to below-average despite the farmers having received adequate inputs and above-average rainfall.

The AGRITEX department housed in the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate and Rural Resettlement in Zimbabwe is one of the most decentralized extension services providers with branches on agronomy agribusiness, farm management, training and land use. The training branch embraces gender mainstreaming through its in-service training curriculum for farmer leaders and its workers, field officers (locally known as

Madhumeni/Varimisi), which is currently composed of more than 45 per cent women. However, the study indicates that despite their decentralization, extension services lack the momentous drive to gender equality at village levels in Sanyati.

In addition, the types of crops that are grown by households were revealed by both men and women respondents that cotton is regarded as a male crop, maize a crop for both sexes and nuts and small grains were women crops. This showed that women had limited say in the marketing of cotton and the income generated from the crop. Considering that men are the beneficiaries of credit access, the respondents revealed that when it comes to marketing the crop, the buyers demand that credit beneficiaries' details be used.

4.5 Smallholder agriculture

Although marred with contextual variations and definitional challenges (Kamara, 2019), small-holder farming is generically characterized by land sizes, labor, access to land, (World Bank, 2003; FAO, 2002), and market orientation (Kamara et al., 2019), physical capital and technology. Farms of two hectares or less constitute small-holder farming (Kamara et al., 2019; Wiggins and Keats, 2013). Small-holder farms are very diverse, typically less than 5 hectares and usually vary significantly across countries depending on geographical locations and context (Aid environment, 2013; Eastwood et al., 2009). According to Ngweni et al., (2018), a small-holder farmer cultivates a small piece of land, not a large scale commercial farm. Garner and de la O Campos (2014) note that the word small-holder is interchangeably used with low income, subsistence, small-scale and family-farmer. Clearly, a small-holder farmer does not own a significant piece of land. For the purposes of this study, the researchers embrace Wiggins and Keats (2013) and Kamara et al. (2019) definitions as it is appropriate to the Zimbabwean context.

Zimbabwe's agriculture is dominated by small-holder farmers in rural areas (Dzvimbo et al., 2017), which constitutes nearly 75 percent of agricultural activities in Zimbabwe; and this economic sector is dominated by women within what is known as A1 farms. A1 farms came out of the necessity to provide easy access to land by the rural poor. These farms require an application for one to be a land permit holder. The permit holders have the right to the land for various uses such as agricultural, residential, and pastoral and infrastructural developments such as silos and boreholes. In this regard, for women holding permit entails monopoly over the operations on land or farm. However, the allocation of A1 farms is undertaken within the confines of rural local or village customary systems and in these systems spring up land-gender related conflicts (Goebel, 2005). In the past, before the promulgation of these systems, women were only allowed to own land through patrilineal lines, that is, accessing land through a brother, husband or male member of the family (Goebel, 2005). Notably, on average, small-holder households in rural Zimbabwe own two hectares or less of land, and 35 percent of small-holder farmers owns less than 1.5 hectares of plot sizes. However, since 2000, due to exponential population growth in rural Zimbabwe of more than 65 percent, there has been a considerable decline in farm sizes. Due to growing families, the available land tends to be fragmented to give male sons. The population density in rural villages is rising but with no increase in arable land. In Zimbabwe, small-holder farmers make up 70 percent of food production in the country and a mixed farming with much crop diversification, including maize farming and other small crops such as groundnuts. In most cases, these farms are rain-fed and irrigated intermittently due to the climate change and rainfall variability induced drying up of rivers.

4.6 Gendered land question: Why should women own land?

Land forms the bedrock of economic activities such as farming, rearing of animals and is a significant asset for households that rely on farming for their livelihoods. The land has been recognized as a primary source of wealth, power and social status

(Nyamudeza, 2012; Costa, 2010; Komjathy and Nichols, 2001; FAO, 2002; Mkandawira, and Matlosa, 1995). Regardless of its increasing scarcity, women are sidelined for its ownership. Women traditionally owned a socially defined minimum land from their husbands' holding (Chidzonga, 1993; Nyahunda and Tirivangasi, 2021) before colonial capitalism. Nyamudeza (2012) argues those changes in societal set up due to colonialism eradicated women's rights and their social status. Due to local and traditional inheritance systems, access to and control of land by women is limited (Jere, 2008; Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2022). This makes women-headed households vulnerable, and upon the death of their husbands or divorce, they usually lose the title to the land. This is the prevailing case in Zimbabwe. Nyamudeza (2012) argues that while the Utete Report of 2003 had recommended a 40% allocation for women, especially in A1 peasant farmers, the recommendation has not been implemented by the government despite the population of women in Zimbabwe being around 52%, less than 18% of the beneficiaries were women, and thus this has resulted in women having less access to land.

Empowering women through access to land is essential in improving their social status and will enhance agricultural productivity and food security (Chigwenya and Ndhlovu, 2016; Tirivangasi et al., 2021) as well as welfare. Women land ownership develops avenues for the decision-making power of women within the small-scale farming industry. In this regard, women should have equal rights, same as men in owning land and other economic resources, and when they own land, they can increase productivity. However, the trend in Zimbabwe is that women's rights are confined to unproductive assets and resources instead of land and exclusive rights to it. In this regard, the study observes that women's access to land is not entirely important per se; rather, exclusive ownership is critical.

4.7 Rural agricultural feminization

Feminization is the swing in gender roles and sex roles in a society, group, or organization towards a focus upon the feminine. More so, feminization entails the integration of women into a group that was once traditionally predominated by men as advocated by the sustainable development goal 5, which promotes gender equality. Traditionally, women farmers are not considered as farmers. The rural-urban migration of men and middle-aged women leaves a large share of rural women-headed households in rural Zimbabwe with mass responsibilities, including farming and other household duties. As agriculture and rural areas are becoming "feminised" (Pattnaik, 2017; Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2008), in Zimbabwe, it is observable that 55 percent of women are not title holders to the farmland they cultivate, a situation that is against gender balance and women's economic development.

4.8 Zimbabwe's context to gender and agriculture

4.8.1 Socio-cultural and economic context

The socio-cultural context in Zimbabwe prejudices women due to its patriarchal nature. The study conducted by Chiweshe (2015) and Kambarami (2006) shows that the patriarchal tendencies and values of indigenous Zimbabwe rural society have ensured that women remain outside the influential decision-making positions. As such, women are victims of multifarious upshots of gender-biased socio-cultural and religious values, customs, attitudes, beliefs, gender norms, inter alia, social barriers and constructs. Inheritance and property bequeathment are traditionally patriarchal in which the ancestral property is passed through the male line, except for in some cases where it is matrilineal in which ancestral property is passed through the female line (Kambarami, 2006; Hooks, 2004). Vorley, et al. (2012) view the prevalence of patriarchal socio-cultural attitudes and practices in most developing countries as engendering women, particularly rural women, to face inequalities in accessing essential services and productive assets. In this respect, Baden and Pionettia (2011) posit that by doing a more

significant portion of domestic and care work than men, women tend to have limited time to spend on productive and income-generating activities. This limits their exposure to social networks, and Gomulia (2007) reiterates that the ability of women to accumulate social capital is affected by their limited social space and engagement in social networks. Therefore, women continue to have limited representation in traditional governance structures and face skewed power relations within the household. In Zimbabwe, religion also contributes significantly to posing limitations for land ownership, freedoms and educations for rural women. Improving gender equality in the agricultural sector and tapping more benefits for women is therefore vital to revamp the existing socio-cultural attitudes and practices that undermine women's contributions and roles in society.

4.8.2 Policy and legal environment

Several legislative and policy frameworks have been introduced in Zimbabwe as part of the national drive towards gender equality and women empowerment (Nhuta and Mukumba, 2017). However, agriculture is directly steered by critical policies such as the Comprehensive Agriculture Policy Framework (2015-2035), Zimbabwe Agricultural Investment Plan, and Agriculture Gender Strategy. These policies emphasize the need to mainstream gender issues in all national action plans so as to promote development in the country. However, due to policy implementation failure, rural women are still not able to fully control and access productive resources such as land. Land reform policy, for example, in Zimbabwe allows one to be allocated the land only if married or widowed, and this discriminated against single unmarried women who want land in their names (Manjengwa et al., 2014; Mazhawidza and Manjengwa, 2009; Chitsike, 2003).

Section 17 of the Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment (No.20) Act of 2013 emphasizes that the state and its institutions must ensure that women have access to resources, including land, as compared to their male counterparts. While the Constitution clears some conflicts between statutory and customary laws, it does not put focus on women's exclusive control of resources which is vital than just access. In addition, the Marriage Act (Chapter 5:11) and Statutory Instrument 53 of 2014 establish that the rights of spouses to land under the resettlement program, that in the instance of monogamous customary law marriage, there is equal ownership over small scale farms. However, in cases where the rural land is outside A1 farms, widows may end up being stripped of the land to the family of the husbands (Goebel, 2005). This system, however, only favor married women over unmarried women as they can have joint land permits with their husbands.

Although these laws are advocating for giving women more rights to land, it is within the very same laws with loopholes which pave the way for gender disparities. The ownership of land is still skewed to the males (Costa, 2010). Traditional leaders have unrestrained "rheostat" over agricultural land. It is claimed that these traditional leaders tend to abuse women to acquire resources and inputs such as seeds and fertilizers. In addition, in communal land management, there are some contradictions between the Rural District Councils Act, Agriculture Act, the Communal Lands Act, and Traditional Leaders Act which have spillovers to small-holder farmers, mainly the women. Section 282 subsection 1(d) of the Constitution states that traditional leaders have the jurisdiction, by an Act of Parliament, to administer communal land. As a result, local people end up losing their plots, with some people being settled in locals' farming plots, and pastures leading to conflicts between resettled people and original owners of the land in communal and resettled areas.

The legal frameworks (current customary and statutory laws) signify the need for pro-women laws as they are ensconcing blocks to women's democracy within the small-holder agriculture sector. Despite their contribution to agricultural output, women remain invisible to policymakers (Action Aid, 2012; FAO, 2010). Moreover, there are no statistics gathered concerning women in agriculture, for example, women's yields, technology

embracing rates and their use of inputs (Ferguson and Moosa, 2011). This stems mainly from the government's failure to have laws and policies that support activities in women agriculture. Vorley et al. (2012) argue that even the best laws and policies supporting women in agriculture can attain only minimal impact if the broader policy environment continues to look down upon women's roles and status in other spheres of life. Therefore, family law, inheritance law, customary laws and gender equality laws and policies are primary to this broader policy environment. Therefore, the cross-cutting policies that touch on socio-cultural aspects are particularly vital.

4.8.3 rural political environment

The rural communities of Zimbabwe are much politicked. Post-2000, rural areas have become hotbeds of politically driven violence, the plundering of property, and wanton evictions. So, due to these, women's voices have simmered in various aspects of their lives and the activities of small-holder agriculture. Politics have stirred corruption, and as such agricultural inputs are intercepted with the big political wigs and local leaders such as village heads and traditional leaders, many of whom are male.

4.8.4 Smallholder agricultural institutions and structures

In Zimbabwe, there several institutions that oversee and relates to agricultural operations and activities as well as gender. They range from financial, regulatory, and technical services. These are summarized in Table 2. The institutions such as the Agricultural Development Bank (Agribank) of Zimbabwe failed to bestow mandatory agriculture-gender links, and this is seen from their missions and vision statements. The rights of women to partake in their roles without fear and favor is grossly undermined

Table 2: Other Institutions or entities concerning small-holder agriculture sector

Institutions (Public and Privates)	Functions/ Mandate
Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate and Rural Resettlement (MLAWCRR)	Technical, extension, advisory, regulatory and administrative services to the agricultural sector to achieve food security and economic development.
Agribank	Financial services for agricultural development
Agricultural Technical and Extension Services (AGRITEX)	Extension services on agronomy, agribusiness, farm management, training, and land use
Zimbabwe Farmers Union	Promote farmers interests and welfare through representation, networking, information dissemination, capacity building, environment, gender mainstreaming, and mobilization of resources and members.

4.9 Gender-agriculture inequalities, constraints and prospects

The gender gap in agricultural support is a justice and human rights issue and has a significant impact on poverty, hunger, and economies at large across the developing world (Ferguson and Moosa, 2011). Recent analysis on how agricultural resources is allocated confirms that stark gender inequalities which limit the support women receive tends to be a norm rather than an exception. However, it should be noted that alternatives abound.

4.9.1 Gender division of labour

Although in some countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, men provide more on-farm labour, it is apparent that women constitute more labour force than men within

the small-holder household farms. However, Kes and Swaminathan (2006) argue that another gender-specific constraint is the division of labour where women are regarded as doing domestic work while men are regarded as working outside the domestic domain. This makes women's work to be seen as insignificant despite contributing immensely to agricultural output at the household, national and global level. As a result, women have a limited chance to participate in production for the market. However, it is noteworthy that women's labour is not limited to household roles. Instead, women undertake various roles, including working on the family farm as unpaid workers, growing crops for domestic use, and working as paid farm labourers and traders. Clancy et al. (2002) term this division as gendered cropping and cropping patterns. FAO (2011a) reported that while men tend and market livestock, women tend and control dairy animals and small animals. In this respect, it is ostensible that women do much of the work on the farms but have little benefit from their concerted efforts. Evidence shows that women engage more in the production of food crops such as maize, groundnuts, vegetables, and poultry and less on livestock. Women can reap more from supply chain crops such as vegetables and fruits, but there is evidence that men invade women's activities once they become lucrative (FAO, 2011a). However, due to limited space to operate some of the desired farm's projects, they tend to focus on food crops to ensure household food security.

4.9.2 Agricultural education and extension services

Extension services are significant to small-holder farmers as they provide not only information but training, technical and advisory services, farmer training, food production, technology, health and nutrition, market-oriented extensions, and regulatory services. The dissemination of agricultural innovations hardly considers gender specific requirements (Muzari, 2016) and occurs in a specific socio-cultural setting and is susceptible to power dynamics that shape gender relations (GZI, 2013). Apparently, in Zimbabwe, agricultural extension officers rarely visit farmers in their homes, and it is the farmers who usually visit the extension officers when they require their services or when they are called for a meeting or refresher courses by the extension officers. The extension officers usually meet farmers at a designated location where most of the farmers walk for an average distance of eight kilometers. This proved to be a challenge to women farmers because of their household responsibilities; they fail to travel to such places from time to time. Above and beyond, they usually walk to the meeting place since no transport network links their villages to the meeting place. This leaves men as the only persons who can attend these meetings and benefit from the services of the extension officers. As a result, women are relegated to third party beneficiaries of extension services, and they are left at the mercy and benevolence of their husbands in terms of information sharing concerning agricultural extension services. Evidence shows that women's roles, positions in rural society, heavy workloads and childcare responsibilities, low levels of literacy, and certain socio-cultural aspects prohibit them from talking to male agricultural extension officers and using public transport or driving a motorbike. These are some of the obstacles that impede the introduction of gender-equitable extension services in some countries including Zimbabwe.

4.9.3 Lack of access to credit and insurance services

Women farmers receive less than 10% of small farm credit in Africa despite constituting most farmers in Africa (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2008). This is because most women are not landowners and financial houses such as Commercial Banks are reluctant to disburse or give loans without collateral security (Muzari, 2016). In addition, high transaction costs, exorbitant interest rates, limited education and mobility, social and cultural barriers limit women's ability to receive credit (Muzari, 2016; Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2010). While women should access the credit, they should be wary of getting into unmanageable debt (Ferguson and Moosa, 2011). This signifies why women in Africa

have traditionally relied mainly on informal and illegal sources of micro-credit (Perry, 2002) to avoid the possible debt trap. Micro-finance promotes women's independence by putting capital and financial resources to them, and its results in higher bargaining power in their households (Nhuta and Mukumba, 2017). On the same note, women's access to financial services is paramount for acquiring inputs such as labor-saving technologies, fertilizers and seeds. Hence, it is vital to ensure women empowerment to credit access as this provides them the much needed resources to finance their farming activities. However, credit access should be manageable in order to bring improvement to one's well-being and agricultural productivity. Troicare (2015) calls for the need for budgeting in gender-specific activities, establishing women-only organizations, working with women's organizations to raise their capacity, using the family unit approach, forming women's structures within mixed-gender projects and ensuring the engagement of women in decision making. This will empower women to enhance productivity levels, reduce household dependency ratio, improve access to education and boost health and nutrition within each household.

4.9.4 Physical Capital

The shortage of agricultural engineering technologies, machinery, tools, equipment, infrastructure, and inputs is rife in small-holder farming in Zimbabwe. Lack of access and control of physical capital affect agricultural productivity, and this is also worsened when women also do not have control over land, financial capital, human capital, and social capital (Costa, 2010; FAO, 2010; Denning et al. 2009). Women's access to technological resources and tools is constrained (Muzari, 2016; Siegel, 1999). Restrictions to women's movement, lack of access to collateral, level of education, limited credit availability, time constraints and low levels of awareness are the primary reasons that affect women's access to agricultural inputs (Peterman et al., 2011). Besides having little or no access to physical capital in agriculture, it is evident also in Sub Sahara Africa that women have less access to newly introduced technologies (Meizen-Dicket al., 2010). Globally, agricultural tools, equipment, machinery and protective clothing are being produced with a bias towards the needs of male farmers (Troicare, 2015). At times, this makes it physically and culturally difficult for the equipment to be utilized by women as the equipment is customized to the specifications of male body size and physique. Therefore, women must have a say in the equipment that they use in agriculture, especially concerning its design to reduce the labour burden on them.

4.9.5 Market access

Besides market failure, low productivity levels, poor infrastructure and inconsistencies in supply, OECD (2006) says that unequal gender power relations and gender division of labour mean that women face differential access to markets and struggle to enter the value chains for commercial production. Less involvement of women in markets means women farmers cannot fully benefit from their produce and allow men to take the role of marketers of household produce, women are left with little control over the income earned. Quisumbing and Pandolfelli (2010) argue that the issues to be considered include modes of transport, harassment due to high cost of permits, time burdens for caring for the crops, potential household conflicts and appropriation of crops by men once they enter into the market economy. Besides that, markets that operate following laid out procedures tend to hinder women's access as strategies are formulated to support women's access to markets, these interventions need to be particularly sensitive to these context-specific issues. It is also important to note that low access to resources influences women's yields, which in turn affects the quantity of produce available for the market.

4.9.6 Human and physical capital and credit

While the physical capital is collectively owned by both men and women in each household, it was the man who had the final say and control over the tools and equipment at the household level. This showed categorically that women have little say on how the equipment and tools are used and disposed of if need be. Therefore, such a scenario puts women at a disadvantage, especially should the couples divorce or the man passes on because the woman will not have any say over the tools and equipment. Thus, it is prudent that women be empowered to own property in their names should any eventuality occur.

5. Conclusions

Most women in the small-holder farming sector in rural communities of Zimbabwe are under-privileged to the extent of having no voice in activities that are important to socio-economic transformation in Zimbabwe. They are heavily burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that food is always available in the household. As discussed in this paper, most of the women have no land ownership rights, and this entrenches curfew in making decisions that affect their ability to control what they grow, how they grow it, access to credit and extension services and how they access markets to sell their produce. So, given such challenges, it is evident that there is a great need to empower women in small-holder agriculture through policy reforms, changes in attitudes, and empowerment through participatory reforms. In redressing policy fissures, the government needs to walk the talk on the issue of land and agricultural policy reforms and bring the reforms to the grassroots through different stakeholders such as the women farmers associations, traditional local leadership, key agricultural industry players, researchers, academia and agri-business leaders among civic organizations and public institutions within gender circles to enhancing policy awareness at schools, community and household levels to champion women empowerment in terms of land ownership. There is also a need to repeal customary laws and other provisions to propitiate prejudices in realizing women's rights, gender equality, and opportunities in terms of exclusive control and access to productive resource, particularly land for farming. The policies, programs, and laws that the government has put in place only focus on economic empowerment, and they are not still succeeding. For women to be more prosperous farmers, they need to be empowered socially, economically, and politically. Moreover, it is significant to inform all people about women empowerment in terms of land ownership so that cultural discrimination about women land ownerships must be jettisoned.

On facilitating access to credit, there is a need for financiers to promote cash crops and small grains to ensure that women get the chance to access credit. In addition, there is a need to ensure that women get credit in their own names so that they can have control over the credit that they get and the inputs that they buy or receive from the financiers.

Women farmers' organizations should be established and funded to empower women through the provision of loans and agricultural input schemes. Empowering women financially is important because it ensures that women can control what they can grow, how to use the inputs and when to market the crops. There is also a need to ensure that there are information centers in farming communities that ensure that small-holder farmers get adequate and timeous information on product prices. Not only that, but markets should also embrace different modes of payment besides cash payments to ensure that payment is made on delivery of the crops. The Zimbabwe Women Farmers Accelerator, for instance, a new entity set up to work with 10 women farmers from all provinces in Zimbabwe, is leading advocating easing financial challenges for women to embrace crypto currency as a cash alternative. This can help to eliminate delays in payment and abuse of payments made by men. There is also a need for branding farm products so that women can reach lucrative markets.

Women need to be capacitated so that they have autonomy in farming activities. Capacity building can enable women to open their small-medium enterprises, and value addition and beneficiation of farm produce through agro-processing. Donor institutions and non-governmental organizations, instead of solely providing food handouts to rural communities, should offer agricultural equipment, inputs, services, water harvesting facilities, information and ensure lucrative markets for women farmers.

As the access to extension services requires knowledge and technical skills, there is a need for both the government and non-governmental organizations to empower women through the provision of non-formal education in every school so that women can undertake financial literacy courses in agriculture. Moreover, women should be encouraged to undertake courses in agriculture at the tertiary level through the provision of scholarships and bursaries to help in the provision of extension services. Having more women who work as extension officers has the effect of ensuring more women get access to education and extension services for the benefit of women farmers who constitute most farmers in Africa and globally in general.

In this case, women empowerment in agriculture is still a mammoth task which requires collective effort through public-private partnerships at local, regional and national level by all stakeholders in agriculture.

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