

Gender, Poverty and Land in Africa: A Transformative Social Policy Perspective

With land and agrarian reforms remaining critical for transformative and equitable growth on the continent, a social reproductive perspective reveals gendered asymmetries in the allocation of labour between earning and caring with concomitant gendered welfare outcomes (Kabeer 2015: 194). This perspective has not been adequately emphasised in the literature on gender, poverty and land in Africa with unequal land rights, inequalities in access to capital, credit, technologies and labour having enjoyed greater limelight (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; see also Agarwal 1994). Using empirical evidence emerging from the latest land reform programme in Zimbabwe, I argue that attention to gender in land reforms holds potential to increase women's access to land but can inadvertently increase their social reproductive burden.

A feminist Marxist analysis of capitalist production highlighting the gendered production of labour power used to create commodities and value in a capitalist system (Bhattacharya 2013: 1; McNally and Ferguson 2015: 2) frames the arguments presented in this article. Such a theoretical perspective challenges rationale choice theories and assumptions underpinning certain strands of mainstream economics viewing labour power as 'natural' – simply presumed to be present, a given factor of capitalist production, a product of natural, biologically determined and regenerative

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processes (see McNally and Ferguson 2015; Budlender 2002; Razavi 2007). Rather, Marxist feminists argued that labour power is produced and reproduced outside capitalist production in a kinship-based site called family, thus arguing for labour power to be conceptualised as a 'produced' input in the capitalist economic system of production (Caren, Elson and Cagatay 2000; Bhattacharya 2013: 2). Social reproduction theory reveals that the 'production of goods and services and the production of life are part of one integrated process' (Bhattacharya 2013: 7; McNally and Ferguson 2015: 3). Thus, capitalist production of goods and services is scaffolded by social reproduction that happens in the so-called private sphere of the family (*ibid.*; see also UNRISD 2010; Razavi 2011; Folbre 2012). The theoretical efficacy of the social reproduction approach, deployed here, lies in its ability to explicate the interconnections of the work we do to reproduce ourselves on the one hand, and waged work on the other, thus presenting a completely differentiated yet nonetheless unified understanding of social reality (McNally and Ferguson 2015: 4). The 'reproductive labour tax', one feminist innovation from which men

are largely exempt (Palmer 1995: 81), illuminates the constraint on women's labour emanating from the gendered division of household tasks as reflected in the gendered output gap between potential and actual production (Tsikata 2009: 20). This understanding positions women at the intersection of production and reproduction; earning and caring (Folbre 1994).

Analysed within (Braunstein 2015: 11) social reproductive function comprising inputs (time, infrastructure and commodities), modes of delivery (public, private and voluntary) and outputs (human capacities, welfare, wellbeing and gender equality), data was gathered through an ethnographic field study over a period of eight months using structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and key informant interviews within an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design. The sample of 105 survey participants comprised thirty-two medium-scale farm land beneficiaries; thirty-three small-scale farm land beneficiaries, and forty communal non-land reform beneficiaries. This was in addition to thirty households purposively selected to participate in a qualitative study comprising in-depth interviews.

Despite the well-documented redistributive outcomes of the fast track land reform programme (FTLRP) (Tekwa and Adesina 2018: 54; Moyo 2011: 944), from a social reproductive perspec-

tive empirical evidence indicates that increases in household land size were concomitant to a congruent increase in time spent by women on household chores. A disaggregation of households by gender reveals that within resettlement areas women in male-headed households expended more unremunerated time in social reproduction compared to female-headed households. Extending this to the totality of women's work, that is the cumulative time women spend on reproductive and productive work, reveals the arduous double burden on women (Chen, Vanek, Lund et al. 2005: 20). Women in resettlement areas reported an extraordinarily longer working day of more than twelve hours with high percentages of time poverty (Folbre 2012: 17). This has been exacerbated by inadequate provision of physical and social infrastructure in fast track resettlement areas relative to the surrounding communal areas. The latter was measured by access to protected water sources within standard distances, access to sanitation services, and availability of child and health care facilities comparing resettled and communal areas. This analysis revealed an inverse correlation between households cultivable land size and the provision of physical and social infrastructure. As land available to households for cultivation increased via land reform, access to physical and social infrastructure decreased pointing to a deficient infrastructure provision within resettled areas compared to communal areas.

The study then used time-use surveys to understand the effect of this deficiency in infrastructure provision on the welfare of women relative to men within resettlement areas. Findings reveal that due to poor provision of social infra-

structure (health and education) and physical infrastructure (water and electricity), the time devoted to unpaid care work by women in resettlement areas concomitantly increased. Such analyses provide insights into aspects of development not yet fully explored, particularly in the context of land reforms (Chen, Vanek, Lund et al. 2005). In the small-scale farming areas, over 90 per cent of the female respondents indicated that the nearest source of water was more than a kilometre away and a round-trip to fetch water took them more than an hour. Adding onto that, over 80 per cent of these female respondents made more than two trips of water collection per day. As this was not enough, over 70 per cent of these women use their head as a mode of transporting water for home use. This provides little insights into the time and energy demands on women for a single social reproductive task, the collection of water for household consumption which under the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have exponentially increased with the need for improved hygiene (see Parry and Gordon 2020: 7). Based on this accumulating evidence, this article argues that land and agrarian reforms without the concomitant provision of public and social infrastructure do little to transform gendered poverty and inequality within agrarian societies. Lack of social service provision represents one major gendered shortfall of the FTLRP in Zimbabwe.

Relatedly, findings presented in the chapter reveal a positive correlation between household cultivable land sizes and ownership of time-saving household equipment. This suggests that increased household incomes engendered by access to land through land reforms had a positive effect on ownership

of time-saving equipment such as electric stoves, fridges and washing machines including the ability to acquire the services of paid help. Ownership of such household equipment has a direct impact on the amount of time spent by women on unremunerated social reproductive work (Folbre 2012; Braunstein 2016). Irrespective, as outlined above, such ownership of time-saving household equipment by resettled farmers could not offset the time constraints imposed by deficiencies in the provision of public services, such as child and health care, water supply and sanitation. This was reflected by a positive correlation existing between increasing household land size and female time poverty. An interesting dynamic emerging from the findings relates to emerging class differentiation as reflected in the capacity to outsource unremunerated reproductive work by some resettlement households through engaging the services of paid helps.

While the option to outsource unpaid care activities, such as cooking, cleaning and fetching water, has been found to be an unaffordable luxury for most households in low-income countries (see Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka 2014: 5) this has not been the case with some resettled households in the study sites. Enhanced household incomes had enabled some households to outsource many or part of these activities through engaging the services of housemaids, thus freeing more time for women to engage in paid work activities. In a way, this reflected emerging class differentiation in Zimbabwe's countryside engendered by fast track land reform, though it represents a research niche still to be adequately explored. Nonetheless, I argue that from a gender perspective, this is less transformative as

it represents one class of women shifting their social reproductive burden onto another class of the same gender, as most paid helps are commonly women.

Interesting to note was the effect of gendered social norms on male participation in reproductive work within resettlement areas. Though quantitative statistics indicated male participation was reflected by husbands taking part in social reproductive work, focus group discussions with men revealed the need to tackle strong gendered social norms prevailing in resettlement areas. This was exacerbated by patriarchal social relations and institutions in many African societies obliging women to provide labour on their husband's plots before they can work on their own, thus increasing the time they spend on productive work (Yngstrom 2002: 29; Amanor-Wilks 2009: 32; Tsikata and Amanor-Wilks 2009: 3). Based on these empirical findings the article makes the following policy recommendations.

State intervention in social reproduction

In managing the contradictions associated with social reproduction, African states can draw lessons from social policy in the Nordic countries, and intervene to prevent or mitigate cost-shifting by capitalists through appropriate legislation or underwriting some or most of the social reproductive costs. Paradoxically, most states in Africa, as in many other developing contexts, and emanating from neoliberal residual social policy, have increasingly intervened only to the extent of correcting market failures or failures of family provisioning by providing meagre support to the ultra- or 'deserving' poor or households (Adesina 2011: 460;

Braedley 2006: 216). By adopting residualist social policies, African states limit themselves to attempts at reducing poverty rather than focusing on the objectives of economic growth and are systematically gutting the welfare state. Consequently, social policies have been more sensitive to the needs of the capitalist economy, resulting in escalating gendered poverty and inequality in the past three decades of neoliberalism.

Public social infrastructure provision

As the household or family remains a major site for social reproduction in most agrarian societies, state support in terms of public, social and physical infrastructure remains critical in lessening the social reproductive burdens on households, particularly on women. Most land reforms are characterised by an insufficient provision of social services. The increased social reproductive burden takes up much of the time women can devote to productive work to enhance their economic wellbeing. In the study areas, the scale of the FTLRP saw the resettlement of large numbers of people with little or no provision of physical, social and economic infrastructure (Gonese and Mukora 2003: 13), posing a contradiction to the aim of creating a path to agrarian transformation. Fast-track policymakers and planners can learn from the pre-2000 Phase One Land Reforms, in which the provision of infrastructure complemented the settlement of incoming communities to ensure that they could access, within reasonable reach, necessary social services. The programme was hailed worldwide as one of the most successful land reforms (Gonese and Mukora 2003: 3). The key implication of the social reproductive approach is

the need for investment in a social and physical infrastructure that reduces the structural constraints on women's time.

Male participation in social reproductive work

Some feminists have argued that future gender equality rests on promoting the parental sharing ideal through encouraging men's care (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Fraser 1994). In the context of welfare states, policies that encourage and incentivise fathers to share caring responsibilities, such as granting paternal leave and fathers' quotas – time set for fathers' childcare – facilitate men's capacity to take solo care of young children while the mother returns to work. The involvement of fathers in caring work is likened to a better gender division of care work and better welfare outcomes for women (Mathieu 2016: 580). Within agrarian societies men can be incentivised and encouraged to take part in social reproductive work thus easing the social reproductive burden on women and enabling them to balance their time between earning and caring.

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