

Allocating farmland to rural women – new insights



Land reform in South Africa intends to redress racial imbalances with regard to ownership and access to land. On the surface, the various strategy documents also talk to transferring land to black women, the youth and the disabled. *Tim Hart, Margaret Chandia and Peter Jacobs* reason that some interesting patterns are emerging with respect to gender relations and land ownership driven by land reform.

One example of a land reform strategy is the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) programme (now outdated) that includes a target of transferring at least one-third of the land to black women. But do such policy intentions materialise in practice: do rural women benefit from the land reform process at all and, if so, how?

Based on the analysis of survey research data from 248 participating households in the North West, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal during 2012, participants stressed that future land reform policy research should increase its gender lens by focusing more on teasing out the effects of land reform on household gender relations, in particular the gender relations in land ownership.

The participants, who were all recipients under the redistribution or restitution component of land reform, suggested that follow-up research questions should

include why exclusive female farmland ownership generally remained low; and what were the roles, responsibilities and opportunities for women in emerging co-ownership patterns/relationships.

Gender and land ownership

Due to the historical, largely patriarchal structure of many of South Africa's ethnic groups, men are traditionally viewed as exclusive owners of land in rural areas, particularly agricultural land. However, regular analyses of the labour force survey and the general household survey indicate that household farming in rural South Africa is largely undertaken by women.

A challenge to their farming activities is that women do so under conditions of insecure traditional land tenure. In practice, they often rely on male household members for permission to use land and to gain access to the household resources required for agricultural production and investment.

Table 1: Gender of land reform landowners by province

Gender of landowner	Share in Western Cape	Share in KwaZulu-Natal	Share in North West	Share of total respondent households
Exclusively female	18	19	4	41
	29.03%	15.7%	6.15%	16.53%
Exclusively male	29	84	22	135
	46.77%	69.42%	33.85%	54.44%
Jointly female and male	15	18	39	72
	24.19%	14.88%	60%	29.03%
Total	62	121	65	248
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: N = 248, number of valid cases

Source: HSRC, 2012

With respect to land ownership under the land reform programme, overwhelming male ownership might be changing

Table 1 suggests that, at least with respect to land ownership under the land reform programme, overwhelming male ownership might be changing. While slightly more than half of land distributed through the land reform process in the sampled households in these three provinces had been transferred exclusively to men (54%), there was evidence of exclusive female ownership and co-ownership of land among land reform recipient households.

The minority of surveyed households (16.5%) had exclusive female landowners. This was just less than half of the 33.3% targeted in strategy documents such as LRAD. In slightly less than one-third (29%) of the households, females co-owned land with their male counterparts (husbands, fathers, brothers, sons).

Households in which females exclusively owned land reform farmland was highest in the Western Cape

The share of households in which females exclusively owned land reform farmland was highest in the Western Cape (29%) and lowest in the North West (6%). In the Western Cape it seemed there was a movement towards the policy target, but in the other provinces this was way below the proposed figure. In KwaZulu-Natal, almost 70% of the land transferred was to male household members.

An interesting pattern emerged with respect to co-ownership. This type of land tenure practice of land reform was highest in the North West (60%) and lowest in KwaZulu-Natal (15%). This evidence suggested that in some provinces, land reform could be influencing and transforming traditional gender patterns of exclusive male agricultural land ownership.

The land reform process seems to have introduced the category of co-ownership

A tentative reason for these patterns of ownership is a combination of features that emerges from the land reform process. Men traditionally owned land and controlled the bulk of household resources, including those used for farming. In at least two of the three provinces the focus has been predominantly on transferring land to men. However, the land reform process seems to have introduced the category of co-ownership and not simply ownership through the household head alone.

Historical analyses and early missionary reports noted small numbers of exclusively female landowners, however, there is little mention of co-owned agricultural land. As the various land redistribution programmes have changed over the past 15 years, it is possible that these may have influenced ownership patterns and tended to include females in land ownership agreements alongside men. Similarly, women may have included men as partners because they were traditionally the household spokesperson, custodian of land and other resources.

Under the Settlement Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG), many males and females were jointly included in land ownership agreements. This was especially true for the communal property associations and trusts initiated as part of the land transfer process. In 2001, the LRAD sub-programme replaced SLAG.

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The requirements of this sub-programme were very different to those of SLAG. It placed demands on would-be beneficiaries for a large share of own contribution in the form of finances, capital and labour as opposed to simply earning below a certain income. According to some of those respondents participating in qualitative discussions and interviews, the implication, in many cases, was for less wealthy applicants to include household and family members in the agreements so that resources could be pooled to meet the application requirements.

When the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) replaced LRAD several years later, similar demands were placed on would-be applicants, who used similar strategies to ensure acceptance of their application. While not specifically addressing gender imbalances with regard to land ownership, these redistribution programmes have definitely resulted in co-ownership arrangements. Co-ownership might simply be a strategy to overcome the contractual requirements of the land reform sub-programmes, but it does give female partners legal standing with regard to the ownership of property.

Conclusion

The evidence from this study indicates that women have not fared as well as we would have hoped, especially in terms of increasing the extent of exclusive female ownership of farmland. However, land reform seems to have unintentionally brought men and women together as joint owners of land, thereby enabling women to have a legal share in the ownership of farmland.

Future research should look at why the transformation towards exclusively female-owned farms remains slight, especially in North West and KwaZulu-Natal. Research should investigate the stories behind the need for co-ownership and the implications of co-ownership. ■

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Our dry land: alternative models for water schemes in remote rural areas

Lessons from Namibia and South Africa

The severe drought experienced in southern Africa is a wake-up call for governments to rethink rural water schemes in remote areas.

Selma Karuaihe et al. studied rural water access and management approaches in Namibia and South Africa and suggest greater involvement of communities in water schemes.

Water scarcity is a major problem for Namibia and South Africa, as both countries are classified as 'water stressed' based on their per capita water availability, which is below the threshold of 1 000-1 666 m³ per person per year.

Water provision in these countries has traditionally relied on specific approaches to water supply, limiting the potential for expansion. This makes efforts towards managing water demand more necessary and critical. This is aggravated by the fact that water demand outstrips supply, which is currently a challenge in both countries.

Valuable lessons are emerging from an ongoing study by the HSRC and the University of Namibia on access to, and the management of, rural water in South Africa and Namibia.

Water scarcity remains one of the main challenges to socio-economic development in these countries. Rural communities carry the brunt of limited reliable water



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