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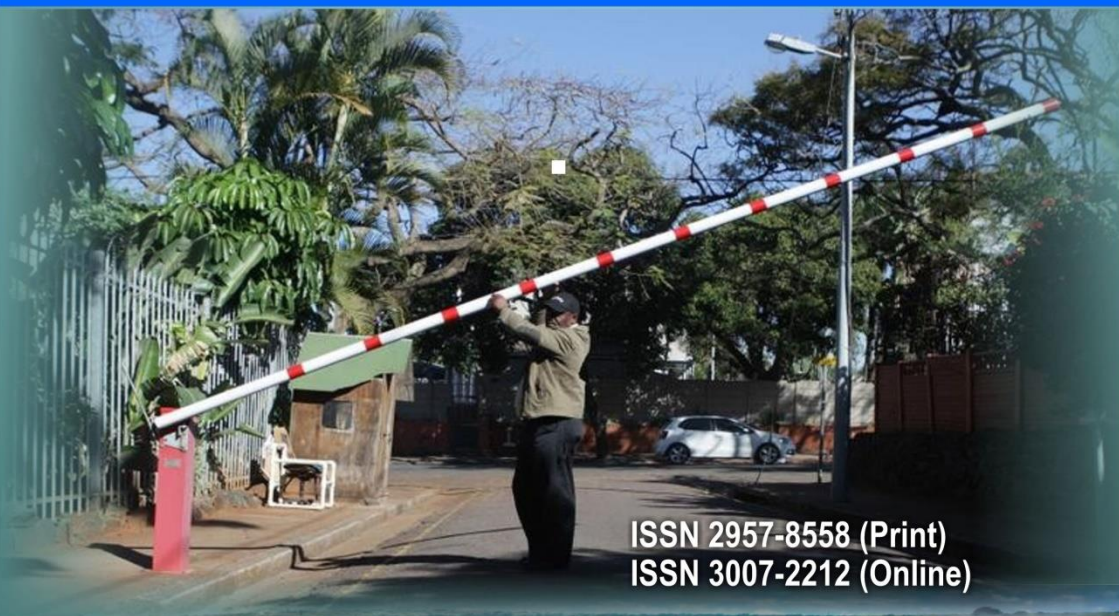
THE ZIMBABWE EZEKIEL GUTI UNIVERSITY JOURNAL
OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION



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About the Journal

JOURNAL PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Ngenani - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformation Review and Advancement,* is to provide a forum for community engagement and outreach.

CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

Sociologists, demographers, psychologists, development experts, planners, social workers, social engineers and economists, among others whose focus is on community development.

JOURNAL SPECIFICATIONS

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SCOPE AND FOCUS

The journal is a forum for the discussion of ideas, scholarly opinions and case studies of community outreach and engagement. Communities are both defined in terms of people found in a given locale and defined cohorts, like the children, the youth, the elderly and those living with a disability. The strongest view is that getting to know each community or sub-community is a function of their deliberate participation in matters affecting them by the community itself. The journal is produced bi-annually.

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Articles must be original contributions, not previously published and should not be under consideration for publishing elsewhere.

Manuscript Submission: Articles submitted to the *Ngenani - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformation* are reviewed using the double-blind peer review system. The author's name(s) must not be included in the main text or running heads and footers.

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Italicise *et al., ibid.,* words that are not English, not names of people or organisations, etc. When you use several scholars confirming the same point, state the point and bracket them in one bracket and ascending order of dates and alphabetically separated by semi-colon e.g. (Falkenmark, 1989, 1990; Reddy, 2002; Dagdeviren and Robertson, 2011; Jacobsen *et al.,* 2012).

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WOMEN FOR LIVELIHOODS! CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE IN RAFINGORA, MASHONALAND WEST PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

LANCELOT NYAMAKA[1] AND NYARADZO SHUMBA[2]

Abstract

Women play crucial roles in agriculture for the welfare of their households and overall development in agro-based economies. They are a critical component as they provide most of the agricultural labour force, care for farming households and work as farm owners independently and jointly with family members. States across the globe have also instituted programmes and initiatives to support women in agriculture. However, women continue to face several challenges in agriculture, usually power-laden. Using a qualitative research approach, through a case study design, this article highlights the challenges women face in agriculture under small-scale farming in Rafingora, Mashonaland West Province. Zimbabwe. In-depth interviews with women and key informants in agriculture were used to obtain data to understand the challenges faced by women in farming. Thematically analysed data indicated family land conflicts, role conflict and the burden of motherhood, illiteracy and lack of information/education, harsh climate change, lack of agricultural equipment, and high transportation costs associated with long distances to depots/suppliers of farming inputs as main challenges affecting women in agriculture. The research concludes that being a female household head in a rural farming area is a challenge on its

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own, and a human rights issue since it is associated with a multiplicity of challenges.

Keywords: *women empowerment, gender, farming households, household heads, welfare*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, women play indispensable roles in agriculture despite constituting the largest proportion of the disadvantaged populace in rural farming areas. The Borgen Project (2021) indicates that about 60% of rural Zimbabwean women are poor, yet the World Bank (2018) indicates that they constitute more than 55% of the rural agricultural labour force. In this case, therefore, they are responsible for heading farming households as individuals or jointly with their husbands making farming decisions and they also work as farm managers, as owners of farmlands or on behalf of other parties, yet they remain poor due to low productivity and poor profit realisation (FAO, 2018).

Additionally, females are responsible for converting agricultural produce into consumable 'on the table' portions within the household, sharing the food for the general nutritional well-being of the family on top of constituting a considerable number in the agricultural labour force (The World Bank, 2020). This can be explained by the fact that customarily or in African society, women are seen as caregivers responsible for preparing food and sharing it amongst the household members. In this case, the issue of sharing food is also determined by the cultural or patriarchal values that ascribe kitchen responsibilities to women. Moreover, Doss *et al.* (2011) indicate that women make essential contributions to agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries, but their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. It can be noted also that women's involvement can differ with

the type of crops produced. As argued by USAID (2014), women are usually known for leguminous crops like groundnuts and cowpeas, while men take charge of cash crops like tobacco, large-scale maize production and cotton. Berman (2014) is of the view that leguminous crops are considered feminine crops and usually less paying and not prioritised when females farm jointly with their husbands. This, therefore, shows that women are usually considered for less paying crops, limiting their potential in profit realisation through large-scale maize or other paying crops.

However, with changes in rural household headship, women are now taking charge of formerly men-dominated duties in agriculture, venturing into extensive farming even as stand-alone household heads (Horrel and Krishanan, 2007). They frequently manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies and their activities typically include producing crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019; The World Bank, 2020). Research has unearthed that they account for over 40% of its labour force worldwide (Kwaramba *et al*., 2020:7); 43% in developing countries; 50% in East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2020:4); and specifically, 70% in Zimbabwe (FAO, 2017; Ncube, 2020:5). They are responsible for 60% to 80% of food production in developing countries (Doss *et al*., 2011; World Bank, 2017:1). Zimstats (2016) indicates that more than 18% of A1 land reform beneficiaries are independent female farmers who produce diverse crops. It should be noted that the government of Zimbabwe after, its radical land reform, embarked on maize-farming supporting schemes and some farmers have independently produced the precious cereal both for sale and consumption (Moyo and Nyoni, 2013; Mazwi *et al*., 2019). Women are

no exception in agricultural production though they continue to face a myriad of challenges.

The crucial role of women in agriculture has prompted states to enact laws, endorse conventions and protocols, and develop institutional frameworks spearheading and augmenting the support and recognising their role in agriculture. Chief among them are the UN Sustainable Development Goals that uphold gender equality (SDG 5) as an ingredient for development even in agriculture, since it is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world through reducing inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind across sectors (including agriculture) (SDG 10) (UNDP, 2022). They also underscore the fight against poverty in line with SDG 2 which seeks zero hunger (*ibid.*). In the Zimbabwean context. the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act (2013:44) under section 80, every woman has full and equal dignity of the person with men and this includes equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities. In this case all laws, customs, traditions and cultural practices that infringe the rights of women conferred by this constitution are void to the extent of infringement (*ibid.*).

However, despite a significant place occupied by women in agriculture and various initiatives by the state to boost their farming productivity (e.g. maize farming, etc.), they continue producing less in agriculture as compared to their male counterparts. On average, women-run farms produce 20 to 30% less than farms run by men (Duckett, 2022). As argued by FAO (2016), women farmers typically achieve lower yields than men, not because they are less skilled, but because they operate smaller farms and use fewer inputs like fertilizers, improved seeds and tools.

Literature on women in agriculture presents that women are taken as a monolithic group with limited access to land even under land reforms such as the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in Zimbabwe (Mushunje, 2001; Gaidzanwa, 2011; Njaya 2014). This article examines challenges faced by women in Zimbabwe's post-2000 agricultural resettlement areas. While agriculture has been male-dominated, women's roles extend beyond labour. Following the FTLRP and strained UK relations, women became vital to agricultural revival, yet face obstacles hindering production. This article explores these challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study was undertaken in Rafingora, a high-potential area in the province of Mashonaland West, Zimbabwe, which is usually the best producer of maize in Zimbabwe (Ministry of Agriculture, Mechanisation and Irrigation Development, 2015; Nyamukondiwa, 2018). It is located about 45 km northeast of Chinhoyi, the capital town of Mashonaland West Province. It falls in the Zvimba North Political District. This research uses a qualitative research approach through a case study research design. This is preferred due to its ability to unearth insider viewpoints and facilitate digging deeper in a natural context on the issues which affect women in agriculture. This also enhances the disinterment of comprehensive, detailed and rich information associated with narratives and descriptions of the challenges faced by female farmers under small-scale resettlement (Tracy, 2013; Cresswell and Cresswell, 2017). The approach and design also acknowledges the subjectivity of participants and the research in generating meaning out of their lived experiences and reality about challenges faced by women in small-scale maize production (Zucker, 2009).

In this study, A1 female household heads residing in Raffingora were the target population. The population was, therefore, delimited by the

land scale and residential boundaries. Agritex officers in the area under study were also targeted and from whom key informants were chosen. All study participants (27 primary and three key informants) were purposively sampled to participate in in-depth interviews because they were well-versed in critical issues concerning challenges faced by women in agricultural practice. The number of participants was determined by the principle of saturation as underscored by Saunders *et al*. (2015). This also enhances the researcher to acquire detailed and relevant information for deducing conclusions. Female household heads' ages ranged from 38 years to 59 years and on average, each household had four individuals. Participants were interviewed using in-depth interview guides which asked questions related to the objectives of the study. In-depth interviews were open-ended and discovery-oriented to obtain detailed information about a topic from key stakeholders in small-scale maize production. These enabled the research to explore in depth a participant's point of view, experiences, feelings and perspectives about challenges faced by women in maize production (Workbook, 2014).

Data collected from both primary participants and key informants were transcribed and then translated from Shona, the local native language, into English. Thematic data analysis was used as argued by Braun and Clark (2006). The themes that emerged from the analysis to present the findings as shown in the following subsection, were then used. Written and oral informed consent was obtained from all study participants and all ethical considerations (informed consent, confidentiality, least harm and anonymity, among others) we upheld. A non-judgmental attitude, acceptance, privacy, debriefing, informed consent, empathy and good communication skills, also helped the as emphasised in the Helsinki Declaration of 1968 (Carlson *et al*., 2004). Ethics approval was sought from the researchers' university to conduct the study.

FINDINGS

The female farmer participants indicated that female household heads face the challenge of family land ownership conflicts which puts them at the receiving end of lack of arable land to cultivate. This was common to widows who indicated that female household heads are usually dispossessed of their land, usually by step-sons after the death of their husbands through force. Mostly, the land is grabbed by the oldest sons or relatives of the husband since culturally, women are not entitled to land when widowed. In this case, the participants indicated that they were not able to venture into the maize production programmes like command agriculture or self-help programmes for maize production since land is a prerequisite for one to join the programme and they do not have power over it. They indicated that their lands are leased without concern and were, at times, left with very small pieces of land or none. Key informants clarified that widowhood is usually followed by landlessness and powerlessness over the land amongst A1 farmers, and this disadvantages female farmers.

> I wish to produce maize on my own and also through joining supporting programmes like command agriculture for maize production, but the problem with this is that I no longer own land. The offer letter for land ownership which is required to register for many maize farming programmes, say if I want to join, is no longer available. After the death of my husband, the offer letter was taken by my stepson, the firstborn of my late husband. He grabbed the letter of land ownership by force. He connived with the Lands Department and changed land ownership without my consent. For the past three years I wasn't allowed to cultivate the land, he could lease the land to someone else (Female Farmer (FF) 9).
>
> I haven't been able to produce as an independent farmer or even join maize production programmes. As it stands, my stepson doesn't love me at all as the stepmother; he doesn't take me as his mother. He leases the land to someone without my knowledge. I only have control over this stand with a small piece of arable land. The land is all occupied by someone else, so I no longer have control over the land, so I cannot produce maize now (FF 8).
>
> Well, we do have females, especially widows, who are failing to increase their productivity in maize farming or join the command agriculture programme that supports all farmers. After the death of their husbands,

> they are left with no power over their land. Usually, some are sacked or disposed of land ownership papers. Of course, they can do joint ventures with other individuals, but it's just difficult (Key Informant (KI) 1).

The verbatims above show that despite the presence of statutes, policies and or institutions to promote women's equal access to land and property rights, women in Zimbabwe have remained on the receiving end in the fiasco of land ownership. Inequality and social injustice on the land issue is still a rampant phenomenon in Zimbabwe and continuously and disproportionately affects women. The customary laws have continuously side-lined women from equal access to and use of land. More-so, instead of public institutions working on behalf of disadvantaged groups like women, they are also conniving in working to the disadvantage of women and this negatively affects their maize productivity. For women to enjoy full participation in development programmes or maize production initiatives like command agriculture, they need assets like land or capabilities for the full realisation of their rights.

Maize production has turned to be asset and resource-based, rather than problems and needs, women tend to be a disadvantaged group. Patriarchal values produce structural oppression, especially for widows who, after the death of their husbands, are likely to lose land ownership to the extended family or the eldest son within the households. This then limits their right to farm and increase their production or participate in programmes that require land, like command agriculture which supports maize production in Zimbabwe. They are just oppressed and considered secondary owners of land, hence cannot realise their rights to involvement in economic endeavours and social development programmes.

The Social Relations Theory holds that poverty is a result of people's unequal social relations that dictate unequal access to resources, claims and responsibilities, thus they produce inequalities that assign each

person a position in societal hierarchy and structure and govern the tangible and intangible assets or resources an individual or community can get (Keeber, 2005). As argued by Gaidzanwa (2011:3),

> "underlying the land reform programme is the pervasive influence of patriarchy in the institutions and functionaries involved in the programme. Upon the death of the male registrant of the land, the land is perhaps shared among his relatives. Concerning women's experiences with land rights in Zimbabwe, the customary inheritance laws will apply whether land is held communally "or privately". This excludes some women in developmental projects which require land."

The social justice principle acknowledges that social problems are a result of how institutions organise and distribute resources, especially for disadvantaged groups, like female household heads (Chavalala, 2016). Maize production demands land, but female household heads are seen as secondary holders of land. From a developmental social work, female-headed households are economically and socially disempowered by some customary values and laws that do not allow women to own land.

ROLE CONFLICT AND THE BURDEN OF MOTHERHOOD

The study findings show that female household heads face the challenge of role conflict of being a mother/caregiver and farm manager, at the same time trying to balance the demands associated with those roles. Participants complained that being a caregiver/mother and farm manager as a female house head was a burdensome experience, demanding that they balance caring for children, heading the family and fulfilling a myriad of demands involved in maize farming as individuals or with the support from the government under command agriculture, a programme for maize production and other community responsibilities. The majority of females who participated in the study lamented that being household heads made them neglect some household duties and own farm activities while trying to access loan facilities for them to increase their productivity. The key informants clarified that widowhood is difficult

and that they assume many headship roles which perhaps strain them and at the same time try to concentrate with increased productivity. The key informants indicated that some female household heads drop out of maize production support programmes due to failure to balance the demands of their circumstances. One of the participants had the following to say;

> Here I have to take care of my disabled child, you see that child has Downs syndrome and heart problems and he needs care. At the same time, I also want to herd the cattle while programmes like command agriculture registration for maize production are required and if I get registered, I think accessing the inputs demands more time as well. I feel overwhelmed, some farmers travel because they have other people to look after their homes but my situation is different (FF 5).
>
> We go far away as far as Harare to process and get registered for some maize production programmes, as a female mmm, here I am only one as you can see, so nothing will be progressing at home. I am traveling to Harare and back home several times, so one can end up surrendering the me despite the zeal to get assistance and work (FF 8)
>
> I have to balance many roles to perform as a mother, household manager and labourer. Time won't be on my side to effectively embark on productive maize farming (FF 16).
>
> Given the hustles surrounding the registration for maize production programmes, inputs acquisition and the time it takes, it's difficult for someone who has other roles at home, some are single mothers. The process can strain them because it's not certain that upon verification they will benefit from the programme (KI 3).

The quotes show that for women, household headship is associated with tripartite gendered demands which lead to a great burden and the role conflict between being a mother or caregiver, head of the family and the manager of the farm. While female household headship is now a demographic phenomenon globally, the policies, acts and developmental programmes in Zimbabwe are perhaps silent on female-headed households. More importantly, the peculiarities of female-headed farming households' challenges and circumstances are not considered. When it comes to caring for the children, the role of

women clashes with that of managing farming activities, especially when trying to augment their productivity through support programmes like command agriculture which demands time.

The socially ascribed and defined roles in highly patriarchal communities place females at a disadvantage since they have multiple duties within the households, hence they spend some of their time caring for their dependents. This limits equal participation with men in the market to access services crucial for maize production like extension. As argued by the Gender Integration Framework, women have an overly burdensome workload that hinders them from having a healthy work/leisure balance which negatively affects the well-being of their household and keeps them from accessing other opportunities that could help advance them socially and economically (USAID, 2014). Some female-headed farming households are labour-constrained, hence no one can support the female household head to balance the demands associated with female household headship. This also echoes the sentiments of Nyikahadzoi *et al*. (2012) who indicate that widowed female household heads are left with the burden of headship for their welfare and the children.

ILLITERACY AND LACK OF INFORMATION/EDUCATION

The study indicates that female household heads face the challenge of illiteracy and they are at times not educated or well-informed about maize production or supporting programmes, for participation and involvement. The participants lamented that most of the paperwork and travelling requires a literate person who can comprehend the demands and issues critical to the programme and the general know-how of maize farming. This is difficult since most female-headed farming households are labour-constrained. Moreover, the female farmers indicated that the online or mobile system of registration for support programmes is difficult since they were not taught how to use it by the responsible institutions, hence making their life difficult and

to make it, worse, the English language was a challenge to many. The female household heads indicated that they did not even know what they signed with regard to maize contract farming because they were not able to comprehend the contracts. Key informants clarified the issue of informed participation and illiteracy and hinted that full understanding and education is a challenge for farmers, given the low literacy levels of female farmers. They further indicated that some contract farming programmes for maize production introduce digital or online platforms which are not being cascaded down to grassroots or beneficiaries, hence posed challenges to farmers.

> Some maize production is ok but when you do it through contract farming like the command agriculture, you will surrender. We collect some inputs in towns, but I am not able to read the streets where we are directed to visit for assistance or do anything. Where we go, the paperwork involves reading so it's a challenge for me. I resorted to sending my son, but now he is living with his family so I dropped out of the programme. Sometimes, like this year, changes like the mobile system are a challenge, they did not communicate or educate us about it (FF 6).

> I don't know the names of some of the papers involved in maize farming, especially through contract farming, we just sign. This year, we received text messages informing us of successful registration and what to do next in English. Some don't know how to read the messages. I usually forward the texts to my son who interprets for me. They should educate us please (FF1).

> I heard that recently. they [farmers] have received text messages about the maize production programmes. There comes a challenge because some farmers are not informed about the mobile procedures and some farmers are not educated and cannot comprehend the texts…of course, AEOs preach the gospel of command agriculture but they are overwhelmed (KI 3).

> Haa I think they are supposed to come to the grassroots and educate people more about the programmes. Some females are interested, but they don't know where to start, right from registration procedures and the payment modalities of the loan if they do it the contract way. The programme's changes were not cascaded to the grassroots and informed the farmers. Illiteracy also affects farmers to be well-informed and educated about the programme (KI 3).

Despite socio-economic development promoting informed participation, Zimbabwean women in maize production, whether independent or through state programmes, often lack the understanding to comprehend contracts, hindering their self-determination. Technology adoption is also limited by usability (Zimstats, 2020) and development programmes often fail to consider women's specific circumstances. Women farmers also have less access to extension services and information (Peterman *et al*., 2010), and often lack skills and knowledge in profitable programmes (USAID, 2014). Illiteracy and limited mobility further restrict their access to credit (Nyathi, 2018; Ugwu, 2019). While adult education is crucial for empowerment, it it lacking in agriculture, highlighting the need for holistic empowerment programmes, even though state institutions are currently under-resourced.

HARSH CLIMATE CHANGE

All research participants indicated that female maize producers are affected by harsh climatic conditions and that they sometimes fail to produce more and, in worse circumstances, they fail to pay back the loan, if they are farming through contract schemes. Female farmers further highlighted that they cannot irrigate to cushion themselves from drought conditions. This, therefore, opens avenues for poor productivity. More-so, key informants indicated that agricultural practice for A1 farmers is not insured, hence it is at risk and also the farmers do not have alternative ways of farming without natural rainfall. They propose drilling boreholes and other ways of farming.

> Unlike A2 farmers who irrigate, we automatically fail to produce and pay back or enjoy profits if there is little rainfall, the crops won't survive and we just pray that more rains will come (FF 4).
>
> If there is not enough rainfall, it's a disaster. We have nothing to do because of our incapacity to irrigate (FF 25).
>
> Most A1 farmers do not have insurance in the event of harsh climatic conditions. If it's a good year, they celebrate, they need more education (KI 3).

> Farmers need education on alternative sources of income, not natural rainfall-fed agriculture and the importance of insurance. Alternatively, they can drill boreholes for horticulture (KI 2).

Research shows that drought disproportionately harms female maize farmers, exacerbated by limited education on resilient livelihoods and weather insurance. This reliance on rain-fed agriculture makes their livelihoods vulnerable. Similar studies in Senegal found unreliable climate and lack of insurance discouraged female farmers from improving productivity and accessing credit (Tegegne, 2012). The Social Relations Theory suggests structural oppression limits women's access to agricultural information, including insurance (Keeber, 2005). Sustainable development requires better resource management by female farmers.

LACK OF AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT

Focus group discussants indicated that lack of agricultural equipment or farm implements is a big challenge affecting maize farming and productivity in Mapondo Farm. In-depth interviews of female participants specifically highlighted that the lack of tractors for high-quality tillage and land preparations was affecting their productivity. They also lamented that in the area there are few tractors to hire and, at times, were not available at all, hence leading to delays in preparing their land and this consequently affected their yields negatively. One of the key informants highlighted that most female farmers lack farming implements vital for land preparations, weeding, spraying and diverse farming activities, hence this negatively affects their productivity. He further highlighted that the inheritance conflicts after the death of husbands are usually associated with the seizure of key implements by members of the deceased from the widows.

> Generally, farming implements are a challenge to me and this limits my potential to produce more in maize farming. Land preparations are difficult to do especially tillage. I do not have a tractor or even an ox-drawn plough, so automatically, production is poor (FF, 10).

> In Mapondo Farm, we as females, do not have tractors, even for hiring. I think we only have only two individuals with functioning tractors, at times none. So due to this, we lag behind the ideal farming calendar as we prepare our land very late (FF, 12).
>
> Indeed, most female farmers do not have farm implements. Some do not even have the basic ox-drawn ones for land preparations, weeding and spraying. In the worst circumstances when they are widowed, the conflicts associated with inheritance, worse when their husbands die, they lose the implements they had purchased with their husbands. Some extended families have tendencies of dispossessing widows of farm implements (KI 2).

The above verbatims indicate that maize production amongst female farmers demands capabilities and is assets-based without which, women produce less due to compromised processes crucial for effective farming. In this case, one can interpret that women are disproportionately affected by structural issues when it comes to possession and ownership of key assets vital for farming, hence affecting their productivity. Conflicts and oppression of females informed by patriarchal values negatively affect their assets and ownership of farm implements and, consequently, affect their productivity. As argued by the Women's University in Africa (2021), without adequate funds for capital investments and collateral, female farmers are less likely than men to buy and use fertilizer, advanced farming tools and techniques, sustainable agricultural practices and others that increase crop yields. Alsgaard (2012) further indicates that customary inheritance laws lead to the loss of vital farm equipment by women who are usually considered inferior and 'unfit' to take the farming legacy further to other generations. This, therefore, shows that women are usually on the receiving end with regards to access and ownership of farming equipment and this leads to poor yields as compared to male counterparts.

High transportation costs associated with long distances to depots/ suppliers of farming inputs

All the study participants indicated that beneficiaries face transportation challenges associated with long distances to their

collection points or depots. Both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and key informants highlighted that transportation is complicated due to high hiring costs from the distant depot and that some beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries sell part of the packages to meet transport expenses.. Key informants further clarified that it is procedural that the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) is supposed to disburse inputs to a farmer who has that transport, especially a registered vehicle. This, therefore, makes command agriculture a programme for those with capacity. Thus, even if one does not have her transport, she must hire.

> We might have the e-voucher, but transport is a challenge considering the distances to the collection points and suppliers. Some transport operators demand something like US$3 per bag of fertilizer it is difficult (FF 19).
>
> When it comes to transport, the programme is difficult. They [farmers] struggle a lot, even myself I don't think I can afford it. Some even resort to selling some bags of fertilizer to pay for the transportation of their inputs. The distance is a disadvantage. (FF 22).
>
> Inputs are being collected from far away depots and suppliers. They should be collected at the nearest GMB depots, say here at Raffingora and those in Lions' Den must be collected there. Last year we had some farmers who collected their inputs from as far as Chegutu depot. They also go as far as Aspindale [Harare] and Norton (KI 3).
>
> The GMB only disburse inputs to a farmer who has transport to ferry her or his commodities, yet most of the farmers don't have lorries. Given the distances to the depots, command agriculture has become a bourgeoisie programme, suitable only for those with their assets and financial muscle. If you're lucky with the inputs, the struggle is real to secure transport for your inputs (KI 1).

The verbatims above show that command agriculture fails to satisfy the accessibility principle central to the developmental social work approach. Thus, for socio-economic benefits to be realised by disadvantaged groups, the services that seek to improve the livelihoods of communities must be easily accessible and located closer to service users. This makes the programmes or services accommodative of the most vulnerable, neediest and disadvantaged groups of the community. Whereas the Constitution of Zimbabwe

(No. 20) Act (2013), under section 110 underscores the enactment of relevant policies and through the cabinet, there seems to be gaps in terms of how command agriculture is implemented. Moreover, the AMA Act [Chapter 18:24] (2004) underscores the need for policy recommendations to align agricultural programmes in Zimbabwe, but command agriculture continues running in an irresponsive manner as it is silent on high transportation costs. Thus, planners of social development programmes must consider the geographical barriers to accessing services by people in need. Service providers must employ the concept of decentralised service delivery whereby service users access services locally. This, therefore, speaks to the rights-based approach to social work where communities have the right to poverty alleviation strategies and programmes. For Chavalala (2016), the inaccessibility of developmental services is tantamount to a violation of human rights which social work practitioners strive to protect. Despite that AMA Command Agriculture Regulations (2017) stipulate that

> ….any person who purchases, receives, stores, sells, obtains, possesses, or otherwise, disposes of such agricultural produce; shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding level four or imprisonment not exceeding three months or both such fine and imprisonment.

The farmers justified their unlawful acts, citing that inputs are collected far away, yet they do not have their own transport or capacity to hire transport and ferry their inputs to the farms.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that female-headed farming households in Zimbabwe face significant barriers to agricultural mechanisation under Command Agriculture. Despite the Zimbabwe Gender Policy (2017) and SDG 5 promoting gender equality in access to productive resources and the Constitution guaranteeing women equal rights, structural inequalities persist. Government programmes disproportionately favour male farmers (Shonhe, 2019), limiting women's access to tractors and irrigation equipment and hindering

their productivity and contributing to the "feminisation of poor agricultural productivity" (Mazwi *et al*., 2019). This perpetuates poverty and negatively impacts dependents. Furthermore, female household heads face exclusion and oppression within their families and agricultural institutions, being denied land ownership and other socioeconomic rights and often ignored regarding their psychological and social needs. These challenges, rooted in patriarchal values, infringe on women's fundamental rights (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). This marginalisation, coupled with the lack of access to resources, perpetuates the feminisation of poverty, negatively affecting the well-being of women and their dependents. The study further concludes that most challenges associated with female household headship are brewed and reinforced by how institutions or societies allocate or organise their resources, especially for the most disadvantaged or weak groups of society. In this case, it noted that women lack access to land, education and information about agricultural programmes. This is deeply rooted in the cultural and patriarchal norms and values that disproportionally allocate resources between women and men. The implication of this at the macro level is that communities are normalising the impoverishment of women and poor living standards in rural communities of Zimbabwe. Women also remain on the periphery of agricultural policy or programme development and this consequently leads to gender-blind policies which do not acknowledge gender dynamics in the Zimbabwean context. Women have poor access to land as influenced by patriarchal values. They also lack equal access to education and this is influenced by the cultural values that view females as caregivers and undeserving to attend school as men. The socially defined and ascribed roles, prejudices and discriminations further reinforce the disadvantaging of women and reduce their participation in development programmes. Conflicts in households or extended families and disorganisations inherent in responsible organisations for command agriculture make the involvement of females in command agriculture a challenge.

Moreover, customary laws and social norms that define females as caregivers reinforce the challenges of females. These society-made prejudices and discrimination against females continuously disadvantage female

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