

Sustainable multi-functional agrarian landscapes on restitution land: importance of women's participation

MIRIAM MURAMBADORO AND CONSTANSIA MUSVOTO

BACKGROUND

South Africa's Land Restitution Programme has provided restitution of rights in land to persons or communities dispossessed of such rights as a result of past discriminatory laws or practices. In Makhado Local Municipality, land restored to its previous owners (restitution land) is earmarked for agrarian use. This land has to meet human needs for food, water, wood and other requirements such as earning income from natural resources through tourism, and is thus under pressure to be multi-functional. Sustaining multi-functionality requires coordination and integration of different objectives in the way agrarian landscapes are managed. For landscapes to provide a range of goods and services, and to meet stakeholder objectives on a sustained basis, there is need for planning and management initiatives to accommodate people and their needs in an integrated and coordinated manner. It is therefore important to put in place mechanisms to ensure that landscapes in restitution areas accommodate different stakeholder objectives and are managed sustainably. This necessitates the meaningful participation of all stakeholders in decision-making and productive activities.

A key stakeholder group in Makhado Local Municipality is women, who comprise 54.3 % of the population (Makhado Municipality IDP, 2011/12). Women in many developing countries have limited access to land, creating a gender gap in agricultural development (FAO 2011; Ajani, 2009 and Meinzen-Dick, and Quisumbing, 2010). In many South African communities women do not have the same rights as men to buy, sell or inherit land; to open a savings account or borrow money, to sign a contract or sell their produce (Mogau, Dzivakwi, Jacobs, 2010; Mutangadura, 2005). The South African government has provided national initiatives such as the Gender Policy Framework that seeks, among other things, to address poverty by facilitating equal access to goods and services for both women and men. However where legal rights exist on paper, they are often not honoured in practice. This study examined women's access to land and participation in decision making and productive action in restitution areas.

STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in the restitution areas of Munzhedzi, Mavungeni and Shimange which lie in the east of Makhado Local Municipality in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. Unemployment and poverty levels are high in the municipality, with an unemployment rate of 48.9%, and of this 63% are female (Makhado Municipality IDP, 2011/12).



The land was restored in March 2002 and this was state land that formed part of the Venda homeland. Restitution land is managed by Communal Property Associations (CPAs), which, in some instances, work with tribal leaders to make decisions on use and allocation of land for agricultural projects. Although earmarked for agriculture, the land is currently being used for spontaneous settlements, planned settlements, communal grazing, group projects, individual farming, and leasing, while some remains unused (Manenzhi and Lahiff, 2007).

DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected through a desktop study on the land restitution process in Makhado, and land and gender issues in South Africa. Household interviews were also conducted with women and men in the three restitution areas. Focus group discussions were done with women involved in vegetable, poultry and pig farming projects.

RESULTS

Women's perceptions on gender and access to restitution land

- Women and men have equal access to land. Traditional leaders and CPAs allocate land for agricultural projects and settlement regardless of gender.
- Women make decisions on utilization of pieces of land allocated to them, and these decisions include what crops to grow, when and how.
- Laws and customs relating to property rights and inheritance have flexed enough to permit women to inherit land.
- Small scale farmers generally struggle to access agricultural inputs such as fertiliser, seed and loans. However the women interviewed in this study felt that government policies and programmes had facilitated their access to funding from government and NGO's.
- Where women are engaged in cash crop production, they control the profits they make, yet historically, traditional customs permitted males to dominate cash crop production, and control the money made from the crops, even though women did most of the work.
- For cooperatives that had both males and females, duties were not assigned on the basis of gender, but expertise. Profits were also distributed equally.

WHY MAINSTREAM GENDER IN AGRICULTURE?

To increase sustainability of agrarian landscapes



To improve food security and nutrition

From: World Food Programme

To improve agricultural productivity and prosperity

From push-pull.net



For poverty reduction through empowerment

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research and policy needs to align with the needs of different social categories and take into account the unequal social relations that exist in societies. It is argued that one cannot address poverty and sustainable development, especially in Africa, without addressing the gender issues (Meinzen-Dick, and Quisumbing, 2010). Women in this study perceived themselves as being on the same level as men, since they could access land and make land-use decisions on that land. Understanding the dynamics in land ownership and access provides a platform to develop approaches in the fight against extreme poverty and hunger. FAO (2011) argues that giving women the same access as men to agricultural resources could increase production on women's farms in developing countries by 20 to 30 percent, and which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 100 to 150 million (FAO, 2011). There is therefore a need to improve women's access to land and their role in decision-making in order to have multi functional sustainable landscapes that support the different agrarian land uses, especially in rural areas like Limpopo.

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