

Trapped

in poverty:

An analysis of gender and the role of agricultural development support in agrarian land reform

The December 2017 ANC 54th Conference resolution to support expropriation without compensation, has ignited vigorous debates, but the ensuing debates have been largely silent about the necessity for coupling land transfer with effective post settlement support to land reform beneficiaries, especially women. *Shirin Motala and Stewart Ngandu* report.

Infrastructure, such as windpumps to access underground water, is crucial for farmers in dry parts of South Africa.

Photo: Graeme Williams (Brand South Africa)



Post-1994, South Africa adopted very ambitious goals with respect to land and agrarian reform that would contribute to an overarching integrated rural economy vision. The focus was on five outcomes including the promotion of rural job creation, improving access to affordable and diverse foods and a promise that women should make up at least one-third of all land reform beneficiaries. After two decades of farmland redistribution, evidence suggests that these outcomes have not been achieved. In fact, the National Development Plan Vision 2030 (2011) identified the lack of support to small-scale farmers as a major risk for agricultural expansion. Evidence from global and national research studies suggests that post settlement support is critical for sustaining rural agrarian-based livelihoods. Researchers have also identified the need for a gendered approach in the provision of agricultural development support.

Women have not benefitted equally from land reform

A micro-level study conducted by the HSRC in 2012 found that few land reform beneficiaries had had access to agricultural development support and that women had not benefitted equally or equitably through land transfer mechanisms and agricultural development support.

The study, which combined a purpose-built household survey with key informant interviews and focus group discussions, was conducted in two districts in each of three provinces, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and the Western Cape. These provinces have varied agrarian structures and agro-ecological zones suited to different types of agricultural production. The study uniquely over-layered farmland transfer data with the provisioning of agricultural development support information. It focused on beneficiaries of three farmland transfer mechanisms

implemented in South Africa since 1994, namely redistribution, restitution and security of tenure and their access to government-funded agricultural development support programmes, namely the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme and the Recapitalisation and Development Programme. The researchers used the sustainable livelihoods framework as the lens for making sense of gendered livelihood outcomes in the countryside.

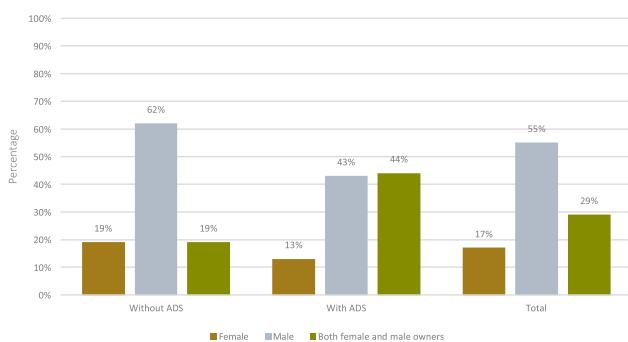
Land reform beneficiaries

Of the 286 land reform beneficiaries in the sample, over half (54%) were men, followed by joint ownership at 29% and females exclusively owning land at a mere 17%. The ownership rates for women in sub-Saharan Africa, based on a study of 16 countries, was reported as 24% in a paper *Gender Inequalities in Ownership and Control of Land in Africa: Myth versus Reality* published by the International Food Policy Research Institute.

Access to agricultural development support

The study found that less than half (43%) of all land reform beneficiaries had accessed agricultural development services. Of those beneficiaries, male land owners (55%) were the largest recipients of state-funded agricultural development support interventions as Figure 1 shows. The importance of post-settlement agricultural development support to enable access to markets, infrastructure, education and training to enhance productive use of agricultural land has been well documented.

Figure 1: Gender of land owners without and with agricultural development support: Land received from land reform programme (n = 286)



Source: Motala, Ngandu and Aubrey Mpungose, 2017

Asset accumulation

Ownership of farming assets is an indicator of a household's ability to invest in productive resources, which in turn is expected to contribute to increased agricultural productivity for subsistence and commercial farming. The researchers probed the changes in asset ownership

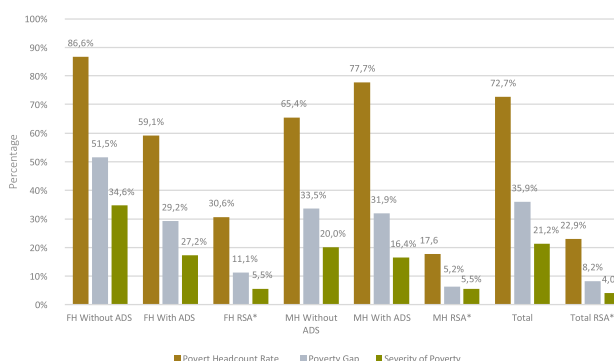
from the time of land transfers to the time that the survey was conducted. Lists of assets owned were consolidated into an index of seven common assets that can be found across different types of farming activities, and this included irrigation equipment, light farm equipment (wheelbarrows, axes, etc.), heavy farm machinery (tractors, harvesters, trailers, bakkies, etc.) and farm infrastructure (storage tanks, sheds etc.).

On average, female-headed households with access to agricultural development services had acquired the highest number of assets post-land transfer (higher by at least 3 units) reflecting a positive relationship between access to agricultural development support and asset accumulation. The study did not probe how these assets contributed to enhancing livelihoods, hence it was not possible to assess the contribution of asset ownership towards improved agricultural production and enhanced livelihoods.

Poverty status by gender

Most land reform programmes have poverty reduction as one of their intended outcomes for beneficiaries. The findings in Figure 2 show that female-headed households who received agricultural development support had the lowest levels of poverty in terms of its incidence, depth and severity. This is in sharp contrast to female-headed households who did not receive support that fared worse across all three indicators and relative to all household types. While female-headed households with support had better welfare outcomes than their counterparts, their poverty levels were still substantially higher than the national average. This suggests that land reform, even with the requisite support, might not be the panacea to rural poverty alleviation.

Figure 2: Poverty measures incidence, depth and severity by gender of head of household and ADS (n = 286)



Source: Motala, Ngandu and Aubrey Mpungose, (2017); *Statistics South Africa (2017) based on the lower-bound poverty line (LBPL) 2011



Working at the Moya We Khaya community garden in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape has provided Christina Kaba (69) and many of her community members a means to escape extreme poverty. This urban farming project is supported by the Abalimi Bezekhaya NGO, but Kaba does not own the land. "We would like to build a cold store and other infrastructure on the land, but the funders are reluctant, because the land is leased. What will happen to the investment if the lease comes to an end? We need title deeds to move forward."

Conclusions

The study provides a compelling storyline of female-headed beneficiary households without agricultural development support who are trapped in poverty. Land-based agriculture households are highly vulnerable with low levels of human capital (educational levels), financial and physical capital (infrastructure), despite their access to natural capital in the form of land. The findings show that poverty is more nuanced for female-headed households and women have not benefitted equally or equitably through land transfer mechanisms and agricultural development support. Female-headed beneficiary households with access to state-funded agricultural development support demonstrated a positive relationship with increased household food expenditure, which is a proxy for food consumption responsive to chronic food insecurity. This finding suggests that agricultural development support is an important mediator of land reform success. Land transfer without agricultural development support is unlikely to generate enhanced livelihoods outcomes, especially for female-headed beneficiary households. The researchers found that households are engaging in agriculture mainly for household consumption and not as a main source of livelihoods, which might explain low levels of land use. The researchers believe support for women's agricultural activities is justified despite low commercial potential as there are few alternatives for livelihood generation.

Recommendations

The study suggests that there is a need to generate gender-disaggregated evidence to inform policy making and argues for more considered measurement of impacts of policy and programme interventions that is underpinned by well-articulated theories of change. There is also a need to address the barriers to access for marginalised women farmers including capacity development, access to appropriate resources and financial support.

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