

# An Analysis of Women's Control and Ownership of Land According to Marxist and Socialist Perspectives: A Case of Mpumalanga Province

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**Abstract:** Studies indicate that even though women play a vital role in food production all over the world, ensuring food security for all, very few women however own and control the land they cultivate. Instead of owning land, women only have use rights to land which are insecure since use rights can be terminated at any given time. This desk top paper analyses women's access to land to land with specific reference to the Marxist and Socialist perspectives on feminism. The Marxist perspective is based on the capitalist class of employer – employee exploitation. According to Marxist perspective women then find themselves as servants for men especially because they do unpaid work both in the home and on cultivated land and as such they are seen as servants on men and servants cannot own and control the land belonging to their employers. The Socialist perspective puts more emphasis on women's position of subordination to men in society. According to this perspective, women's roles are defined along the lines of motherhood, domestic workers and child rearing which also has an impact on their ownership and control of land. The study focuses on women and land in Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. The study is anchored on feminism theory which argues that women are oppressed and exploited in society and as such do not enjoy the same rights and privileges enjoyed by men. The unequal relationship contributes to the skewed land ownership. Using data on the extensive literature written on women and land, and also using the available data from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, this paper explored women's access, ownership and control of land in Mpumalanga Province. The study concludes that even though there is a plethora of treaties and legislation advocating for women's ownership of land, still very few women own land. Of all the provinces in South Africa, Mpumalanga as a province seems to be doing better in women's land ownership.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Feminism, Gender, Inequality, Socialisation

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## 1. Introduction

This paper argues the inability of women to access land by presenting the Marxist and Socialist perspectives on feminism. Land is a key or tool to life for all people as it improves the standard of living, offers economic independence, and empowers people at a personal level. It is also a tool that has a possibility of assisting women to gain social status and for claiming a political voice (Duncan, 2004; Lambrou, 2005:3; Nyukiri, 2006:2; ICRW, 2008:3). Despite legislative framework all over the world including South Africa, that is aimed at eliminating discrimination against women in order to improve access to land (Agarwal, 1994:48; Federici, 2011:1459; Nyukuri, 2006:21), many women around the world do not have ownership of land. Of all the rights to land such as (i) use rights, which are the rights to use land; (ii) control rights, which are rights to make decisions about the land, deciding on the type of crops to plant and benefits from the sale of crops and; (iii) transfer rights which include to right to sell, lease, giving

the land to someone else through inheritance and making overall decisions about use and control rights most women only have use rights. Most women who access land do so through male kinship which is normally marriage or through other male family members like sons, brothers-in-law or uncles (Deere & Doss, 1977:138; Walker, 2002:15; Duncan, 2004:10; ECA, 2004:69). The problem with accessing land this way is that women acquire use rights only, which can be terminated upon the death of a spouse, when the husband marries other wives or due to divorce. Using data on the extensive literature written on women and land, and also using the available data from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, this paper explored women's access, ownership and control of land in South Africa with specific reference to Mpumalanga Province.

## 2. Feminism Theory Explained

Feminism refers to awareness that women are oppressed and exploited within society, in the

workplace and within families. It also refers to the conscious action taken by both men and women to change the situation (Offen, 1988:152; Mahmood, 2006; Pati, 2006:14; Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2011:1). Feminism is based on an argument that society organises humanity into male and female and thus assign responsibilities based on sex, and due to the assigned responsibilities, women are then viewed as weak when compared to men. The fact that women do not have access to land does not imply that they have no legal rights. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for instance, summarises the plethora of treaties that came into existence before its promulgation, hence it is regarded as the 'supreme law' or 'the international bill of rights for women'. It was adopted in 1979 and came into force in 1981. Around one hundred and eighty-seven (187) states including South Africa have ratified this convention. Countries are expected to submit periodic reports about progress made with regard to gender equality with specific reference to women (Cotula, 2002:22; UN, 2003:27,37; Mutangadura, 2004:4; UN-HABITAT, 2005:19-21; Nyukuri, 2006:24; IWRAP, 2008:2; Palama, 2008:38). Even though CEDAW has been ratified by more than one hundred and eighty-seven states (187), adherence cannot be accurately measured due to the fact that the submission of country reports as a requirement of CEDAW is still a challenge (Byrnes & Freeman, 2011:14). Progress can thus not be monitored on whether countries are developing and implementing legislation and programmes to protect and promote women's human rights. The submission of reports indicates countries' commitment to implement CEDAW whereas non-submission indicates that countries may only be paying 'lip-service' and not really changing legislation and having plans to promote gender equality. Designing implementable procedures from policies is a challenge because policies meant to advantage women on the ground in terms of accessing land remain un-implementable as there is lack of political accountability about women's access to land (Walker, 2002:55; Kahn, 2007:6, Paradza, 2011a:1). Women's legal rights in connection with access to land are however not recognised socially (Agarwal, 2002:3; Knox, Duvvury & Milici 2007:10; CSV, POWA & WCNOVAW, 2011:51-58; Paradza, 2011:2). This is because culturally, there are predetermined gender ideologies which describe rights and responsibilities for both men and women. Access to and control of resources such as land is mainly in the hands of men who, culturally, are seen as decision makers.

These ideologies reinforce the position of women as inferior or dependent on men (Reeves & Baden, 2000:4). As such a conscious decision has to be made by all concerned to reinforce the implementation of legal statute advocating for access to land by women.

### **3. Feminism Perspectives**

This paper analyses women's access to land with specific reference to the Marxist and socialist perspectives on feminism.

#### **3.1 Marxist Perspective**

The Marxist perspective is based on the capitalist class of employer – employee exploitation. This perspective argues that the reason women find themselves in the position where they are exploited, oppressed and discriminated against is because of the way men in society have been socialised. Men have been socialised in a way that they regard the exploitation, oppression and discrimination of women in the workplace and in the home as normal. According to Marxist perspective women then find themselves as servants for men especially because they do unpaid work both in the home and on cultivated land. This behaviour is seen as a capitalist behaviour because it benefits men hence the notion of employer – employee exploitative relationship. Marxist feminists however indicate that for equality to prevail, and for discrimination, oppression and exploitation to cease, the capitalist system needs to be overthrown by the oppressed and exploited (Pati, 2006:14-15; Sarikakis, Rush & Grubb-Swetnam, 2009:505; Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2010:3; Zake, 2011; Holub, n.d:4; Tschurennev, 2013:266). It thus becomes imperative that legislation advocating for women's land ownership be implemented. Studies on poverty and development indicate that 80 million hectares of land has been leased for agricultural purposes but only one percent (1%) of the world's women own land (Lorber, 2010:6; UN, 2012:3). A study done by Moyo (2000:21) revealed that in Zimbabwe, eighty-seven percent (87%) of registered land owners are male and less than five percent (5%) are women. The notion that only a few percentages of women have access to land, unlike their male counterparts, means that wealth is in the hands of men than women since land is equated with wealth. Women, according to the Marxist perspective, only provide cheap labour for men since they are the ones responsible for

**Table 1: Individual Land Ownership by Province in 2010**

| Province      | Gender (hectares) |                  |                | Total             |
|---------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------|
|               | Male              | Female           | Not identified |                   |
| Eastern Cape  | 3,364,966         | 448,733          | 144,898        | 3,958,597         |
| Free State    | 3,054,269         | 777,577          | 139,369        | 3,971,215         |
| Gauteng       | 221,760           | 107,135          | 11,193         | 339,204           |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 896,201           | 177,720          | 111,663        | 1,185,584         |
| Limpopo       | 942,831           | 304,717          | 49,711         | 1,297,259         |
| Mpumalanga    | 878,623           | 777,577          | 28,970         | 1,162,810         |
| North West    | 1,821,884         | 557,662          | 96,562         | 2,476,108         |
| Northern Cape | 9,080,590         | 2,083,258        | 146,520        | 11,310,369        |
| Western Cape  | 2,465,129         | 479,140          | 92,210         | 3,036,478         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>22,726,252</b> | <b>5,191,159</b> | <b>821,096</b> | <b>28,737,622</b> |

Source: Department of Rural Development and Land Reform land audit report (2010)

planting, harvesting and storing of food but have little influence on how profit from the land can be utilised. The proceeds are normally used by the men to increase their yields by buying equipment related to land or sometimes use it to entertain themselves or by marrying more wives. According to Morrison, Raju & Sinha (2007:4), Razavi (2009) and Kevane (2012:12351) women, unlike men, spend their money on the nutrition and education of their children. Table 1 depicts a disproportionate land ownership by gender in each province in South Africa.

From Table 1 it is clear that the gap between ownership of land between men and women is still very wide because a total of 22,726,252 hectares of land was allocated to men compared to the 5,191,159 allocated to women in 2010. In comparison to other provinces in South Africa, Mpumalanga Province has allocated an almost equal share of land 777,577 ha to women whilst 878,623 ha of land have been allocated to men.

### 3.2 Socialist Perspective

The Socialist perspective puts more emphasis on women's position of subordination to men in society. Patriarchy is blamed as a social order that puts women in the subordination position because it divides humans into two categories, i.e. female and male. Women's roles are defined along the lines of motherhood, domestic workers and child rearing. Agarwal (1994:1464) and Federici (2011:50) argue that women should establish formations to challenge the existing power relations and advocate

for equality in all spheres. In terms of political participation of women, they are poorly represented in political structures because customary practices prevent women from participating in decision-making structures (Prakash, 2003:3; Tasli, 2007:40; Arat, 2010; Domingo, 2013:20) such as attending community meetings where decisions are made about land, a notion more prevalent in rural than urban areas. It is important that women be represented at these structures because their aim is to mainstream gender issues into political and economic processes. Political structures should support the empowerment of women and the elimination of gender inequality (UN, 2005:6; UN, 2008:9; UN, 2009:23). The involvement of women at the political level gives them a greater opportunity to influence policy so that there are policies that are gender-sensitive (Reeves & Baden, 2000:8; UN, 2005:16; World Bank, 2012:217; UN Women, 2013:31). To buttress this assertion, when women have a political voice, they are able to make inputs regarding decision-making and thus influence a fair distribution of resources. When women influence things at a political level, it also spills over into their homes and will give them a voice to be at an equal footing with their male counterparts. This will improve their bargaining power and improve access, ownership and control of land. In Mpumalanga Province, women are underrepresented in important decision making structures such as the Communal Property Associations (CPAs) as per Table 2 on the following page.

Table 2 depicts the number of women elected to leadership positions within CPAs in three districts in Mpumalanga, i.e. Ehlanzeni, Nkangala and Gert

**Table 2: Existing CPA Structures Within the Three Districts Under Study**

| DISTRICT     | NO OF CPAs | NO OF CHAIR PERSONS |            |           |           | NO OF DEPUTY CHAIRPERSONS |            |          |          |
|--------------|------------|---------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------|------------|----------|----------|
|              |            | MALE                | %          | FEMALE    | %         | MALE                      | %          | FEMALE   | %        |
| Nkangala     | 110        | 104                 | 95         | 6         | 5         | 104                       | 95         | 0        | 0        |
| Gert Sibande | 38         | 36                  | 95         | 2         | 5         | 36                        | 95         | 2        | 5        |
| Ehlanzeni    | 78         | 74                  | 95         | 4         | 5         | 74                        | 95         | 0        | 0        |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>226</b> | <b>220</b>          | <b>100</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>214</b>                | <b>100</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>5</b> |

Source: Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (2015)

Sibande. From a total of two hundred and twenty-six (226) CPA's in the three districts, only twelve (12) women were elected to chairperson positions whilst two hundred and twenty (220) men have been elected to chairperson positions. Two (2) women have been elected to deputy chairperson positions against two hundred and fourteen (214) men. The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform advise that the composition of CPAs should include women, however women when women are elected, they are elected into positions which are not positions of power. The lack of representation of women in decision-making positions making it difficult for women to have their needs articulated and making sure that developmental initiatives take their needs into account.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite legislative framework all over the world including South Africa, which is aimed at eliminating discrimination against women in order to improve access to economic assets like land, women still do not have access to land on equal footing with men. This may be due to the fact that the custodians of these customary laws and practices are mainly men. According to studies on women's access to land, most women who access land do so through male kinship which is normally marriage or through other male family members like sons, brothers-in-law or uncles. The problem with accessing land this way is that women acquire use rights only, which can be terminated upon the death of a spouse, when the husband married other wives or due to divorce. Accessing land through male kinship means that the husband is viewed as the head of the family and the woman has to get permission to access land.

Feminist theories have identified men's presence and dominance of political institutions as a major obstacle to women's equality. Men thus have a crucial role to play in enhancing women's

representation and participation. As major participants with regard to policy-making, men can assist to leverage women into positions of power either through direct selection and appointment. In order to accelerate women's access to land, this paper then recommends that:

- There should be an increase in women's representation in decision-making positions by encouraging greater participation and representation of women at all levels of structures that deal with land issues. As such the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform should enforce the election of women in positions of power before the registration of CPAs.
- Women's structures advocating for gender equality within customary systems should be supported through creating awareness on women's rights to access land.
- Mainstreaming gender equality in the design, development and evaluation of policies and having in place gender sensitive budgets is crucial to guarantee women's access to land.
- It is important to continuously provide a systematic gender-impact assessments and sex desegregated data that can be utilised to gauge the impact of programmes and policies and also used as evidence to build a benchmark for future assessments.

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