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WOMEN AND LAND TENURE DYNAMICS IN PRE-COLONIAL, COLONIAL, AND POST-COLONIAL ZIMBABWE¹

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In Sub-Saharan Africa, women produce between 60 and 80 percent of agricultural foodstuffs and cash crops. Yet, in many parts of the African continent, women lack legal access to land and support services for production and distribution. As a result, women are frequently left to provide for their dependents without adequate agricultural, educational, institutional, and financial support. Based on an analysis of the historical development of women's access to land within the two major ethnic groups in present-day Zimbabwe, this paper argues that action should be taken in three broad areas. First, legal barriers to women's land rights must be challenged. Second, women have to be provided full extension and support services tailored to their needs. Third, support must be given to non-governmental organizations and movements that actively promote women's land rights.

INTRODUCTION

Women's lack of direct access to land and other means of production remains a major issue in African development. African women are denied direct access to the resources necessary to adequately produce food and cash crops on a recurring basis. As a result, African women are unnecessarily burdened and often unable to reap the potential benefits of their

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labor. This essay focuses on the Southern African country of Zimbabwe, which is exemplary in critical respects of the situation in other parts of the region. Female farmers are the major producers of agricultural foodstuffs and cash crops in Zimbabwe. Yet they cannot maintain direct access to the means of production, because land, resources, and extension services remain under patriarchal control. This limited access to resources stems from indigenous notions of patriarchy, coupled with the institutional effects of colonial rule in Zimbabwe. However, current demands and activities of women in Zimbabwe serve as a challenge to patriarchal control in the society.

This paper begins with a consideration of access to resources in an African context. Second, the paper examines the development of female access to land within the two major ethnic groups of present-day Zimbabwe, *Shona* and *Ndebele*, during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Third, the paper evaluates post-colonial government policy, with reference to women's access to land, including an analysis of some of the demands for change currently being made by Zimbabwean women. In a final section, based on a discussion of the implications of women's lack of access to land, some policy issues are outlined.

ISSUES OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT: AFRICA IN PERSPECTIVE

As the backbone of many rural economies throughout the continent of Africa, women remain the chief producers of agricultural foodstuffs and cash crops. Brett (1991, 1-7) notes that in countries such as The Gambia, Kenya, Senegal, and Uganda, women contribute 60 to 80 percent of the agricultural labor.²

Primary agricultural production, however, is not the only role for which African women are responsible. In addition to those tasks directly related to agricultural production, women in Africa perform a variety of daily chores. For example, Mehretu and Mutambirwa (1992, 1675-1683) found that women in the Chiduku communal area of Zimbabwe are often responsible for a number of tasks including fetching water and firewood, laundering, and traveling to local and regional markets. In all of these activities, women's chore burden was significantly higher than that for men. In fact, for all types of chores examined, women were found to bear greater weight for all activities save livestock grazing and watering.³

Women in various countries in Africa are often refused the opportunity to own land or hold farming or grazing permits to land in their own right. For example, McCall (1987, 192-214) asserts that 98 percent of the

economically active women in the Kilimanjaro and Bukoba regions of Tanzania are small-scale farmers on land not theirs by legal right. By virtue of custom, colonial policies, and the Ujamaa Village Act, most women in these regions are allocated indirect usufruct rights, that is, the right of enjoying all the advantages derivable from the use of land belonging to husbands or male guardians.

Access to resources and services of production and distribution is linked to direct land tenure in many African countries. As a result, in countries where women do not maintain direct access to land, females often are unable to obtain credit, cooperative membership, and marketing facilities. For instance, Bergman (1985, 20–30) maintains that in Ethiopia, the husband, as traditional head of the household, remains in control of land, production decisions, and income spending regardless of the skewed division of labor. Consequently, credit, full cooperative membership, and extension and support services, are generally afforded to the male landholders rather than the female agricultural laborers of Ethiopia. Likewise, B. Svensson (1985, 126–137) notes that in Zambia, male landholders rather than female agricultural workers tend to make agricultural production decisions. In addition to making decisions regarding the types and number of crops to be planted, men in Zambia often control cash crop production, agricultural surplus, and the proceeds of surplus. Women, however, do the majority of agricultural work in the country.

Denied direct access to land, women have little control over the products of their labor in many countries of Africa. G.M. Svensson (1985, 56–67) found that although married women in Guinea-Bissau were involved in agricultural production and marketing, they were not granted legal rights to the products of their labor. Custom in Guinea-Bissau affords men control over the labor and income of women, as no laws granting female control exist. G.M. Svensson maintains that although 60 to 80 percent of agricultural labor in Guinea-Bissau is completed by women, these chief agricultural producers do not maintain legal control over the products of their labor and, therefore, are unable to support their families directly.

Without access to resources and the fruits of their labor, women in Africa are often left to provide for their families without substantial educational, agricultural, and financial support. Furthermore, the heavy work burden of rural women may indeed threaten not only productivity, but also already declining standards of living.⁴ Whitehead (1991, 68–78) argues that in numerous countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the female-dominated agricultural sector does not maintain access to scarce resources

such as land, fertilizer, and other inputs, and therefore is unable to support rural populations through subsistence and/or cash crop production.

PRE-COLONIAL SHONA AND NDEBELE SOCIETIES

Kinship and inheritance provided the basis of organization of the Shona and Ndebele communities. Specifically, as the basis of organization, descent through males was recognized for purposes of inheritance. Male agnates, inheriting clan names from a common male ancestor, tended to cluster their dwellings, creating patrilocal lineages of fathers, brothers, and sons (and their families). The lineage elders constituted the political organization of the agnatic cluster, consulting in matters of common interest such as ceremonies, celebrations, and land allocation.⁵

Land was not owned in pre-colonial Shona and Ndebele societies. Instead, the male chief of the patrilineage held and distributed it.⁶ The chief of the patrilineage, who allocated land to village headmen, claimed descent from the original owner of the land, and as such, gained patrilineally-inherited political power as the allocator of land. The chief allocated land to the headmen, who, in turn, held all village lands in the family name and distributed land as necessary to male members of the lineage and, perhaps, with the consent of the chief, to male non-lineage members. While chiefs and headmen claimed the best lands for themselves, the role of land allocator passed from village headman to headman (Cheater 1990, 188–206). The participation of Shona and Ndebele women in land distribution and political authority was therefore largely limited to the bearing of male children who may have someday held authority as land allocators. A father typically provided his married son with village land to clear and cultivate with the help of his household. A polygamous husband was usually allocated enough land to support himself and each of his wives and families. Practicing shifting cultivation where possible, the household, whether simple or compound, remained under the authority of the husband and periodically moved to new fields as land became unproductive (Bourdillon 1987, 85–89).

Women's access to land in pre-colonial Shona and Ndebele societies was dependent on female obligations or duties within the gendered division of labor. In exchange for usufruct rights to patrilineally held land, women were expected to produce subsistence crops such as maize and women's crops such as beans, groundnuts, and other vegetables (Pankhurst and Jacobs 1990, 202–207). By virtue of their roles in the production process, women received indirect usufruct rights to land through member-

ship or association with Shona and Ndebele patrilineages as daughters and wives.

Daughters were often granted usufruct rights over the land of their fathers. A divorced daughter who had left any children and returned to her patrilineal kin usually received usufruct rights to cultivate the land of her patrilineage for subsistence. In addition, an older unwed daughter received the right to labor on her patrilineal land in order to exchange proceeds for future marital property made by other women, such as cooking pots and utensils, water pots, and baskets.

A married Shona or Ndebele woman received indirect usufruct rights to land through the patrilineage of her husband and labored on her husband's land for subsistence. The wives of a polygamous husband worked his land together, carrying out the production decisions made by the husband. In either case, married women in both simple and compound marriages spent the majority of their labor hours working the fields allocated to their husbands (Gaidzanwa 1988, 3–6).

A husband often granted his wife or wives additional plots or *tseu/isivande* which remained under the control of women.⁷ Time permitting, maize or women's crops such as beans, groundnuts, potatoes, and pumpkins which a wife in a monogamous marriage chose to cultivate on her *tseu/isivande* supplemented the produce of her husband's land, was exchanged for goods such as baskets produced by women, or was used to entertain guests in the home. In contrast, wives of polygamous husbands often used the women's plots for the production of maize for subsistence, as produce from the main fields was used by the husband for exchange, to entertain guests, and perhaps to sustain one of his families if a wife's production ran short.

For the grazing of cattle herds, women received further usufruct rights to the land of their fathers. Women grazed the cattle they received from work completed on *tseu/isivande*, as well as that received from bride wealth payments made to mothers from son-in-laws. Termed *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga*, the cattle of motherhood which women in pre-colonial Shona and Ndebele societies possessed was a sign of wealth which, depastured on male lands, remained under female control.

The land and income rights Shona and Ndebele women enjoyed in pre-colonial communities, however, were threatened by foreign intervention into African societies. Settler colonialism in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) served to compromise the rights of women in Shona and Ndebele societies, as policies privileged male landholders rather than Shona and

Ndebele female farmers. Specific colonial policies aimed at facilitating male migrant labor and capitalist agricultural and industrial development threatened women's guaranteed access to land for subsistence, personal income production, and grazing as provided by pre-colonial Shona and Ndebele institutions.⁸

COLONIALISM IN ZIMBABWE/RHODESIA

Settler colonialism began as early as 1889 in Rhodesia when the British South Africa Company (BSAC) under Cecil Rhodes received a Royal Charter of Incorporation from Great Britain. The Royal Charter granted the BSAC rights over the land north of the Limpopo River and west of present-day Malawi and Mozambique, excluding the Tati Concession of present-day Eastern Botswana. The Royal Charter further afforded the BSAC the power to make agreements and treaties with African rulers and headmen, to expropriate and distribute land, and to establish banks and police forces in its territories. Moreover, the Royal Charter allowed British nationals to occupy and settle its territories. In return, the BSAC agreed to "develop its territories economically, to respect existing African law, and to tolerate all religions" (Rasmussen and Rubert 1990, 38). In practice, however, each of these criteria was blatantly violated.

Rhodes and the BSAC invaded the land outlined in the Royal Charter in 1890 and, facing indigenous opposition and rebellion, created in 1896 the BSAC-administered colonies of Northern and Southern Rhodesia, or present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe. The BSAC exploited the mineral deposits of these areas and, upon discovery that Southern Rhodesia was relatively mineral poor, introduced capitalist agricultural development to Rhodesia. This manifested itself in schemes to ensure migrant labor and land expropriation, as well as stability in the colony. In 1884, hut taxes were introduced to force Shona and Ndebele men into migrant labor on farms and in mines and by 1902, three-quarters of African lands in Rhodesia had been expropriated.

As the BSAC and settler government of Rhodesia expropriated land formerly held by indigenous peoples, the Shona and Ndebele were assigned scarce land of generally poor soil quality and water availability (Jacobs 1983, 33–50). The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 segregated land into legal racial holdings, namely the native purchase areas (7.7 percent of the colony), native reserves (22.4 percent), European areas (50.8 percent), and unassigned areas (18.4 percent). Never totaling more than five percent of the population, the European settlers could purchase land in the superior European areas, while Africans were limited to occupy

land of poor quality in the native purchase areas, or more likely, the reserves (Ramsay 1991, 153–155).

In an effort to facilitate limited capitalist agricultural development and thus forestall Africans from moving to better lands, the settler government established the native purchase areas. In the purchase areas, wealthier African male peasants were afforded the opportunity to buy what were relatively unproductive lands.⁹ A central element of the settler government's agenda regarding the purchase areas was to allow the African elites to buy land in order to further the goal of keeping these relatively powerful Africans from uniting with the masses.

In addition to obtaining title deeds, African males in the purchase areas had the opportunity to receive certificates as Master Farmers through training programs. In contrast, wives in the purchase areas received only usufruct rights to land for subsistence and cash crop production, and often could only participate in training programs on behalf of their husbands.¹⁰ Despite this legal ability for a few Africans to purchase land in the purchase areas, these groups did not develop into a petty bourgeoisie in Rhodesia due to lack of credit and the existence of discriminatory pricing mechanisms.

The majority of the Shona and Ndebele populations were forced to reside in the crowded, rather infertile, native reserves. Despite an acute shortage of land in the African areas, Shona and Ndebele land tenure in the reserves, to some extent, resembled pre-colonial holdings and allocation. Land was allocated patrilineally by male chiefs and elders, but kin holdings were drastically reduced in size due to settler expropriation. Given the shortage of land and the fragmentation of holdings between kin and non-kin in the reserves, the usufruct rights to land which Shona and Ndebele women enjoyed prior to colonialism were threatened. Whereas unmarried women formerly received land through their patrilineages for subsistence and personal income generation, scarce land was seldom allocated to young unwed women in the reserves. While married women continued to receive usufruct rights to land through their husbands, land was allocated chiefly for subsistence and cash crops and, moreover, women were seldom granted *tseu/isivande* (Jacobs 1992, 5–34).

In addition, the work burden of Shona and Ndebele women increased because of changes in land tenure and cultivation and male participation in migrant labor. Scarcity of land and decreases in shifting cultivation resulted in declines in productivity and necessitated increased female labor for subsistence. As taxes and other policies forced men to enter settler employment, women were left as *de facto* heads of households, despite

scarcity of land and lack of direct access to the means of production and distribution (Gaidzanwa 1981, 1–10). Women worked upwards of 16 hours a day carrying out their customary tasks in the gendered division of labor, as well as those tasks normally allocated to their absent husbands.

In an effort to grant protection of land rights to migrant male labor and foster limited African capitalist agricultural production, the settler government of Rhodesia adopted the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) in 1951. In practice, the NLHA allowed for the individualized land tenure of Shona and Ndebele men, as land tended to be registered in the names of male heads of households. The NLHA thereby gave male heads of households individual, rather than lineage, rights to land. Without rights guaranteed through customary tenure, female laborers, often with *de facto* head of household status, were marginalized to land use rights which were not registered through the NLHA. As a result, female farmers were often denied direct access to land for subsistence, cash crop production, *tseu/isivande*, and grazing for *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga*.

For the purposes of the NLHA, land amounting to a standard area, the size of which varied between African regions, was allocated to monogamous Shona and Ndebele men who held so-called farming rights. Husbands therefore received farming rights and land tenure in their own right, while wives were limited to unmitigated usufruct access to land through their husbands. With regard to polygamous husbands, the NLHA provided the male with an additional area equal to one-third of the standard area for each wife beyond the first.¹¹

Whereas men over the age of 21, independent of marital status, could receive farming rights and therefore land tenure in the African areas, female direct tenure was limited to female widows, desertees whose husbands' whereabouts were unknown or outside the colony, divorcees with custody of children, and spinsters over age 25. As a result of custom and customary law, however, few women qualified for farming rights and direct land tenure given these restrictions. Furthermore, farming rights and land tenure in terms of the standard area could not be transferred or inherited to those with usufruct access and, as a result, some women, upon being widowed, deserted, or divorced, lost rights to the land in which they had invested their labor.

Despite few women having direct access to farming rights and land under the NLHA, females led the production units as heads of households. In 1956, 63.8 percent of males age 15–49 were employed outside the African areas, most leaving their wives, sisters, mothers, and daughters as agricultural laborers on land allocated to the male absentee owners. Under

the NLHA, Shona and Ndebele women were again left as de facto heads of households without direct access to the means of production and distribution.

Returning to clear the land and perhaps harvest the crop, Shona and Ndebele men legally controlled production decisions through the NLHA. Indeed, women often complained that men made production decisions at the expense of female laborers. For example, men often made decisions with regard to which crops to plant on cash crop, subsistence, and available tseu/isivande lands. One contemporary Shona women farmer argues:

No, women do not control the land. The land is controlled by men. I say this because we are given two acres to cultivate, but our husbands only let us plant maize. So where are we supposed to plant groundnuts, peas, and fruit which are good for our families (Zimbabwe Women's Bureau 1981, 23)¹²

Through the NLHA, women not only were denied access to the means of production, but also lost influence and income from the cultivation of women's crops from tseu/isivande. This was largely a consequence of men, encouraged by government policy which stressed production for the colonial economy, choosing to allocate land to cash crop production rather than to tseu/isivande. Furthermore, by virtue of the NLHA, men often retained access to the fruits of women's labor, as government marketing board checks were given to heads of households, which were defined by virtue of Shona and Ndebele custom and colonial law as men. Another Shona woman argues:

Think how upsetting it is to work land that is not yours. The money you earn from the crops you grow is taken by your husband (Zimbabwe Women's Bureau 1981, 23).¹³

Despite the fact that women were the most involved in agricultural production, the usufruct rights granted them through the NLHA in effect caused a further loss of control over both production and income.

Women also lost control over cattle wealth as the NLHA additionally dispossessed women of grazing rights for *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga*. Grazing rights and land for *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga* were afforded in the same manner as farming rights, and land grants were determined by the standard number of cattle a monogamously married husband and wife were permitted to graze. However, women without a partner or with an absent partner, who did receive grazing rights to land in their own right, were subject to lose those rights after two years if they did not also hold a direct farming right and land. In addition, grazing

rights could not be transferred to or inherited by widows, desertees, divorcees, and spinsters, despite that custom afforded women the right to accumulate *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga*.

In its attempt to develop capitalist agriculture through the NLHA, the settler government of Rhodesia in effect deepened the divisions and discriminatory nature of resource allocation (and overall power relationships) between men and women in Shona and Ndebele societies. In particular, the NLHA and agricultural policies served to perpetuate, and perhaps worsen, the subordination of African women in Rhodesia, as they, although maintaining usufruct rights to land for subsistence, remained the unpaid labor in subsistence and cash crop production. In addition, the labor burden of women increased due to declines in land productivity and migrant male employment.

Opposition to the NLHA led to lack of settler enforcement in the 1960s and 1970s, as the newly elected (white-supremacist) Rhodesian Front party sought to maintain settler control amidst growing indigenous discontent. The Tribal Trust Land Act of 1967 and the Land Tenure Act of 1969 further outlined tenure based on racial segregation, allowing for male allocation and the continuation of the system of migrant labor. Despite the settler government's attempts to quiet indigenous opposition, nationalist movements sought to regain the land first expropriated by the BSAC and settlers some hundred years before.

LAND RIGHT POLICIES IN INDEPENDENT ZIMBABWE

After more than 10 years of civil war, Zimbabwe emerged as an independent nation under African rule in 1980. The newly elected government led by Robert G. Mugabe, a member of Shona society, at least nominally set out to reverse colonial policies, including those with regard to land. Attempting to address inequalities in distribution between European- and African-held lands, the Zimbabwe government embarked upon various land reform and resettlement policies.¹⁴

Upon independence, the government of Zimbabwe embarked upon a land resettlement program in order to relieve overpopulation in the reserves, create an opportunity for poor and landless farmers, and bring abandoned and underutilized land into production.¹⁵ With monetary assistance from the British, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Land, Agriculture, and Rural Resettlement (MLARR) has thus far resettled approximately 52,000 families with differing schemes, including Models A, B, C, and D.¹⁶ Model A schemes consist of 50,000 family village-type resettlements of five arable hectares and 15 grazing hectares each; Model B is based on

collective cooperation and houses 3,000 settlers; 4,000 settlers are living in Model C and D schemes which consist of 10 hectare plots attached to a state farm and villages with arable but no grazing lands, respectively.

The 50,000 families which have resettled in Model A schemes receive permits from the MLARR on a family basis to reside, cultivate, and depasture or graze stock on resettlement lands, as the scheme is based on nuclear family holdings of residential, arable, and grazing lands. Receiving permits rather than land ownership rights, resettled families within Model A schemes must relinquish land in the Communal Areas (CAs) and reside in the Resettlement Areas (RAs), as formal employment of either spouse is prohibited. Resettlement officers reserve the right to retract permits if requirements are broken or if certain production quotas are not met.

Although Section 6 of the Zimbabwe Rural Land Act stipulates that the names of either or both spouses can appear on resettlement permits, in practice few married women hold independent or joint farming and grazing permits with their husbands (Chimedza 1988). In legal terms, women were considered as minors under colonial law, and it was only in 1982 that the Legal Age of Majority Act granted women full adult status under formal law. Despite the Act, however, some legal institutions, such as the Deeds Registry Office, still seem to operate as if women were in fact minors under the law. Roth and Bruce (1994, 32–33), for example, find that Section 15 of the prior Deeds Registry Act still works to limit the ability of women to control land.

This section requires that a married woman have her deed attested by a registrar or a legal practitioner, disclose that she is indeed married, and state the name of her husband. She must be assisted by her husband in executing any deed or document required or permitted to be registered in the deeds registry, unless proof is produced to satisfy the registrar that she has the legal capacity to execute it without the assistance of her husband (Roth and Bruce 1994, 32–33).

Additionally, thus far, land reform efforts themselves have lacked a specific gender focus, as reforms have not recognized the situation and needs of women farmers (Jacobs 1996, 35–42). As a result, women are not integrated directly into the cash economy, as resettlement permits are most often granted to male heads of households rendering women as agricultural laborers rather than farmers in their own right (Jacobs 1992, 5–34).¹⁷ Although 98 percent of husbands hold RA permits to farm and graze lands, only 2 percent of wives do.

Why are only the names of men who have studied farming and have skills being taken for resettlement? Women have also studied, but they [the resettlement officers] are not taking our names. So women are not included in development activities in Zimbabwe. We struggled to win this Zimbabwe, but the government has forgotten and is not interested in women's development and needs (Zimbabwe Women's Bureau 1993, 23–24).¹⁸

Denied permits to farm and graze *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga*, women face potential destitution in cases of divorce or husband's death. Women usually lose any rights to RA lands upon divorce and, as such, return to their kin who may not have already given up land rights in the CAs. A woman who is widowed may retain land rights in the RAs if the resettlement officer deems the household has enough labor to till the land without the husband. In practice, the Resettlement Officers' schemes allocate to divorced or widowed women with dependents, land amounting to one half of the standard area allocated to males.

Numerous women in the RAs are also denied security of income from *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga*. Forced to graze their cattle on land allocated to their husbands, women may be denied access to graze *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga* if a husband's land does not suffice. When men choose to depasture their own rather than their wives' cattle, women may not be allowed to sustain *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga* and its resulting wealth.

Women in the RAs are denied access not only to land for *tseu/isivande* and *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga*, but also to credit and loans. Whereas farming permit holders, the vast majority of which are male, are afforded government sponsored credit through the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC), women do not have access to loans in their own right. Thus, even if a woman is allocated *tseu/isivande* from a male permit holder such as her husband, she will be unable to use her usufruct rights to land to receive loans for inputs such as fertilizer and seeds. Intrahousehold relationships pose a further threat to women's access to credit for agricultural inputs.¹⁹ For example, 32 percent of men surveyed by the Department of Agricultural, Technical, and Extension Services (AGRITEX) who would allow their wives to borrow money said women could borrow only for social use; another 32 percent would give their wives permission to take out a loan only when small amounts of money were involved.

Loans through the government's Rural Housing Programme are limited to land permit holders. Consequently, the housing loan and the homestead remain in the name of the husband, regardless of the fact that the wife's labor in cash crop production may in effect repay the majority

of the loan. Moreover, AGRITEX offers no extension services which are geared toward the special circumstances of female farmers. Extension services do not adequately account for the constraints of female farmers, such as the work burden, usufruct rights to land, and lack of access to livestock, credit, and decision making power. Finally, extension workers tend to be males, who may or may not be sensitized to the constraints on female farmers.²⁰

WOMEN AND DEMANDS FOR LAND RIGHTS

Denied direct access to land in the resettlement areas, numerous Shona and Ndebele women in the urban and rural centers are demanding changes in the land tenure system of independent Zimbabwe. As the government acquires new lands from the white commercial farmers, female farmers and urbanites alike claim that women should share in the control of land. Pamela Tungamirai, a female ex-combatant, explains that this is "the time we [ex-combatants] had been waiting for, to be rewarded for our contribution during the war. Land is the reason why we all left our homes to join the liberation struggle" (Women Seek Say 1994, 7). The women who joined the liberation struggle as combatants, as well as those who remained in support of combatants, demand access to land in their own right.

Burgess and Beilstein (1996, 25) argue that the anti-colonial war of the 1970s united Zimbabwean women's movements in a way never before possible, with the present result being a relatively well-developed system of women's organizations at the local, regional, and national levels. The challenge in the contemporary context is to use and extend the power of women's organizations across geographical (rural/urban) boundaries in demanding better access to resources, including land. Concerned with gaining access to the means of subsistence and protecting customary sources of personal income (e.g., *tseu/isivande* and *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga*), rural women in Zimbabwe are currently engaged in this challenge, demanding changes in the prevailing land tenure system. In the RAs, for example, 70 percent of the women consulted are in favor of receiving joint permits to farm land and depasture stock with their husbands (Chenaux-Repond 1994, 3).

As the majority producers of agricultural foodstuffs and cash crops in Zimbabwe, women demand access not only to land, but also to the services of production, which remain linked to direct land tenure. Granted direct rather than usufruct rights to land, women could receive access to income from the production of cash and women's crops. Furthermore, AFC credit, as well as loans from the Ministry of Construction and National

Housing and the Rural Housing Programme, would be granted to female farmers who held land rights. Direct access to land, income, and credit may indeed prevent the displacement of female farmers, as women are afforded control over the means of production (Gladwin and McMillan 1989, 345–69).

Demands for direct access to land from female farmers including single mothers and married women have been articulated by women at public conferences such as the January 1994 workshop on “Women and the Land” in Harare. Both wealthy and peasant female farmers who attended the one day workshop in the capital city of Zimbabwe asserted the need for direct access to land. Given direct access to land, women would share equally in the benefits of the liberation and the fruits of their labor, and be more equitably integrated into various development processes as controllers and beneficiaries of development.

Female farmers in addition to non-governmental organizations, churches, and women’s organizations have additionally articulated the need for direct female access to land. Welcoming the government’s January 1994 call for suggestions to the Zimbabwe Land Tenure Commission, advocates of women’s land rights have offered recommendations to the government body. Articles in *The Herald*, the country’s largest newspaper, also called for concerned members of the public to offer opinions and recommendations to the Land Tenure Commission.

Female demands for access to land have been met, however, by criticisms from both the government and many men. Stressing that cash crop production was the main goal of resettlement in Zimbabwe, President Mugabe in an August 1994 question session of parliament asserted that “there should be justice for both partners in a marriage . . . but rejected calls for the registration of both spouses’ names on land permits, saying that these were foreign ideas not acceptable in Zimbabwe where the man was the head of the household” (Resettlement Now 1994, 7). President Mugabe further maintained that the government did not accept that “property that is family property [including land and the fruits of female labor] should be registered in two names” (Resettlement Now 1994, 7).

A social observer from Bulawayo (the country’s second largest city) claimed in a letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail* that as “the fight for women’s so-called rights heats up, it is becoming noticeable that their demands are becoming more and more absurd” (Social Observer 1994, 2). Such “absurd demands” of women include access to land in their own right. Another observer argues that “the militant ‘libbers’ have advocated that land must be registered in the woman’s name (because as they say, she

is the one who tills the land) or jointly. Taking into account the various social and cultural factors into play, I do not know how the system could work in practice” (Maximize Use of Census Data 1993, 4).

In practice, the direct allocation of land to women is in conflict with the patriarchal control of not only land, but also the income and labor of women. The demands of women serve not to destroy the family and kin structure of the Shona and Ndebele, but rather, to afford women a share in production. As Shona and Ndebele societies in independent Zimbabwe have thus far failed to afford women even their customary access to personal lands and income, women will continue to demand direct access to land and resources and services of production.

IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY ISSUES

Whereas the pre-colonial kinship structure of the Shona and Ndebele recognized, albeit perhaps secondarily, women’s rights to land for subsistence production and personal income generation, the present land situation in Zimbabwe fails to guarantee women access to land. Consequently, women in the Resettlement Areas do not have direct access to land for farming and grazing *mombe yeumai/inkomo yohlanga* and as a result are denied access to income, *tseu/isivande*, and services and resources of production. Without direct access to land, income, and services and resources of production and distribution, Shona and Ndebele women are left to provide for their families without adequate agricultural, educational, institutional, and financial support.

In order to increase the welfare of women and their families while affording women greater opportunities, women in Zimbabwe must be provided with numerous resources and support services. Direct control over the means of production, including inputs such as land, credit, and social services, in addition to increased decision making capacity within production and development projects, may increase agricultural output while decreasing female work burdens throughout the country.

At least three interdependent policy recommendations can be made to enhance women’s access and control to the means of production and the fruits of their labor. First, the Legal Age of Majority Act and Section 6 of the Zimbabwe Rural Land Act need to be applied with regard to current and future resettlement. That is, the actions of the Deeds Registry Office, where inconsistent with the aforementioned Acts, need to be directly challenged on legal grounds. Although the legal ability for women to be granted title deeds exists, in practice the now outdated Deeds Registry Act still reigns supreme, and titles are more often than not granted to men

instead of women. This practice must be directly challenged by women's groups and others dedicated to seeing women in control of their lives and destinies. Furthermore, resettlement programs must take into account the continuing needs and special circumstances of women farmers and be designed accordingly.

Second, all women farmers, including those who have not and will not take part in land reform schemes, must be given full extension and support services tailored to their needs and circumstances. Increasing the number of women extension staff will help in this regard, but what is more fundamental is a reorientation of extension activities toward women's participation in the design and content of extension. As most women farmers in Zimbabwe will never participate in resettlement, the key policy confrontation between women farmers and development policy will likely be over agricultural extension, research, and related activities in the communal areas. One possible area for intervention is in the promotion of elements of pre-colonial tenure institutions such as tseu/isivande and yeumai/inkomo yohlanga, adapted to current challenges and gender conceptualizations.

Third, enabling the first and second recommendations to become a reality, women's organizations, movements, and gender-issue-active non-governmental organizations in Zimbabwe must be given strong support. Cooperatives, savings clubs, Village Development Committees, and various governmental women's groups and leagues are all examples of organizations which allow women to come together and articulate issues and plans for social action. Grassroots-level development agencies, organizations, and advocacy groups are also relevant in this regard. Burgess and Beilstein (1996, 23-31) found that institutional structures hindering women's advancement in Zimbabwe are more effectively challenged and altered where such women's activities and organizations are strong. These efforts must be articulated at the local, regional, and national level.

Notes

¹The authors express their appreciation to Ane Quade, Bob Walter, Robert Curry, and the JPIA editors for comments on previous drafts. The usual disclaimer applies.

²Boserup (1970) found that men in Africa remain more active in the production of cash crops than in the cultivation of subsistence agriculture.

³This endeavor takes the view of Sen (1990) that activities in and outside the home constitute the production process. Women's activities which support agricultural production and other income generation, as

well as domestic tasks, are therefore viewed as productive aspects of the household.

⁴Hannan-Anderson (1985) maintains that women must receive greater attention in distribution of productive resources if agricultural development in Africa is to succeed.

⁵For elaboration on the Shona chiefdom and government administration, see Bourdillon, Michael. 1987. *The Shona Peoples* (3rd. ed.). Gweru: Mambo Press, 101–23; and Gelfand, Michael. 1971. *Diet and Tradition in an African Culture*. Edinburgh: E. and S. Livingstone. For a study of the political organization of the Ndebele, see Hughes, A.J.B. 1959. *Kin, Caste, and Nation Among the Rhodesian Ndebele*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

⁶Of course, historically and at present, there are indeed some differences in Shona and Ndebele land tenure systems. With regard to the social phenomena under investigation here, however, these differences are subtle and aggregation of the land tenure systems of these two ethnic groups does not pose a problem for purposes of analysis. Appropriate linguistic differences of social institutions are noted in the text. Another issue which should be mentioned is the use of Shona, rather than Ndebele, sources in this study. Unfortunately, at present, formal research on Ndebele systems in their own right is scant, and as such, the authors were forced to perhaps over-rely on Shona sources of evidence.

⁷Women's plot is defined as *Tseu* in Shona and *isivande* in Ndebele. For the purposes of this paper, references to the Shona and Ndebele languages will maintain the Shona/Ndebele order.

⁸For further elaboration of the specific effects of settler colonialism on women in Zimbabwe, see Schmidt, Elizabeth. 1990. Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain: Men, Women, and the Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1939. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 16, 4 (December): 622–48 and ———. 1991. Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 16, 4: 732–56.

⁹According to Rasmussen and Rubert (1990), by 1925 Africans had purchased 18,210 hectares of non-Reserve land, while settlers had purchased 12.5 million hectares.

¹⁰For example, Gaidzanwa (1981) notes that one woman finished a Master Farmer program only to learn that the certificate would be awarded to her husband. Only with persistent complaints was the certificate granted in the name of the wife.

¹¹Unless otherwise noted, legal information in the remainder of this section is taken from: Southern Rhodesia Government Printer. 1952. *The Native Land Husbandry Act*. Salisbury: Government Printer.

¹²Translation from the Shona by Beverly Peters and John Peters.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴According to Chimedza (1988), at independence, 6,000 white commercial farmers owned 40 percent of the total land area of Zimbabwe. Africans, who comprised 75 percent of the population of 7.5 million, held 42 percent of the total land area.

¹⁵Resettlement has proceeded relatively slowly, however, as the Lancaster House Agreement of 1980-90 and internal and international issues (such as the maintenance of foreign exchange earnings, continued foreign aid, the costs inherent in the program, and Zimbabwean government corruption and lack of commitment) have limited the scale and quality of land reform. For further elaboration of internal and international hindrances to land reform, see Arnold, Guy. 1990. The Land Dilemma. *Africa Report*. 35, 1 (March-April): 58-61.

¹⁶For overviews of post-independence land reform efforts in Zimbabwe, see Cousins, Ben. 1994. Institutions for Land Redistribution and Management: The Zimbabwean Experience. *South African Sociological Review*. 6, 2 (April): 32-55, and Palmer, Robin. 1990. Land Reform in Zimbabwe, 1980-1990. *African Affairs Journal of the Royal African Society*. 89, 355 (April): 163-181.

¹⁷It is often the case that Resettlement Officers fail to inform women that they maintain the right to apply for permits in their own right.

¹⁸Translation from the Shona by Beverly Peters and John Peters.

¹⁹Madondo's (1992) survey in Nyamaropa, Mutema, Deure, and Nyanyadzi, found that, in most cases, if a household maintains credit, the husband as head of the household controls the loan.

²⁰In Makonde District, for example, in 1989, two out of a total of 45 extension staff were women and extension workers tended to visit male farmers more often than female farmers.

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