

NO MAN'S LAND:

A gendered analysis of support for land reform in South Africa

In mid-August, the HSRC convened a gender dialogue on land as a contribution to ongoing debates and public hearings relating to land reform policy in the country. From a social and restorative justice as well as development perspective, the dialogue drew attention to the critical importance of ensuring access to and ownership of land for women in the country. *Dr Ben Roberts, Prof. Narnia Bohler-Muller, Jarè Struwig, Thobeka Radebe, and Samela Mtyingizane* examine survey data on support for land reform in South Africa over the past fifteen years to determine the scale of gender-based variation and the degree of uniformity of support among women.

Gender inequality in access to, and ownership of, land remains a critical challenge that infringes on human dignity, rights and security. Therefore, ensuring that the voices of women are heard and effectively shape the legislative and policy choices made around the redistribution of land is of paramount importance. It is one of the motivating factors informing the decision to convene the recent gender and land dialogues.

Against this backdrop, HSRC researchers used data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) to explore gender differentials in support for land reform, as well as the degree to which women share a solidaristic view of this policy issue.

Asking about land

The HSRC has been conducting the SASAS annually since 2003. The nationally representative, repeated cross-sectional surveys have an average sample of approximately 3,000 adults living in private residence and the survey is typically conducted in the last quarter of each calendar year. For this analysis, the researchers used data from all 15 annual rounds conducted to date, covering the period from 2003 to 2017. They relied on a standard land reform question that is included in a battery of items aimed at assessing public opinion about redistributive

policy. The question is phrased as follows:

To what extent do you agree or disagree that government should redistribute land to black South Africans?

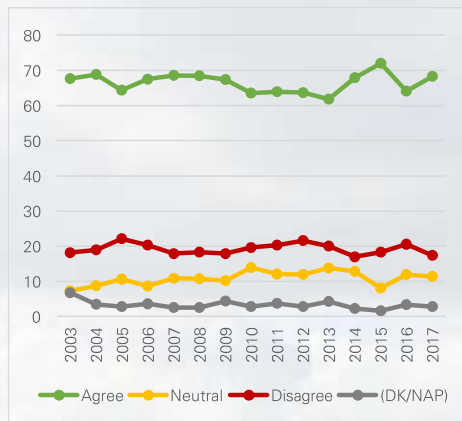
Respondents' answers were recorded using a standard 5-point agreement scale. The consistent fielding of this item over a long period offered important insight into societal support for land reform policy.

A gender difference?

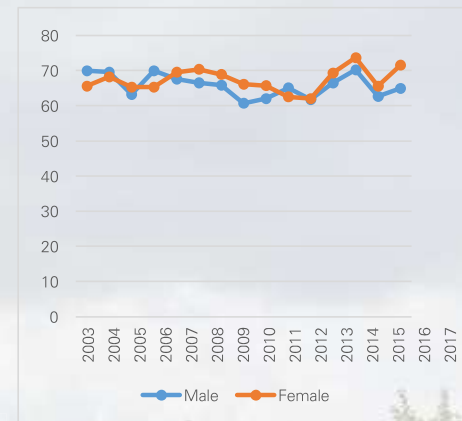
Figure 1(a) demonstrates that, despite modest fluctuations, there has been a generally consistent pattern in public preferences for land reform since the early 2000s. Over the period, an average of 67% of South African adults favoured land reform, with support ranging between a low of 62% to a high of 72%. By contrast, around a fifth of South Africans voice opposition to land reform (19% on average, ranging from 17-22%), a tenth (11%) are neutral and a nominal share are uncertain (3%). These results point to the robust, favourable view that South Africans have of this redress policy. It is also worth noting the slight upswing in support that has occurred post-2013, which possibly reflects the growing political discourse and sense of urgency around addressing the land question.

Figure 1: Support for land reform in South Africa, 2003-2017 (%)

(a) National distribution



(b) Gender differences in support (% favouring)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) rounds 1-15, 2003-2017



Xoliswa Magutywa (63) working in the Moya We Khaya community garden in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape. "It is my passion to grow vegetables and to work with my hands in the soil. These plants are like my children and they help to put food on the table."

“ OPPOSITION TO LAND REFORM IS MORE APPARENT AMONG ELITE AND HISTORICALLY PRIVILEGED WOMEN, MEANING CHALLENGES TO THE STATUS QUO MAY REMAIN HIGHLY CONTESTED ”

Figure 1(b) shows that there is not a sizeable gender-based cleavage in preferences for land reform, and that the patterns over time are broadly consistent. The percentage favouring land reform in principle was 66% for men and 67% for women on average over the 15 years of annual surveying. More sophisticated analysis testing the influence of gender on preferences for this redress policy (results not shown) revealed that women are marginally more likely than men to voice support for land reform.

How unified were women?

While two-thirds of women favour land reform in principle, this view is not necessarily uniformly held among all. Table 1 presents the all-year averages (combined data covering 2003-2017) for women based on birth cohort, population group, educational attainment, subjective poverty status and type of geographic location.

The results suggest that there are discernible cleavages in preferences for land reform among women in the country. This is fairly modest along generational lines, with younger women more inclined to support land reform than older women (70% among those born after 1980 vs. 62% among generations born before 1960). The gradient of variation is more appreciable along race, class and political party identification lines. For instance, 80% of black African women support land reform compared to slightly more than a quarter of coloured and Indian women and a meagre 15% of white women. There is also a 20 to 25 percentage point gradient of difference in support based on educational status, subjective poverty status and geographic locations, with social disadvantage associated with higher support for redistribution. Politically, support for land reform is not especially different among female supporters of the ANC and EFF (79% vs. 72%), though the divide between these supporters and DA supporters is more than 45 percentage points.

Table 1: Support for land reform among women in South Africa on average between 2003 and 2017 (row %)

	Support	Oppose	Neutral or uncertain	Total
All women	67	18	15	100
Birth cohort				
Born Free (born after 1980)	70	15	14	100
(Born 1990 and after)	(69)	(11)	(15)	(100)
(Born 1980s)	(71)	(11)	(14)	(100)
Struggle Generation (1960-79)	67	19	14	100
Grand Apartheid (1945-59)	62	23	15	100
Early and pre-apartheid (born before 1945)	62	21	17	100
Population group				
Black African	80	8	12	100
Coloured	28	46	26	100
Indian/Asian	27	55	18	100
White	15	61	24	100
Educational attainment				
Primary or no formal schooling	74	12	14	100
Grades 8-11	70	16	14	100
Matric or equivalent	64	22	15	100
Tertiary or equivalent	53	29	18	100
Subjective poverty status				
Poor	78	10	12	100
Just get	70	17	13	100
Non-poor	55	27	18	100
Geographic location				
Urban formal	58	25	17	100
Urban informal	81	8	11	100
Rural traditional authority areas	82	8	11	100
Rural farms	63	21	16	100
Party identification				
ANC	79	9	12	100
EFF	72	11	17	100
DA	26	55	20	100
Other political party	59	23	18	100

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) rounds 1-15, 2003-2017

Note: The percentages in the table are based on combined data over the 2003-2017 period, meaning that the results should be interpreted as all-year averages.

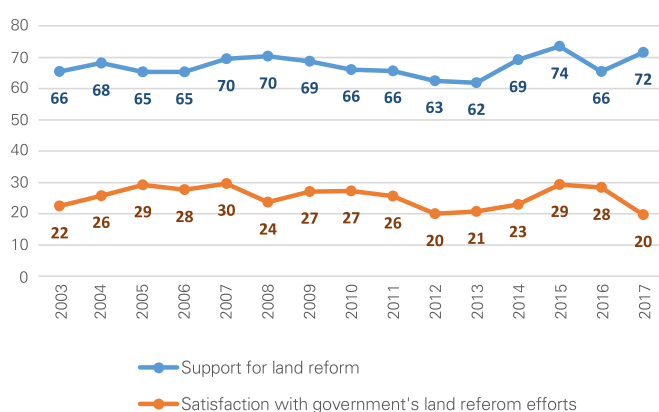


These findings show that while on average there is fairly broad-based support for land reform among women, there clearly exists what some scholars have referred to as a ‘stubborn kernel of opposition’ to redistribution underlying this aggregate picture. The fact that this opposition is more apparent among elites and the historically privileged means that policy proposals challenging the status quo are likely to remain highly contested.

Are government efforts matching expectations?

After nearly a quarter-century of post-apartheid land reform, how appreciable is the gap between support for land reform and evaluations of government performance in this regard? Perhaps unsurprisingly, we find that the women tend to rate progress in a harsh light. In late 2017, only 20% of women were satisfied with progress in relation to government’s land reform programme, and satisfaction fluctuated between 20 and 30% over the fifteen-year interval. Current levels of satisfaction with the implementation of land reform are at an all-time low, which may also partly explain why this policy issue has once again come firmly under the spotlight.

Figure 2: The gap between female support for land reform and evaluations of state progress, 2003-2017 (%)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) rounds 1-15, 2003-2017

Land reform and competing national priorities?

One of the paradoxes of land and associated policies and programmes is that, despite the attention it commands in political discourse, public debate and the media, it does not feature high up on the public’s national agenda. When asked to specify what the most pressing societal challenges are that face the country, land appears considerably lower down the list of priorities, especially when compared to unemployment, crime and safety, poverty, corruption and service delivery.

In late 2017, land reform issues were mentioned as a national priority by fewer than 5% of South African adults. This did not vary much by gender (4% women; 3% men). From a rank order perspective, land did not even feature in the top ten cited priorities, being placed 13th by women and 15th by men. This pattern also did not alter appreciably over the last fifteen years, with the percentage citing land reform as a national priority varying in a small range between 2% and 4% over this period on aggregate (1-4% for women and 2-5% for men).

This apparent attitudinal inconsistency between strong approval of land reform as a general programme of government and its low public ranking as a national priority certainly warrants more attention. It might again reflect the different symbolic and material meanings attached to land in the country and how these can intersect in different ways to inform contemporary land reform debates and seemingly paradoxical public opinion on land reform.

Conclusion

The survey results show that land reform is a redistributive policy that is as widely (if not marginally more) supported among women as it is for men, and that this support has remained relatively stable over time. The significant gap between support for this policy in principle and satisfaction with programmatic implementation is likely to be one of the factors driving the increasingly popular and political appeals for new approaches and a policy rethink to progressively advance the land reform agenda. Yet, the results also point to the polarising nature and complexities that are associated with such debates. This is apparent in the cleavages in support among women, most especially along racial, class and political lines, as well as the disjuncture between support for state-led land reform programmes and the relative ranking of land reform in the public agenda.

The survey evidence points to the urgent need for a fuller, more nuanced examination of land reform attitudes and policy preferences that takes into account emerging new global challenges and the evolving policy context. This is something that the HSRC intends to prioritise in forthcoming rounds of its social attitudes survey series.

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