

## **WOMEN, LAND AND POVERTY IN ZIMBABWE: DECONSTRUCTING THE IMPACTS OF THE FAST TRACK LAND REFORM PROGRAM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The question of land in Zimbabwe has always been political and gendered. Whereas land reform was necessary in the context of highly unequal land ownership patterns and poverty, this paper shows that the Fast Track Land Reform Programme diminished opportunities or spaces for women to be empowered and shrunk the democratic spaces for genuine participation of women in the development process by denying them rights to land, widening gender inequalities and ultimately failing to alleviate their poverty. Women and men's differential access to land and the trajectories that push women to the margins were taken for granted. The failure of the government to seriously consider women's land questions of ownership and control does not only reflect the indifference of hegemonic masculinities to the gender-land interface but also a crisis in development and democracy whereby women continue to be victims. It is of paramount importance to note that giving women land does not automatically lift them out of poverty, allocating land to a "unitary household" does not guarantee women's ownership of land and collating women's needs with those of men does not ensure sustainable livelihoods for women or democratic outcomes. There are also significant factors relating to women's ability to utilize land and to influence production and consumption decisions within households and communities which in turn determine the ability of land reform to alleviate women's poverty. Thus, post land reform policies should consider women as an independent social category with specific and different questions relating to land.

**Keywords:** Land; Reform; Women; Poverty

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is a critical deconstruction of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe, focusing on the impacts on women's poverty. The main argument put forward by this paper is that land reform does not automatically bring democratic gender outcomes in the absence of decisive policy making. In my view, there are a number of issues taken for granted when it comes to land reform. Gender blind masculinities and femininities in governments assume that giving land to men will automatically benefit the women in the households. Furthermore, policymakers assume that giving women land will make them more "empowered". Discourses of sustainable livelihoods are, at worst, not considered and, at best, remain on paper.

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) was a very critical point of departure in the history of land reform in Zimbabwe; the economy and agriculture collapsed, people were displaced, food became scarce, and the environment is a tragedy. The policy framework of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe was devoided of systematic gender considerations and it was political and exclusive, thus, the limited spaces created for women to participate in the implementation process determined the extent to which their livelihoods were secured. Amidst all these, one should analyze the impacts of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme on “*gendered subjects* of state developmentalism. The term *gendered subjects* was used by Redcliffe, 2006 in explaining the position of women in state polices.

Feminist scholars, such Jackson and Pearson (1998), alluded to the view that that one should not assume a direct correlation between land reform and the liberation of women. Land reform does not automatically guarantee that women will be better off. According to Jacobs (2003), land reform does not necessarily lead to democratic outcomes for women or rural classes. Jacobs (2003) further noted that land reform can reproduce or reinforce existing discriminatory practices and institutions.

In analyzing the impacts of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe on women’s poverty, the paper employs the Capability Approach by Amartya Sen and his definition of poverty and the Human Rights Based approach to Development (HRBD). According to Sen (1992), Capability is a person’s or group’s freedom to achieve valuable functionings. Sen places emphasis on the freedom of agency and what a person is able to do and achieve. A working definition of poverty used in this paper is borrowed from Amartya Sen. Sen (2000), defines poverty as capability failure or capability deprivation. This definition captures both the material and non-material aspects of poverty. The paper also invokes the discourse of sustainability and shows how women’s livelihoods continue to be insecure, thus, their poverty further entrenched.

Land reform can also be conceptualized as a human rights issue. Wisborg (2002) noted that land reform, ethically, politically, and strategically interface with human rights. The context of policymaking, legal framework, implementation, and the outcomes of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme are essentially closely linked to the human rights of Zimbabweans. Hellum and Derman (2004) noted that the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was a highly centralized and discretion-based political process, not rights or human rights based. Ikdahl, Hellum, Benjaminsen, Kaarhus and Kameri-Mbote, 2005), noted that “The Fast Track Land Reform Programme was legitimized ex post facto through constitutional changes”. The state largely adopted a state-centric rights approach. This was done through amending laws, reforming the judiciary system and the constitution such that the government decided what could be law or rights from its own reference.

The United Nations Development Programme (2001) has noted that “A human rights-based approach provides both a vision of what development should strive to achieve (to secure the freedom, well-being and dignity of all people everywhere), and a set of tools and essential references (human rights standards and principles)”. Furthermore, Sen

(2005) noted that human rights and capabilities go well with each other, as long as we do not try to subsume either concept entirely within the territory of the other.

### **DEFINING FAST TRACK LAND REFORM**

The question of land has always been political in Zimbabwe since the colonial conquest of the country to the land redistribution of the first two decades of independence. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme, a government initiated land acquisition and redistribution programme, began by land occupations in the late 1990s that were later legitimized by the Rural Lands Occupiers Act of 2001 and Section 3(i) prevented the settlers from any legal proceedings. The government amended the constitution in 2000 and 2001, despite the rejection of the referendum. In 2000, the government initiated a Referendum to change the Constitution and the majority of voters rejected the Referendum by voting “No”. This gave the government power to forcefully acquire land for resettlement. The initial clauses of the Land Acquisition Act of 1992 to compensate farmers for farm improvements were later forgone in the amendments to the Act in 2000 and 2001. Land Acquisition Act enacted in 1992 to speed up land redistribution. It was amended in 2000 and 2001 to empower the president and other authorities to acquire land compulsorily in certain circumstances.

There seem to be no clarity on what exactly the government meant by the “*fast track*”. From the available literature, the fast track was defined as “an accelerated phase was activities which can be done quickly shall be done in an accelerated manner” (Government of Zimbabwe 2001, in Gonese, Marongwe, Mukora and Kinsey 2005). In policy documents, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme entailed:

“... An accelerated implementation of existing Government approaches on compulsory acquisition rather than focusing on land offered under the willing seller- willing buyer principle. Furthermore, this approach focuses on the identification of the targeted land for acquisition and resettlement of the land hungry in order to decongest the Communal Areas” (Government of Zimbabwe, 2001, in Gonese, Marongwe, Mukora and Kinsey 2005)

The immediate objectives of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme were the following:

“The immediate identification for compulsory acquisition of no less than 5 million hectares for Phase II of the Resettlement Programme, for the benefit of the landless peasant households, the planning, demarcation and settler emplacement on all acquired farms and provision of limited basic infrastructure (such as boreholes, dip tanks and scheme roads) and farmer support services (such as tillage and crop packs)” (Government of Zimbabwe, 2001, in Gonese, Marongwe, Mukora and Kinsey 2005)

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme was supposed to be guided by the Land Reform and Resettlement Phase 2 (LRRP2) framework. The Land Reform and Resettlement Phase 2 was launched in 1997 with the aim of distributing large parts of the commercial farming land in 5 years (Mbaya, 2005). In 1997, when the government launched the Land Reform and Resettlement Phase 2 (LRRP2), the government aimed to:

“... resettle about 150 000 families. This included resettling youths graduating from Agricultural colleges and others with demonstrable experience in agriculture, in a gender sensitive manner, to reduce the extent and intensity of poverty among rural families and farm workers by providing them with sufficient land for agricultural use, to increase the contribution of agriculture to the Gross Domestic Product by increasing the number of commercialized small-scale farmers using formerly underutilized land, to promote the environmentally sustainable utilization of land and to improve conditions for sustainable peace and social stability by removing imbalances in land ownership.” (Government of Zimbabwe, 1998 in Mbaya, 2005).

Given the unequal land ownership in the country and persistent rural and urban poverty, it seems the policy objectives on paper were noble if carried out within the Inception Phase Framework Plan (IPFP). The Inception Phase Framework Plan was designed in 1998 to guide the implementation of the Land Reform and Resettlement Phase 2. According to Mbaya (2005), it incorporated issues such as:

“Gender sensitivity, stakeholder participation, concepts of good governance, targeting women as a special group, training women to cater for special needs, provided for affirmative action in certain structures, had a whole paragraph on gender and mainstreamed gender throughout”.

However, fast tracking land reform reflects different discourses and one would question the actual driving forces behind the program. In my view, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was not driven by its objectives in policy frameworks. The government disregarded its policy objectives according to the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme 2 and initiated the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and, ultimately, this had adverse impacts on different social groups particularly women.

### **THE FAST TRACK LAND REFORM PROGRAMME, WOMEN AND POVERTY**

It is important to highlight that women are not a homogenous group. Although there are some similarities, there are differences in the way the FTLRP affected the poverty of different categories of women. In my view, it is important to start by a critical analysis of women farm workers, since they suffered first, in relative terms, when land invasions and occupations began. Women farm workers suffered evictions and displacement. They were deprived of the capability to have secure jobs, incomes, food, and homes for their children. Cernea, cited by Hantarck (2005), noted that displacement leads to impoverishment risks, such as homelessness, unemployment, landlessness, marginalization, food insecurity, loss of property, erosion of health status, and social disarticulation. From the works of Sachikonye (2002), Sachikonye (2003), Magaramombe (2003), and Rutherford (2008) farm workers were treated as aliens and deprived of citizenship. Thus, women farm workers were deprived of capabilities to pursue secure socio-economic and political livelihoods by limited participation in land reform through evictions and displacement.

In my view, women farm workers suffered more than their male counterparts. According to Mgugu (2008), the Utete (2003) report highlighted that women farm workers would have been the losers since they dominated the part

time labor force in farms. The Utete Report glossed over what actually happened to women farm workers. In addition, these women also suffered different forms of violence. The chaotic nature of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme left physical and emotional scars on some women across the country. Goebel (2005) noted that the gendered nature of violence during the Fast Track Land Reform Programme has not been addressed. According to Clark (2005):

“..The capability approach covers all dimensions of human well-being. Development and justice are regarded in a comprehensive and integrated manner, and much attention is paid to the links among material, mental and social well-being, or to the political, socio-economic, and cultural dimensions of life”.

There were no frameworks for women victims of violence during the Fast Track Land Reform Programme to seek justice and recourse. In my view, the importance of mental capabilities of women should be taken seriously as this has impacts on alleviating different dimensions of women’s poverty. The former United Nations Secretary, General Kofi Annan, said in 1999 that “Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation... As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace” (Women and Land in Zimbabwe, 2007). In this case, it can also be noted that there is a relationship between capabilities and human rights as spelled by Sen and the Human Rights Based approach to Development. The human rights violations through evictions, displacement, and violence against women negatively affected their capability to develop sustainable socio-economic and political lives. Therefore, in light of the above, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme actually amplified the poverty of women farm workers and women who suffered violence.

It is important to critically analyze the patterns of land ownership that emerged from the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. Goebel (2005) noted that women have not received a fair share in the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and less than 20% of the 300,000 settlers are women. The table below (table 1) from Utete (2003) cited in Mgugu (2008), shows the patterns of land ownership in all provinces. It is important to note that apart from the Utete land report of 2003, the proposed land audit has not taken place to provide more information on land ownership patterns. Overall, men own more land than women in all provinces in the A1 and A2 models. The government designed land models that targeted different beneficiaries, however, this became a basis of exclusion. Men own 82% of the land as compared to 18% of women in the A1 model. Men also own 88% of land in the A2 model whilst women own only 12%.

In addition to the data provided below, in areas studied by Mpahlo (2003), which are Masvingo, Midlands, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central, and Matabeleland South, that 95% of men own land in A2 model as compared to 4.88% of women. Similarly, in the A1 model, 85% of men own land, whilst only 14.8% of women own land. Land for A2 model was allocated to financially endowed, experienced, and qualified farmers who should practice commercial farming.

The disparities can be explained largely by the failure to target women as a special group in the Fast Track Land Reform Programme policy and implementation phase. Furthermore, many men than women have attended Master Farmer Training, thus many poor and uneducated rural women could not qualify for the model. Goebel (2005) is of the view that women, as an identity of capable modern producers, have been considered ineligible for modern development in the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. Therefore, these are clear cases of capability deprivation as women were allocated much less land in all models and capability failures as they cannot produce beyond mere subsistences, thus, their livelihoods remain insecure.

**Table 1. Land Ownership (All Provinces)**

Province	Model A1				Model A2			
	No of males	%	No of Females	%	No of males	%	No of Females	%
Midlands	14 800	82	3 198	18	338	95	17	5
Masvingo	19 026	84	3 644	16	709	92	64	8
Mash Central	12 986	88	1 770	12	1 469	87	215	13
Mash West	21 782	81	5 270	19	1 777	89	226	11
Mash East	12 967	76	3 992	24	*missing	*missing	*missing	*missing
Matabele South	7 754	87	1 169	13	215	79	56	21
Matabele North	7 919	84	1 490	16	574	83	121	17
Manicaland	9 572	82	2 190	18	961	91	97	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>106 986</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>2 2723</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>6 043</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>796</b>	<b>12</b>

*Adapted from Utete Report, 2003*

Furthermore, the huge disparity in the A1 model is based on the approach by the government to base it on the Family Farm or Household Model. The family farm or household model means the land is given to the family or household not individuals within these institutions. There are certain assumptions on what constitutes a family according to tradition. Customary practices assume that men are the heads of families, thus, are given land and land is registered in their names. The following is a response by one government minister on land allocation:

“Since the family is traditionally made up of two partners, the government cannot say which partner should come forward to apply for land. Such specifics must be left to the families to decide” Dr Made, Former Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement, cited by Women and Land Lobby Group, (2001).

The above response shows the grim extent to which women were not specifically targeted for land allocation as a disadvantaged group. Considering the cultural constraints women face within marriage and family institutions, spaces for women to control land are limited. This has precarious consequences for women's poverty. In my view, this is a case of capability deprivation by the failure of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme to secure women ownership of land. Another dimension that can be extrapolated is the perpetuation of dependence of women on men. The positions of women continue to be compromised and their subordination further amplified. Women may still become landless at the three points of vulnerability in their lives, which are marriage, divorce, and widowhood because they do not have land of their own.

More still, the Household Model also has other dangerous implications. Scholars such as Agarwal (1994), noted that there is an assumption that a household is a single joint unit, people have a common interest and the head of the household is altruistic. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme subsumed women's interests under the unitary household without any reference to women's capability to control production and consumption decisions. For example, female farm workers were considered as part of male headed households (Sachikonye, 2003). The fact that there is a multiplicity of female -headed households was not seriously considered. Sachikonye (2003) noted that 19% of farm worker households are headed by women but only 16% of female farm workers got land. Structural materialist feminist scholars argue that this over-romanticization of the domestic domain in land reform weakens women's bargaining power. Scholars, such as Frenier (1983), are of the view that ownership and control of land by women contributes significantly to women's economic wellbeing and bargaining power in the household. The Capability Approach gives reference to a person's freedom to pursue personal capabilities thus a reference should be given to the capability to achieve things that intrinsically matter for women's survival such as happiness, positive peace of mind, social security, and independence. This influences women's political capabilities to participate in and mobilize communities for the development.

There are also differences in land ownership among women. As shown in the table 2 below, married women comprise 20% of those who own land in their own capacity. Mpahlo (2003), in her study, noted that among married women, it is mostly ex-combatants and those married to foreign husbands who own land in their own capacity. Among the single women who own land, 71% of them are widowed, 25% are divorced, and the rest were never married. Women war veterans comprise 20% of all war veterans who own land. Mpahlo (2003) noted that of the 25,569 war veterans' families resettled, only 2,221 were female headed household.

**TABLE 2: Land Ownership by Gender**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Model A2 (N=41)</b>	<b>Model A2 (N=236)</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Men</b>	95.12	85.17
<b>Women</b>	4.88	14.83
<b>Total</b>	100	100
<b>Women</b>	N=2	N=2
<b>Married</b>	50	20.00
<b>Single</b>	50	80.00
<b>Total</b>	100	100

*Adapted from Mpahlo (2003)*

These disparities among women also affect how different women can command economic and social resources in order to be capable to sustain their lives. Studies have shown that female heads of the households are more vulnerable to poverty incidences than married women who may depend for economic resources on husbands. Mbaya (2005) noted that in view of feminization of poverty, land reform has been limited in the extent to which it has attempted to alleviate poverty. Sachikonye (2003) also noted that one of the principal outcomes of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and is poverty exacerbation.

In my view, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme had negative impacts on women's poverty because of unclear land tenure systems and unclear land rights. According to Li Ping (2003), from her studies in China, women can secure their livelihoods when their land rights are legally recognizable, socially recognizable, and enforceable by authorities. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme failed to acknowledge women's rights to particular capabilities, such as land rights and the specific contexts, which make women more vulnerable. It was implemented in the context of a constitution that discriminates against women. Section 23 (3) i and b of the Zimbabwean constitution discriminates against women by applying customary law; One can see the link between capabilities and human rights as postulated by Sen (2005).

The Human Rights Based approach to Development says that development should seek to secure freedoms, well-being, and the dignity of people. The Human Rights Based approach to Development is also based on the idea that real success in tackling poverty and vulnerability requires giving the poor and vulnerable a stake, a voice, and real protection in the societies where they live. In the case of this paper, women can be given stakes, voices, and



protection by land rights that are legally recognizable, socially recognizable, and enforceable by authorities. The United Nations Development Programme (2001) noted that:

“A human rights-based approach is not only about expanding people’s choices and capabilities but above all about the empowerment of people to decide what this process of expansion should look like. The value of a human rights-based framework lies particularly in the transformative potential of human rights to alleviate injustice, inequality and poverty”.

However, because no reference was made to human rights, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, just like the previous land reform policies, deprived women of the capability to claim legitimate rights to land. The government remains indifferent or pays only lip service by the administrative arrangements that are easily overlooked. Women may own land, but without any legal right to claim ownership, they remain vulnerable. Most rural women in Zimbabwe do not have the capability to claim rights to land in the event of widowhood or divorced under customary marriages and, to make matters worse, most of the marriages are unregistered.

Additionally, it can be noted that there is ambiguity in land tenure arrangements in Zimbabwe. The government responded to calls to resolve the tenure issues by issuing leases. The so called 99 year leases have been issued out, so far, to a few farmers under the A2 model and they remain not well defined. The government in 2007 decided that beneficiaries under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme be given leases for 99 years and the government owns all the land. The 99 year leases also do not allow inheritance of land, thus widows cannot inherit their late husbands’ land. In light of this, one can argue that the Fast Track Land Reform Programme failed to address women’s poverty in terms of their capabilities to claim their rights to land.

It is interesting to note that the government amended the constitution in 2000 and 2001, thus had more power to acquire more land. However, it did not revise Sections 23(3) i and b. These sections do not protect women’s land rights within marriage and in the event of divorce; they legitimize customary law. This shows that Fast Track Land Reform Programme did not consider how gender differentiated land ownership affects women’s survival, capabilities, and gender power relations beyond the marriage boundaries.

There are no laws that define women’s land rights within the family or household. Inheritance laws in Zimbabwe are “legally” recognizable, but not socially enforced, so women may lose land to their spouses’ kin members. Frenier (1983) noted that when women have secure land rights, they can have the capability to produce more and have control over production. Additionally, secure land rights will incentivize women to invest in land and ensure sustainable growing conditions and, ultimately, ensure a steady supply of food and other basic needs. The capability to pursue long term sustainable livelihoods hangs in balance, for some women, in the new resettlements in Zimbabwe, thus, their poverty has been entrenched.

In my view, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme failed to fully consider the women's land ownership within the broad framework of agrarian reform. Women have been deprived of the capability to develop sustainable livelihoods and earn incomes by the inability to utilize land. Jacobs (2002) noted that women may have access to land, but they face gender-based constraints to utilize it. Mpahlo (2003) is of the view that one of the main problems affecting women's productivity in resettlement areas is lack of basic infrastructure, such as clean water, transport systems, and health services. Goebel (2005) noted that lack of infrastructure is burdening women.

The Land Reform and Resettlement Phase 2 and the Inception Phase Framework Policy gave reference to infrastructural development, but this has not materialized. Studies show that more than 60% of female farmers in resettlements have less than average farming implements. Mpahlo (2003) noted that close to 54% of women in the A1 model have no draught powers in the provinces she studied, as compared to 31% of men. The failure of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme to consider the wider framework of land use is negatively affecting the women's capability to engage in productive agriculture. Alexander (2009) is of the view that the processes of acquiring inputs from the government, such as seeds and fertilizer, have been militarized and politicized. In the A1 model, women continued to cultivate small pieces of land because of the limited inputs, thus; they are incapable to expand production beyond subsistence. According to the Women and Land in Zimbabwe, (2008), because of household demands, women may sell the little produce they are getting in order to get income. This eventually has implications for food security because they cannot sustain consumption till the next agricultural season.

Furthermore, the 99 years leases and offer letters given to beneficiaries of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme cannot be used as collateral for borrowing loans from banks to improve production. In reality, the government owns all the acquired land. Commercial banks are refusing to offer loans to farmers because the 99 year lease is not transferable to third parties. Although men are also affected, women have been more adversely affected because they lack alternative sources of income or means to access credit (Women and Land in Zimbabwe, 2007).

According to Mbaya (2005), the Inception Phase Framework made reference to training women to cater for special needs. However, not much has been done. Mgugu (2008) noted that the provision of technical expertise and extension services in the new resettlements is biased against women. According to Mgugu, the Farmer Development Trust trained 10,000 farmers in tobacco farming and an insignificant 5% were female heads of the household. Although one cannot assume direct causal relationship, women may have the capability to expand production or engage in other income generating activities if they have adequate technical and production support. On another note, the Product Market Programme (PMP), introduced by the government in 2004, is also depriving women in new resettlements the capability to earn higher incomes from agriculture. The Product Market Programme is a form of price control of agricultural produce and targeted mainly at maize. Women are affected more since they predominantly grow maize whilst men are benefiting from less controlled cash crops, such as tobacco and cotton.

Furthermore, Mpahlo (2003) noted that the politics of resource utilization and management in the new resettlements is taking a gender dimension which, in my view, is not democratic. Women's capability to control production decisions and land use is being curtailed by the lack of adequate and appropriate representation in the new decision-making structures that are guiding and enforcing land use and natural resource management. Chaumba, Scoones, and Wolmer (2005) present the "four axis of authority" that emerged during the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, which are the war veterans, new land committees, traditional leaders, and local elites in most areas of the country. These structures have not departed from patriarchal and customary tendencies. Studies have shown that only 8% of women in new resettlements have positions in village and ward committees (Mpahlo, 2003). Robeyns (2005) noted that:

"For some capabilities, the main input will be financial resources and economic production, but for others it can be political practices and institutions, such as the effective guaranteeing and protection of freedom of thought, political participation, social or cultural practices, social structures, social institutions, public goods, social norms, and traditions".

This leads to capability failure as women occupy minor roles in communities. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme failed to create spaces for women farmers and laborers to express their views and assumed leadership in determining issues that affected their positions in communities, families, or households.

In my view, there is another dimension of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme which has been largely ignored, which is the impact of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme on HIV and AIDS, bearing in mind the gendered nature of the pandemic. According to Mbaya (2005), the way the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was conducted ignored the reality of HIV and AIDS, especially the gendered nature of the pandemic. There was no consideration of the gender, land, poverty, and the HIV and AIDS nexus. Firstly, from the available literature, there are arguments that the Fast Track Land Reform Programme may have contributed to an increase in the HIV infections by displacing people and disrupting the families. There is also evidence that the HIV infections increased in mobile populations because of their conditions of vulnerability, thus the displacement of women could have exposed them to HIV infections.

Secondly, as discussed above, few women own land in the aftermath of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. In my view, this deprives women of the capability to make decisions about their sexual and reproductive rights in view of HIV and AIDS. Women may not be in positions to negotiate safe sex, especially in marriages when they are dependent on men. Thirdly, the Food and Agricultural Organization (2006) report has indicated that many HIV positive widows are losing land in the resettlements after the death of their husbands. The FAO reported that these women are accused of witchcraft and of killing their husbands by the husband's relatives. During the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, land permits were registered in the names of husbands and women land rights have not been defined. Thus, these women do not have the capability to legally protect themselves. The situation is worse for women married under customary marriage because it does not always protect the women's rights to property.

Whereas the Fast Track Land Reform Programme has largely, negatively impacted women's poverty, there are some positive aspects which should be considered. Mpahlo (2003) pointed out that some women who got land feel that they have benefited, especially female headed households. These households are experiencing increases in incomes, food security, and nutrition for children. An insignificant 3%, in the study areas by Mpahlo, managed to acquire assets for production by the time of the study. Some women have also expressed gratitude for moving away from patriarchal extended families and, therefore, are able to make independent decisions in production. However, this should not be overstated because considering that women are demographically the majority and also provide 70% of labor in agricultural production, the percentage owning land from the Fast Track Land Reform Programme is ridiculously very low.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The paper agrees that the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was a noble cause, but it did not ensure democratic outcomes for women. It is apparent that the programme was short sighted and driven by other factors such as political expediency thus could not fully address women's concerns for land ownership and control. In my view, it is plausible to conclude that overall, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme diminished the opportunities or spaces for women to be empowered and shrunk the democratic spaces for genuine participation of women in development processes by denying them rights to land, widening gender inequalities and ultimately exacerbating their poverty. The proponents and implementers of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme were short sighted in giving women spaces, (referring to land), without addressing factors that would improve the utilization of land by women. Women in Zimbabwe still have undefined and unsecure land rights hence their control on land and its produce is compromised. Apparently, the contentious 99 leases are flawed and cannot be used as collateral. The situation of women is worsened by lack of infrastructure, technical services and agricultural inputs. In my view, the failure to address women's poverty has broader adverse consequences in terms of addressing HIV and AIDS, food insecurity, poverty, democracy, sustainability and the general development of the country.

It is important to note that understanding the gaps in terms of gender in the fast track land reform is a crucial step in any reconstitution of post land reform policies that may be done in Zimbabwe. However, any land reform policy measures that might be taken in Zimbabwe should be guided by a new constitution that protects women's rights to property and the dual laws should be revised. It will not make sense to give women rights to land that can be invalidated by customary laws. Maybe the other most crucial aspects in formulating future land reform policies should be take into consideration human and women's rights based approaches in conceptualizing, implementing and evaluating land reform policies and laws in an atmosphere of tolerance of opposing political views and diversity in perspectives on land across different race, class, ethnic and regional categories of people in a democratic Zimbabwe.

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