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"Here It Is Our Land, The Two of Us": Women, Men and Land in a Zimbabwean Resettlement Area

Allison Goebel

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Department of Rural Economy
Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry
and Home Economics
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Canada

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The author is a PhD student in Sociology at the University of Alberta. Her dissertation is on institutions, tradition, gender relations and power in agriculture and the social forest in a Zimbabwean Resettlement Area (Sengezi, Hwedza District).

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"Here It Is Our Land, The Two of Us"[1]: Women, Men and Land in a Zimbabwean Resettlement Area

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Introduction: Gender and Land Reform

Women's perspectives and needs are marginalized in the discourse shaping land reform in Zimbabwe's resettlement program. The 1993 Land Tenure Commission[2] was appointed by the President of Zimbabwe to investigate the key issues in all land categories in Zimbabwe and through its recommendations, act as a central vehicle of this reform. Although it had no specific brief to examine gender issues in land reform, the Commission consulted women on some topics and reported on their perspectives in its report. Local feminist activists also undertook their own extensive study on women's perspectives on land reform and submitted it to the Commission (ZWRCN 1994a). All of this occurred in a context wherein the Zimbabwean government had signed, in 1991, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, Article 14 of which declares:

> State parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas, in order to ensure - on a basis of equality between men and women - equal treatment (of women) in land and agrarian reform as well as land settlement schemes.[3]

In its final recommendations, however, the Commission has almost entirely ignored women's views and interests. Its recommendations of privatization and the granting of title deeds may actually deepen

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[1] A woman farmer in Sengezi Resettlement Area (2.15f), commenting on the differences in her relationship to land in her former home in a Communal Area as compared to her current home in Resettlement. Women's Schedule, II.8, July 1996.

[2] Rukuni, M. 1994. Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems. Harare: Government Printers. Released to the public in August 1995.

[3] United Nations Department of Public Information: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, February 1993. As cited in Chenaux-Repond (ed) 1996: 5.

women's insecurity in their entitlement to resettlement land (Chenaux-Repond (ed) 1996). The recommendations also jeopardize some of the current advantages for women in resettlement, especially those accruing to widows.

The Land Tenure Commission's recommendations are informed in part by the paradigm of "sustainable development", which privileges ecological sustainability while maintaining high productivity in land use. Questions about gender justice in access and control to resources, inequality in the intra-household distribution of the benefits of resource use, and even gendered divisions of labour are beyond the interest of this discourse.[4]

Indeed, even the question of justice for the most disadvantaged of the rural peasantry is taking a poor second to issues of "productivity" and "efficiency" in the political discourse of land reform in Zimbabwe. This is seen, for example, in the change in selection criteria for resettlement farmers. In the beginning, the landless, returning war refugees, and the poorest people were granted land (Wekwete 1991; Zinyama 1991).[5] As early as 1982, however, plots were granted to Master Farmers as well as the "landless poor" (Alexander 1994: 333; Munslow 1985: 46). By the mid 1980s, Government perceived that the land was "underutilized", and all settlers were to have Master Farmer training by 1986/7. But as the available land quickly filled up, criteria became even stricter: in the

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[4] See Nkala 1996. In this lengthy discussion of recommended ways forward for sustainable development of agriculture in rural Zimbabwe, the author focuses on tenure insecurity in resettlement and strengthening of local institutions. Nowhere in the article are women's interests, or gender relations in agriculture or resource use mentioned.

[5] In my area, this was indeed the case on the ground, not just on paper. Preferred settlers were refugees or squatters, particularly those whose current status was a result of the war. Particular favour was given to those who had been active in the war, either as soldiers or "helpers" to guerrillas who came to the area, such as mujibha (boys) or chimbwido (girls) who helped the fighters as messages, cooks, and finders of clothes and other supplies. People were asked if they had been to Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana or Tanzania because of the war (Former Ward Councillor, September 1996, Field Assistant Interview, Field Diary Village 3, Book I).

current context, applicants must also demonstrate farmer success through ownership of such implements as a scotchcart and a plough.[6] As the Minister of Lands and Water Resources, Cde Kumbirai Kangai states: "Land should only be given to people with the potential to fully utilize it".[7] As only about 20% of farmers in Communal Areas will be able to meet the new criteria, the selection process is likely to enhance the differentiation processes in rural areas further, deepening inequality in terms of land distribution (Moyo 1996).

In addition, throughout the 1980s government was constrained by the Lancaster House agreement (1979), which restricted government acquisition of commercial land to willing-seller basis. Since 1992 however, when the Land Acquisition Act was passed allowing forced selling of land to government, little has changed.[8] To date, between 62,000 and 70,000 families have been resettled,[9] while government estimates that about 200,000 families are waiting for resettlement plots.[10] In 1996 government began a process of demarcation of commercial farms for resettlement, but the process

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[6] Resettlement Officer, Interview July 17 1996; Former Ward Councillor, September 1996, Research Assistant Interview, Field Diary Village 3, Book I. The District Administrator of Hwedza District asserts, however, that while there is no shortage of applicants who meet the new criteria (they have a waiting list of about 500 people), allocations are still made to the "needy" such as those displaced by developments like dam construction or the expansion of the growth point (Interview February 18 1997).

[7] "Land Shortage Problem Deteriorates". The Sunday Mail June 16 1996. See also: "Resettlement must depend on productivity: seminar" The Herald April 16 1996: 1. "Comment: Landmark decision" The Sunday Mail August 18 1996: 10. "Residents with resources sought for resettlement" The Herald August 20 1996: 7.

[8] See Masoka 1994 for discussion of the Land Act 1992 which followed amendments to the Lancaster House constitution and the proclamation of the National Land Policy of 1991. The Land Act removed many of the impediments to land acquisition imposed at Lancaster.

[9] "Land shortage problem deteriorates" The Sunday Mail June 16 1996.

[10] "Resettlement funds too low" The Herald August 3 1995: 12. A more recent article, "3 million ha bought for resettlement since 1980" Herald November 26 1996, p. 9, unaccountably reduces this figure to 80,000 families waiting.

has been stalled by the launch of legal challenges by white farmers whose land is being demarcated.[11]

Given the difficulties of alienating land from powerful white commercial farmers, the flagging commitment to the poorest of Zimbabwe's rural areas, and the lack of concern for women's needs, it may well be that questions of justice, whether along racial, class or gender lines, have been displaced by the paradigm of "efficiency" in the current processes of land reform in Zimbabwe. In this article, I argue that regardless of whether the pursuit is for "efficiency" or "justice", ignoring gender in the question of land reform leaves serious gaps in the understanding of agricultural production.

Feminist analyses of resettlement and land reform use predominantly structuralist and materialist analyses. These emphasize women's disadvantaged position as a result of gender-blind, or gender-biased government policy, and insistent social and cultural norms that leave women in subordinate positions as regards to access to and control of land. Feminist analyses also rely heavily on a logical argument concerning agricultural productivity, pointing out that since women are the main agricultural producers, it is counter productive and inefficient to deny them full access to and control of land (see ZWRCN 1994a; Pankhurst and Jacobs 1988).[12] These approaches lead to the proposing of solutions that focus predominantly on the need to change the structural conditions, such as state policy and laws.

Structural conditions are undoubtedly central in understanding the opportunities and

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[11]"State to compulsorily acquire 27 farms" The Herald December 29 1995:1. "Land shortage problem deteriorates" The Sunday Mail June 16 1996. "Farmers turn abusive over land issue" The Sunday Mail June 23 1996: 1.

[12] This perspective, of course, has a long history going back to Esther Boserup's influential analysis of women and agriculture in Africa (1970 Women's Role in Economic Development). In the current times of Structural Adjustment, gender and development perspectives increasingly emphasize issues of efficiency and productivity rather than gender justice in a hopes to win audience for their analyses (see Moser 1993).

constraints that women face in resettlement. My own data support a materialist perspective that emphasizes access to and control of economic resources, as well as a focus on how political, economic and cultural conditions limit women's room to better their lives. I thus deal with these structural conditions at length. However, I have also found important spheres of power for women in prevailing gender relations. These include women's control of market gardens, certain types of property and income that belong to women, changing gender ideologies as a direct result of enlightened state policy, and changes in household decision making processes. Most important for this article however, are the advantages to widows in resettlement policy to date, and the gendered control over certain crops. In order to counteract the tendency to focus on structural oppression, therefore, I have chosen to highlight these spheres of power and negotiation as possible strategic sites for positive change.

This paper is based on field work undertaken in Sengezi Resettlement Area (Hwedza District) during 1995-7. The research was qualitative in nature, beginning with Participatory Rural Appraisal workshops (PRA), which led to the development of five different formal interview schedules for villagers from four of the six original villages (established in 1981) in the scheme. Data from three of these schedules are drawn on in this paper. A selected sample of 60 individuals, half men, half women were interviewed with the Household Schedule, which covered a broad range of social topics including inheritance and quality of life in resettlement; 20 men and 20 women were individually interviewed with the Men's and Women's Schedules, which dealt directly with issues of women and the land, widowhood and inheritance; and a total of about 70 people participated in men's and women's group interviews with the Gender Schedule, which dealt with divisions of labour and

responsibility and control in the household economy.[13] Numerous key informant interviews with local officials and leaders were also carried out, along with documentary research, and newspaper analysis.

Historical Background: Constructing gendered space in the African Reserves

A great deal has been written about the gendered patterns of African peasant farming in the region.[14] It has become a truism to state that women are the main farmers, but that their subordinate cultural and social position often curtails their abilities to farm as productively as possible. Subsistence farming in the region is characteristically insupportable without remittances from husbands working in waged work, hence farming wives remain dependent on husbands' contributions. These contributions may or may not be forthcoming, as husbands frequently become involved in expensive extramarital affairs, drinking and other town entertainment. African peasant women farmers, therefore, are often pictured in the contradictory position of autonomy by way of de facto female headship in the household, and dependency and vulnerability in regards to male earnings and a prevailing gender ideology that condones the supremacy of male authority even in male absence. Hence there are many stories of women being unable to take key decisions about farming without a husband's authorization and financial support, and wife battery when the husband returns to find that his wife has taken decisions without his permission.

Schmidt (1992a) documents the gendered struggles over production in the African Reserves

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[13] Questions from the schedules are referred to by section and question number. For example, Women's Schedule, II.8, means question 8 from section 2. All respondents in these interviews with schedules were granted anonymity, and hence respondents are referred to only by number. The number 2.15f, for example, means female respondent from household 15 from village 2.

[14] See Epprecht (forthcoming), Gay 1980, Gordon 1981, and Murray 1981 and 1987, on the extreme case of male migration in Lesotho; Berheide and Segal 1994 on Malawi; Moore and Vaughan 1994 on Zambia; Chimedza 1988, Gaidzanwa 1995, Jacobs and Howard 1987, Pankhurst and Jacobs 1988, Schmidt 1992a and 1992b, and ZWRCN 1994b on Zimbabwe; Brydon and Chant 1989, Hansen 1992, Jiggins 1989, and Meena 1992 for general discussions of the issues in the Subsaharan region.

in colonial history in Rhodesia. The viability of agricultural production in the Reserves was squeezed through various measures such as differential pricing and imposition of various taxes to force male labour migration to serve the needs of European owned mines and farms. Shona peasant resistance to these measures was strong, but eventually, the dominant European interests were served. The Reserves, as a result, were increasingly characterized by de facto female headed households. Although women had been the backbone of peasant agricultural production before colonial interference, male absence left women with an increasingly high farmwork burden, but not necessarily decision making authority over farm production. Family dynamics and gender relations also changed. High rates of male migration lead to increasing rates of adultery among both husbands and wives, and prostitution. Male desire to maintain control of their women in the Reserves coincided with a colonial interest in keeping women in the Reserves to create a "safety net" for retired or redundant workers. Increasingly harsh patriarchal ideology among African men, therefore, came together with colonial measures such as the introduction of passes for women in the 1920s in an attempt to control their movements and keep them in the Reserves. Waves of "runaway" women flocking to the cities were routinely rounded up and beaten, then returned to their rural homes. Other supporting colonial practices were, for example, hiring men as domestic workers, subverting the "natural" association of women with domestic work, in order to serve the cause of creating a specifically male waged worked force (Schmidt 1992a and 1992b; Hansen 1992).

The many problems associated by this strategy led to a change of heart in the 1930s. Men were increasingly encouraged to bring their wives to live with them on commercial farms in order to "stabilize" the workforce (Amanor-Wilks 1996; Barnes 1993; Schmidt 1992a). In practice, however, African men were reluctant to relinquish the security of a homestead on a Reserve, and men's unions

with women on commercial farms were often casual, or "additional" marriages (Amanor-Wilks 1996; Barnes 1993).

The situation in towns was similar. Rural to urban migration has consistently been male dominated (Mandishona 1996). Women have always been among the migrants to towns, attempting to flee poverty or patriarchal control in the Reserves (see Schmidt 1992a; Barnes 1993; Horn 1994). However, the dominant pattern has remained one of mobile men, who maintain a "real" home in a Reserve, or Communal Area as they are now known, presided over by a wife or wives. Currently, it is estimated that about 70% of rural households in Zimbabwe are de facto female headed (Mandishona 1996).

In this context, despite women's roles as primary farm workers and household managers, their entitlement to the land and home in a Communal Land comes only through marriage. Women's lack of formal land rights was historically underpinned by the definition of their legal status as minors, and the dual legal system that placed most African women under the dictates of Customary law in the colonial period (Stewart, Ncube, Maboreke and Armstrong 1990; Maboreke 1991). Although women now enjoy majority status at 18 years through the provisions of the Legal Age of Majority Act (1982), customary law still dominates legal practice in Communal Areas (Maboreke 1991; Stewart 1992). Women are not customarily allocated land in their own right, although some divorced women may be granted fields after returning to their natal home (ZWRCN 1994b). Upon the death of a husband, a widow does not gain entitlement to the land in customary law, but only keeps it in trust for the male heir, usually the eldest son. She may even be chased away by the relatives of the

deceased.[15] In the contemporary context, one of the central calls of the national feminist movement is the formal entitlement of women to land.[16]

Women and the Land in Resettlement

The redistribution of land for the benefit of African peasants was a key promise of the revolutionary force that freed Rhodesia from white rule. Upon Independence in 1980, the new government moved quickly to establish schemes on unused or abandoned land, upon which landless or destitute peasants were to be settled (Zimbabwe 1982). The resettlement program has remained central to the government's rhetorical commitment to undoing the colonial domination of whites in most of the good agricultural land in the country. However, in practice government has consistently failed to meet its own targets for resettlement. To date only about 6% of the Zimbabwean population lives in resettlement areas.[17]

While government primarily blames lack of funds for land purchase and infrastructural development, there are other factors stalling the establishment of sufficient numbers of schemes to meet demand. These include the centrality of commercial agricultural to the Zimbabwean economy, pressure from multilateral institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to protect commercial farming, government corruption through which acquired land is given to ministers

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[15] See "Never to own the land they till" (ZWRCN 1996 WomanPlus 1(1):6-8); Moyo 1995; Stewart 1992.

[16] See for example, Woman Plus 1(1), January-April 1996, Special Edition on Women and Land (Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) News Bulletin); Speak Out/Tauria/Khulumani Issue No. 33 1995; ZWRCN January 1994, "The Gender Dimension of Access and Land Use Rights in Zimbabwe. Evidence to the Land Commission". Some female politicians are also vocal about this issue. See for example, comments of the Minister of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Co-operatives, Thenjiwe Lesabe in "Laws needed to give women access to land" The Herald May 16 1996.

[17] "Only six percent resettled on land acquired so far" The Sunday Mail November 3 1996: 9.

and other government friends, and flagging commitment to the welfare of the poor masses on the part of the new black elite housed in government (See Zinyama 1991, Wekwete 1991, Elliott 1991, Drinkwater 1989, Goebel 1997, Moyo 1996 and Nkala 1996).

Resettlement Schemes are of five main types:

1. Model A. Normal Intensive Resettlement. Individual family farms, with individual homestead and land holdings in nucleated villages, plus communal grazing within village boundaries. Later this included "Accelerated Intensive Resettlement" which was designed to deal with widespread "squatting" problems on unused commercial land.

2. Model B. Cooperative Resettlement. Settlement of between 50 and 200 people under communal living and cooperative farming. This model has been recently declared a failure by government, and abandoned.

3. Model C. State Land Resettlement. Individual settlement centred around state land core estate, meant to extend access to state infrastructure on state land to settlers.

4. Model D. Managed Grazing. Not a resettlement model as such, but a programme designed to give peasant farmers in drier regions planned grazing access to commercial ranches.

5. Model E. Group Ranching. Group settlement on former commercial ranches, with possible game management components, in areas not viable for arable land use (Zinyama 1991).

The dominant model is by far Model A with 90% of resettlement land being settled according to this model (Bratton 1994: 76). A Model A scheme is the basis for this study, and other models are not considered.

The situation of women in Model A resettlement holds both continuities and departures from the situation in Communal Areas. The permit system in resettlement is central. Settlers are supplied

with three permits: one to cultivate, one to depasture stock and one to reside (Department of Rural Development 1980). Permits are granted in the name of the household head, who is assumed to be male in the case of married couples. Since the overwhelming majority of women in resettlement are married, they hence have no primary rights to land, but only rights as mediated through marriage. In this sense, women's relation to land is similar to that in Communal Areas.

A significant deviation from the situation prevailing in Communal Areas, however, is the awarding of some permits to widowed or divorced women with dependents, in their own right. Also important are officially sanctioned (but not necessarily written) policies and practices of the state that go against the cultural norms of gender ideology in support of improving women's situation. These include support for widows to succeed to the permits of their deceased husbands. Another difference is that permit holders are required to remain on the resettlement stand and engage in continuous farming activity (Department of Rural Development 1980; 1985 and 1992). For married couples this means that gender relations in farming are starkly different from the dominant model of migrant husbands in Communal Areas. These issues are dealt with at length below.

Unmarried women achieve primary rights to land.

In the early years of resettlement, government was committed to a policy of allowing unmarried (that is, widowed or divorced) women with dependents to obtain permits for resettlement in their own right. This was based on government recognition that this group of households often suffers the greatest hardship, and often has no rights to land through customary practice in communal areas. This policy and practice is seen as a major advance for women, as it represents the first case of women having primary rights to agricultural land. However, over the years only a small proportion of permits have been issued to women in this category. In my own study site, only two stand holders

are divorced women (out of a total of four hundred and forty three stands). The remaining women permit holders are widows, about a third of whom joined the scheme as widows, while the rest became widowed after joining the scheme as married women.[18] Chenaux-Repond found that 11.6% of permit holders in her study of three schemes were widowed or divorced women, a proportion of whom became widowed after resettlement (Chenaux-Repond 1993). As discretion is given to the District Council and the Resettlement Office in the screening process, the proportion of single women to be granted permits depends in a large part on the inclinations of these bodies. Country-wide, by 1988 only 7% of permits were allocated to unmarried women (Fortmann and Bruce 1993).

Policy changes regarding the criteria for resettlement selection implemented in 1992 may further marginalize this group. Settler applicants are awarded a series of points based on farming skill, agricultural implements, education and perceived need for the land. A large number of points are awarded for the qualifications of a spouse of the permit applicant. This means that single parent households may be disadvantaged (Chenaux-Repond 1993).

This point requires further research over the next few years. In my study area both the Resettlement Officer,[19] and the District Administrator,[20] claim that the new selection criteria actually make it easier for single women with dependents to be granted land. This is because it is now easier for women to get Master Farmer certificates, an important element of the criteria, and allowances are made for the absence of a spouse. This position is echoed by the Minister of Lands and Water Development at a recent land conference. The Minister stated that the ministry was not "gender-biased" in that it would accept female applications for resettlement land. Further, the ministry was

[18] Resettlement Officer, Interview February 19 1997.
[19] Interview February 19 1997.
[20] Interview February 18 1997.

"gender-sensitive" in that it would take into account the historical disadvantages faced by women, which may cause them to appear less qualified than men in terms of educational status or ownership of farming implements. Since the ministry is aware that women are often the most experienced and skilled farmers, special allowances will be made in regards to selection criteria in order to favour female applicants.[21]

While this sounds hopeful, it remains at the level of unwritten policy. There are no imposed quotas or other specific directives to ensure that unmarried women will be granted resettlement land. These women will still largely be vulnerable to the perspectives of District Administrators, Resettlement Officers, VIDCOs (Village Development Committees) and Councillors who control the flow of information about available resettlement stands, as well as final selection of settlers.[22]

Widows and the permit system.

Resettlement land belongs to the state, and settlers are granted only usufruct rights through the permit system. As such, stands are not inheritable. However, the resettlement authority has formulated policy on the succession to permits upon the death of the permit holder. Unwritten government policy has been that widows in resettlement be allowed to stay on the plot if the husband dies, and the permits and registration book be changed to bear her name (Chenaux-Repond 1993). In practice, this is often what transpires, including in my own study site. Given the aging of the first generation of settlers, and the fact that husbands tend to die before their wives, the incidence of widowhood on resettlement is becoming quite high. In the four villages in my study for example, an

[21] K. Kangai, Minister of Lands and Water Development, speaking at the Consultative Conference on Land in Zimbabwe, convened by the NGO ZERO, and held at the ZESA Training Centre, Harare, May 27-28 1997. The Minister's speech was made on May 28 1997.

[22] Women and Land Working Group, the Consultative Conference on Land in Zimbabwe, convened by the NGO ZERO, and held at the ZESA Training Centre, Harare, May 27-28 1997.

overall 19% of households are widows. In one village, widows head a third of all households, and hence represent a significant social group.

In cases where a widow does succeed to the permits, this represents a marked improvement in her status as compared to the usual practice in communal areas. Customary practice in Shona society, is that a brother or other male relative of the deceased husband should take over the care and management of the estate of the deceased. Frequently, the widow is expected to marry a brother of the deceased, especially if she is still of childbearing age. If a male heir is old enough to manage the estate, then it shall be passed to him. In theory, whether the estate is passed to a brother or other male relative, or to the male heir, the estate is supposed to be used for the benefit of the widow(s) and the dependents of the deceased. In practice, however, there has been an increasing tendency for the relatives of the deceased husband to plunder the estate of the deceased and evict the widow(s), often leaving her or them destitute (Stewart 1992; Moyo 1995).

The practice of resettlement stands being given to widows of deceased permit holders is well-known in the study site. Both men and women are aware of it, and expect it to be the practice in their own households.[23] On the issue of rights to the fields, all female respondents said that a widow will have the right to plough in the fields: "she will do what she wants on the use of fields because they will now be hers" (1.18f); "it will belong to her and change the name from his to hers" (3.31f). The responses of males are mostly basically the same, reflecting the widow's control of the land. For example:

"she will have control over the land" (3.21m)

"she takes on from where the husband has left in looking after the children; she would

[23] Women and Men's Schedules, II.7. July and August 1996.

be the one responsible for the ploughing of the fields" (3.7m)

"she will have the power to rule the stand" (4.2m).

However, some men retain more of the flavour of traditional practice in their answers:

> "the widow looks after the children, that is if no one has inherited her; some who might be young go back to their parents; widows control everything with the help of the eldest son" (1.34m)
>
> "she stays there; she acts as the husband has been and she can be helped by the eldest son" (2.44m)
>
> "she stays behind looking after the children; if she is young she can go to her parents place if she does not want to be inherited; if she is old then she stays behind controlling the ploughing of the fields" (2.35m)
>
> "if she has got three or more children then she stays with the children while if she has got only one child she can go if she wants; she takes on the services of her husband until the eldest son is mature enough to look after the family" (3.47m)
>
> "when the husband dies the eldest son looks after the family with the help of the mother; she can share the fields with her sons or tell which crops to plough" (4.4m).

The gender difference in perspective seems to suggest that men are more attached to the traditional practices that see a widow's rights as mediated through the eldest son or a brother of the deceased, than are women. The same difference, although less strongly stated, appears in the responses regarding the widow's right to stay at the homestead. All of the women said that the widow has the right to remain, making statements like the following:

> "she will be acting as a father so that some people cannot see the difference because she is the one left at home" (1.33f)
>
> "the home will be hers because she has the control over everything" (1.18f)
>
> "she will live with the children; if the brother of the deceased comes talking nonsense she will talk to the Resettlement Officer" (2.15f).

The dominant theme in men's responses is the same:

"she will be the leader of the family" (1.24m)

"she would stay at her home freely managing the family" (4.2m)

"she deserves the right to rule the family and decide how to run it" (3.38m).

But some men's responses show their view that the eldest son, or one of their brothers will have a say:

"she will be the head of the family; she will at times be helped by her elder son to run the family" (2.25m)

"the eldest son looks after the family" (2.44m)

"she is helped by the elder brother of the deceased or the younger brother" (2.35m).

A similar gender gap in perception was found in responses to a similar question on the Household Schedule (N=57).[24] Seventy-one per cent of women said that land would be "inherited" by the widow, while only 54% of men said this would happen. Only two female respondents said that the widow and the son would take over together, and two said that only the son would take over. By contrast, three men said that the widow and son would "inherit", and eight said only the son would take over. These responses indicate that while the government policy of allowing widows to remain on the stands is widely practiced and accepted in the study site, the issue appears to be somewhat conflictual. Given the differential power of men in the family and the culture, it is unlikely that customary practice could be changed without the intervention of the state.

It also appears that the granting of widows succession rights in resettlement influences inheritance practices regarding moveable property, such as furniture, and decreases the pressure for widows to marry a brother of the deceased. All twenty women interviewed with the Women's

[24] Household Schedule, II. 7. Two responses are excluded here: one male response as it was given by a group of sons rather than the household head (widow), and one female response as it was given by the grandmother rather than the settler generation. Interviews undertaken in February and May 1996.

Schedule said that the widow has the right to all furniture and dishes in the homestead, except for the dead husband's clothes which should be shared among his relatives.[25] Most men interviewed said basically the same thing, although they place more emphasis on the use of household contents for the benefit of family rather than the widow per se.[26] When asked whether any of these practices differed from their former homes, most men and women said the practices were basically the same. However a significant number (30% of the women and 25% of the men) said the practices were different. They referred mainly to the practice of widow inheritance, but also to a practice of the property being shared out among the husband's relatives. For example:

Some women's voices:

> "It is different because in the Communal Areas they share the property among the husband's relatives; if the wife refused to marry inlaws they just leave her because it depends on the age" (2.23f)
>
> "It is different because at our Communal Areas you are forced to be remarried; they will be jealous if you take another husband who is not the brother of the deceased; here it is our land, the two of us, so I remain here; no one will come and give me rules" (2.15f)
>
> "There is a difference because in the Communal Areas if the husband is gone the relatives of the man then send back the woman to her parents and they take over the place and property" (2.19f)
>
> "It is different because here you cannot be chased away but to our previous homes you will be chased away if you refuse to be remarried by the other brother; they say here is perfect because the Resettlement Officer will be on their (widows') side" (3.31f).

Some men's voices:

> "It is different because in Communal Areas you are forced to be remarried to the brother of the deceased because you will be in their homestead, but here in the

[25] Women's Schedule, II. 7 (e).
[26] Men's Schedule, II. 7 (e).

> resettlement, it's our land as two of us, no brother, no sister, so we do what we want" (2.12m)
>
> "It is not the same because here our land is controlled by the government so we use rules that are imposed by them whereas in Communal Areas they use rules that were made by the forefathers" (4.3m).

While the dominant pattern in resettlement appears to be to allow widows to remain, in some cases, an individual Resettlement Officer may disagree with this practice, or allow himself to be persuaded by relatives to allow a more "traditional" course of action, such as the plot going to a male relative of the deceased (such as a brother), or directly to the male heir (usually a son of the deceased) (Rukuni 1994; Chenaux-Repond 1993). In my own study, the Resettlement Officer stated that disputes over succession to the resettlement plot were among the major conflicts he had to deal with.[27] He said that relatives of the deceased often want to base succession on customary law of inheritance and have a brother of the deceased take over. But according to the Resettlement Officer, this is not appropriate anymore, and they always refuse and award the plot to the spouse. Sometimes, however, the Resettlement Office fails in enforcing this policy. In one of the villages on the scheme, a male relative of a deceased permit holder came as a "caretaker" to the stand of the widow while she was still in mourning. The relative then refused to leave, even when the matter was reported to the Resettlement Office and the District Administrator's office. The current Resettlement Officer, who came in 1994, inherited the problem. He has written a letter of support for the widow, and the matter has been reported to the police. Meanwhile the widow is homeless, unable to return to the stand as a son of the "caretaker" has threatened her with an axe. The "caretaker" has even claimed free fertilizer designated to the widow.[28]

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[27] Resettlement Officer, Schedule 1: Interview July 17 1996.
[28] Resettlement Officer, Field Notes II, p. 3: Interview October 12 1995.

This ambiguity is rooted in the fact that while widows have tended to be allowed to succeed to the permits, they have no official written right to do this. They are vulnerable to the decision of the Resettlement Officer, who may find in favour of the deceased's relatives. It may also occur that while a widow succeeds to the permit, property such as cattle, agricultural implements and bank accounts are taken by her husband's relatives. Hence, while she may retain access to land and a homestead, she may lose the means with which to farm productively (Chenaux-Repond (ed) 1996: 14). Furthermore, the adoption of the Land Tenure Commission's (1994) recommendations for a change to long term leases with option to purchase after ten years, is set to seriously undermine this advantage, however insecure, that widows have had in resettlement. With a shift to title deeds, the Commission recommends the application of Common Law of inheritance. While Common Law strengthens the rights of the surviving spouse and children vis-a-vis the husband's relatives (Stewart 1992), women in resettlement do not see this as providing enough security in inheritance rights.[29] This is because inheritance laws do not deal directly with land. Thus, even though the Administration of Estates Bill that is in the printing stage while this article is being written (May 1997), strengthens the rights of widows and children in regards to moveable property, the question of the inheritance of land rights is still open to dispute.[30] Women's view is that the deed, permit or lease should **automatically** go to the surviving spouse without contestation. This would be facilitated by the issuing of joint permits, leases or title deeds (Chenaux-Repond (ed) 1996). It is hoped by women's groups that the question of inheritance of land rights will be dealt with directly by the proposed Land Act, which is meant to

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[29] "Apply common law on inheritance to minimize conflicts" The Herald August 14, 1995: 7. "Inheritance issue not clear for women farmers" The Herald December 1, 1995.

[30] Women and Land Working Group, the Consultative Conference on Land in Zimbabwe, convened by the NGO ZERO, and held at the ZESA Training Centre, Harare, May 27-28 1997.

consolidate all legislation pertaining to land. This is supported in theory by the Minister of Lands and Water Development, who stated that there should be only one inheritance law that includes both land and property. This law, he said, must support a widow's right to stay on the land with her children.[31]

The Threat of Divorce

Allocating permits to unmarried women in their own right is undoubtedly an advance for women in terms of gaining land rights. The prevailing situation for women who become widows on resettlement is also clearly an improvement for women. However, the vast majority of women in resettlement are married. In this case, the norm has been to issue the resettlement permits in the name of the husband only. As the District Administrator of Hwedza puts it: "Ministers do not want to change culture".[32] Or, as the Minister of Lands and Water Development put it more specifically, the sharing of land rights between married people is a "private" or a "domestic" affair. He gave this as a reason not to legislate for joint permits, leases or ownership.[33] Government views men as heads of households, breadwinners, and as traditionally the only ones to be given land rights (Chenaux-Repond 1993).

Allocating permits only in the husband's name means that only the husband has official primary land-use rights. Married women's access to land is thus mediated through the institution of marriage. The nature of this mediation is discussed in detail below. But first I consider how the permit system means that women who are divorced by their husbands in resettlement are particularly vulnerable to

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[31] K. Kangai, Minister of Lands and Water Development, May 28 1997, speaking at the Consultative Conference on Land in Zimbabwe, convened by the NGO ZERO, and held at the ZESA Training Centre, Harare.

[32] Interview February 18 1997.

[33] K. Kangai, Minister of Lands and Water Development, May 28 1997, speaking at the Consultative Conference on Land in Zimbabwe, convened by the NGO ZERO, and held at the ZESA Training Centre, Harare.

losing their rights to land.

All studies have found that a woman who is divorced by a male permit holder must leave the resettlement scheme. Since a wife's name does not appear on the permit, she has no official claim to the plot, and usually has no choice but to return to her natal home. This was also found in my study site.[34] With two exceptions, all respondents, male and female, said a divorced woman must leave the scheme and return to her home. This also means leaving her children, who in Shona custom belong to the husband. Of the two exceptions, one woman said that the woman would stay on the scheme with the children, while the husband would go back to his home. The other woman said that her first choice would be that her husband would build her another hut, as she would not want to leave her children. If he would not do this, however, she would have no choice but to leave.

In marriage, Shona culture contains a clearly gendered construction of property ownership. Much of the most valuable household property, such as agricultural implements, furniture, cattle and the buildings on the homestead are constructed as belonging to the husband. The wife is said to own the kitchen utensils, property she has worked for over and above her duties to her husband's land and domestic work,[35] and any property given to her as result of her status as a mother. This latter, known as umai property, is property a woman has obtained through a marriage or pregnancy of a daughter. For example, it is customary in some places for mothers to receive a suit of clothes from a new son-in-law, a head of cattle (mombe youmai), and possibly payments in cash, although these latter would always be very small compared to the cash paid as lobola (bride price, or marriage consideration),

[34] Women and Men's Schedules, II. 6 (N=40).
[35] This is known as maoko property, literally "property of the hands" (Chenaux-Repond 1993). This explains the popularity among Shona women of handicraft production such as crochet work, basket making or pot making, as they are entitled to exclusive control of income from these ventures.

paid to the father of the bride. Upon divorce, a wife is entitled to take all such property with her. This includes any "women's crops".[36] In my case study, this pattern dominates:

> "the woman takes the groundnuts with her because they belong to her" (2.35m)
>
> "the woman takes all her things, even the grains, leaving the man with his share on the place" (3.47m)
>
> "the woman moves out and takes all her belongings including the crops (harvest); the man stays behind" (4.3m)
>
> "the household utensils belong to the mother, the cattle and children belong to the father; father stays and mother goes to her original home" (4.3f).[37]

From discussions with the women's groups in the PRA workshops, fairly high rates of divorce prevail in the study site, serial monogamy apparently being preferred by men over polygyny.[38] This reveals the precariousness of women's relationship to land in resettlement, as well as their lack of rights in regards to many household assets that their labour has contributed to obtaining. With no automatic access to a resettlement stand of her own, the divorced wife holds the most disadvantaged position in the permit system.

Married Women: "Tseu" and Gender in Crop Production

A married woman has similar vulnerability in the case of eviction. A permit holder may be evicted for failure to comply to resettlement rules, or unacceptable social behaviour. Since wives have resettlement rights only through their husbands, she is forced to leave the scheme if her husband is evicted, even if she has no part in the cause for eviction (Chimedza 1988).

Within this context of married women's vulnerability however, there are spheres of autonomy

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[36] "Women's crops" are discussed in more detail below.
[37] Selected sample of responses to Women and Men's Schedule, II. 6.
[38] Exact rates of divorce were not obtained.

and access and control of important resources. These include the traditional practice of a husband allocating his wife or wives a field from his own larger allocation.

The wife's field, known as tseu, is customarily controlled by the wife, who normally grows important supplementary foods such as peanuts, beans or sweet potatoes, both for home consumption and for sale. Women have customarily also cultivated gardens in riverine and wetland areas which are normally under their exclusive control. In a context where the bulk of household resources and income are under male control, while women are often responsible for supplying key family needs, women's access and control to resources and income respected as belonging to them is crucial. Historically, the practices of allocating tseu, and garden cultivation have been eroded by increased land pressure in African areas, and the land use controls implemented as result of the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) of 1951. The Act banned cultivation in areas where women often had their gardens, such as streambanks and wetlands, and formalized individual rights to arable land in the name of male household heads (Bourdillon 1987; Moyo 1995). Currently, the story in Communal Lands is unclear. The large ZWRCN study in seven districts found that women, interviewed in groups, said they were given fields of their own (ZWRCN 1994: 18). Yet another ZWRCN survey of 173 households found that only 23% of women had the special land allocation (ZWRCN 1996: 17). Another researcher found that only about a third of the women in her sample had access to the traditional tseu (Chimedza 1988: 43). The erosion of this practice is related to lack of enough land, as well as a household preference to devote all available land to lucrative cash crops which fall under male control.

In resettlement, it is left to the discretion of the husband whether or not he allocates portions to his wife or wives. In my own study, in a selective sample of twenty women and twenty men (all

representing different households), about 65% said that wives were allocated a field or fields by their husbands.[39] However, the Agritex worker holds the view that most men in the area allocate one or two acres to their wives, although a few farm the whole twelve acres together with their wives.[40] This figure is very close to the 60% found by Chenaux-Repond's sample (Chenaux-Repond 1993). Chenaux-Repond found that most men and women in her study agree that giving wives fields is traditional. Of the sample, 95% of the married women said that having their own field is very important, particularly because it would provide them with income that they would control with which to buy things such as groceries, kitchen utensils, clothes and furniture. However, only 60% of monogamously and 67% of polygynously married women had been granted a field by their husbands.[41] Of those who had not, some had asked and been refused, while others had not bothered, a few because they intercropped their own crops in the husband's fields, but mostly because they knew they would be refused. The husband was intent on utilizing all fields to maximum cash cropping capacity (Chenaux-Repond 1993). In this case, the new situation of relative land wealth in resettlement has not guaranteed women's access to the traditional tseu. Chenaux-Repond makes the point that the permit system, which tends to give formal primary land use rights to married men, and no formal rights to their wives, supports the desire of a large proportion of men to sidestep the custom of allocating fields to wives. Section 5 of the permit to cultivate stipulates:

> The holding shall be used solely for agricultural purposes, for the holder's exclusive benefit, and shall not be subdivided.

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[39] Women's and Men's Schedules, II. 1.
[40] Interviews with Agritex worker, July 10 1996 and August 25 1996.
[41] In the case of polygynously married wives, the granting of a field is not necessarily an advantage, as in some cases the husband excused himself from any additional contribution to her or her children, in spite of her labour on his own fields (Chenaux-Repond 1993).

In Chenaux-Repond's sample, men who did not allocate fields to wives made mention of the rule against subdivision, and that the fields were meant for their use only. While the wording of the permit was never intended to prevent men from allocating their wives fields, it is clear that it has provided justification for some men inclined to deny this to their wives.

Another study of a small sample of wives in resettlement found that most wives were allocated fields by their husbands (Chimedza 1988). Chimedza also points out that age is an important factor in the allocation of tseu, with older wives being more likely to have a field, along with greater decision making power in the family. Jacob's study concludes that resettlement wives were not less, and perhaps a bit more likely to be allocated a field (Jacobs 1991). However, her figure of 37% of married women being allocated fields is very low compared to other findings.

Although the question of whether or not a wife is allocated a field is important in ascertaining her economic status, ending the enquiry at this point may miss some aspects of women's access to agricultural produce. In my study, there is some indication that some husbands have demoted their wives from the position of principle farmer, to the status of labourer. As one woman says:

> Wives are treated differently because some women they are not given the land or field to do whatever she wants; and the husband is the boss every time he shouts to the wife to wake up early to go to the field; after hard work the woman will come and work again at home; at Communal Areas the fields are smaller and the work is easier no matter the man is strict; here in resettlement we have more quarrels because we stay together, rather than in Communal Areas they have more love when the husband comes home from work <ie from town> because he just supervises and the woman is in charge (2.15f).[42]

Hence my data lends some support to the view that the formal allocation of primary land rights to married men through the permit system can interfere with women's customary secondary rights to

[42] Answer to the question: "Are wives treated differently by their husbands in Resettlement as compared to in Communal Areas? Explain." Women's Schedule, III. 2.

arable land, whether or not these rights are also being eroded by the economic incentive to grow more cash crops. The permit system also buttresses patriarchal control in the family by investing the husband with the only formal rights to land. However, I do not agree that the permit system necessarily decreases women's access to subsistence foods and income through crop production. I suggest that it is important to dig deeper into the gender relations of crop production to ascertain whether or not this is true. Power and control not only reside in who has the stated right to a piece of land, but also who is said to control particular crops.

Men's Crops/Women's Crops[43]

Of the same sample of 40 households, all households said they grew maize and groundnuts (peanuts). Most grew rapoko (35 households), roundnuts (33 households), sunflower (29 households), and beans (28 households). Other crops mentioned, but grown by fewer than ten households in the sample, were sorghum, cow peas, rice, and sweet potatoes. Of these major crops, some are thought to be "men's crops" and some "women's crops". This designation may or may not correspond with decisions made about the planting of the crop. Different crops have different use and cash values in the household. Maize is the major crop, providing the staple food and the biggest income. Groundnuts, roundnuts, rapoko and beans are important household consumption foods, but surpluses are often sold. Table 1 shows data on gender relations in the six major crops. Women and men's views are disaggregated, revealing important gender splits in perceptions.

The data in Table 1 reveals that maize is predominantly viewed by women as a man's crop. Men, however, are split on this, about half saying it is a "man's crop" and the other half saying it belongs to both the husband and wife, or to the family in general. Similarly, more women than men

[43] Women's and Men's Schedules, II. 2-4.

state that beans are a "man's crop", with men more likely to say they belong to both or to the family. A smaller such gender difference of perception exists in the case of sunflower, again with men more likely than women to say the crop belongs to "the family". This gender gap suggests that women have a more rigid sense of what belongs to the man, perhaps more aware of how certain resources are beyond their control than are the men. The men seem to have a more collective view of their own areas of control, revealing a type of patriarchal ideology that places men in control, but asserts that this control is used for the benefit of the family at large. As male generosity may not always be forthcoming, it is important to document and support the areas of control that both women and men define as well respected. In the case of crops, women's control appears strong in groundnuts and roundnuts. There is no gender split in perception, with both men and women mostly agreeing that these are "women's crop".

Table 1. Gender Relations in Major Cropping Practices

CROP	Who decides what, where and when to plant?	Men's Crop	Women's Crop	Both/ Family
MAIZE	**Women say (n=20):** men (70%); joint (25%); widow (5%)	90%	Widow (5%)	5%
	Men say (n=20): men (70%); joint (25%); we both decide on our own crops (5%) [44]	55%		45%
GROUND-NUTS	**Women say (n=20):** men (55%); joint (25%); woman (15%); widow (5%)		95%	5%
	Men say (n=20): men (10%); women (55%); joint (30%);5%+		95%	5%

[44] This 5% relates to one male respondent who followed an unusual practice in field allocation and cropping. He allotted his wife one quarter of the total 5 hectares, keeping the rest for himself. On their respective portions, they both farm a large variety of crops, each making their own decisions about them, and controlling the income therefrom.

RAPOKO	**Women say (n=18):** men (61%); joint (28%); women (11%)	67%	11%[45]	22%
	Men say (n=17): men (65%); joint (35%)	59%	5.5%	35.5%
ROUND-NUTS	**Women say (n=20):** men (50%); joint (20%); women (30%)	10%	80% widow (5%)	5%
	Men say (n=14): men (14%); joint (14%); women (64%);8%+		93%	7%
SUN-FLOWER	**Women say (n=14):** men (79%); joint (14%); widow (7%)	71%	7% widow (7%)	14%*
	Men say (n=16): men (63%); joint (31%); 6%+	69%		31%
BEANS	**Women say (n=17):** men (53%); joint (23.5%); women (23.5%)	41%	35% widow (6%)	18%
	Men say (n=12): men (33%); joint (50%); women (8%); 8%+	25%	8%	66%*

+See note #44. *These lines add up to 99%, due to rounding.

[45] Includes the widow and one other woman.

Does being labelled a "women's crop" ensure that women have full control over this crop? The first column in Table 1 shows answers to the question: Who decides what, where are when to plant? From the responses, it is clear that there is significant male involvement in decisions around "women's crops". In the case of groundnuts, for example, 55% of women say that the man decides what, where and when to plant the crop. In the case of roundnuts, 50% of women make this claim. Does the practice of labelling a crop a "women's crop" denote any real female control? The group interviews which examined gendered power and control help answer this question.[46] In these interviews, it emerged that the dominant practice in the area is for women to control income from what are called "women's crops".[47] In the case of "men's crops", decisions about income are either taken by the man, or as a process of discussion with his wife. The man has the final say but the wife must be given a voice. From this, then, it can be argued that a woman's lack of a designated field or fields of her own does not necessarily mean lack of access to agricultural income from women's crops. Only 65% of the sample (including both women and men) said that wives were allocated fields, while 100% say they grow groundnuts, which are in 95% of the cases said to be the woman's crop. Roundnuts are also grown by most households in the sample, and again are designated mostly as a "woman's crop". These findings support Chimedza's view that formal access to land is less crucial to women than the control over the produce of the land (Chimedza 1988). In her study, Chimedza found that many women's crops were intercropped with maize, so that where maize is the dominant crop, male control of fields many not hinder women's access to "women's crops".

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[46] Gender Schedule, February to April 1996. This schedule was used to interview nine gender segregated groups, five men's and four women's groups, with a total of approximately 70 participants.
[47] Also found by ZWRCN 1994: 18.

In my case study then, the permit system in resettlement which gives married men exclusive primary rights to all arable land has not necessarily decreased married women's access and control to produce from the land. Rather, the large increase of the size of arable land available to the household has led to an improvement in married women's opportunities to earn and control their own income, in spite of the fact that a large minority of women do not seem to be allocated the traditional women's fields (tseu). Most men and women in the sample of forty households said that the gendered cropping practices they currently use are the same that they practiced in their former homes in the Communal Areas.[48] However the comments of a number of respondents indicate that the increased size of the fields in resettlement has meant that they are now able to grow a greater number of crops, with distinct advantages for women, as many of these are "women's crops":

> "it differs because in Communal Areas the land was small compared to resettlement that is why we have more crops" (2.12m)
>
> "yes, it's different because we now all want to plant different types of crops so we share the fields so that the two of us have enough land to plough what we want differently" (3.47m)
>
> "yes, it's different, because here we have got enough land to grow our crops, crops for mother and father" (4.2m)
>
> "it is different because now we have more land; long back we didn't have enough land to plant all the crops" (2.15f).

Further, when asked whether their situation as women has improved in any way since coming to resettlement, the majority of respondents mention having access to more income from more crops as a reason that their lives are better.[49] Hence, while women are still confined to an inferior position in regards to access to the main productive resource of arable land, they are better able to meet their

[48] Men's and Women's Schedules, II. 5.
[49] Women's Schedule, III. 1.

goals of providing nutritious foods for their families, plus produce a surplus for sale which avails them of cash that they generally exclusively control.

Conclusions

These findings suggest that while the overall structural conditions created by the permit system in resettlement are important in determining women's situation vis-a-vis the land, it can not be assumed that lack of formal rights to land means that women do not control any part of the produce of their agricultural labour. In this case study, the overall sense is that the benefits women derive from arable land have improved in resettlement: "Here it is our land, the two of us" (2.15f). The important factor of what produce from the land women actually control can only be determined by looking in detail at the gendered power involved in crop production. Through this it is found that certain types of crops are respected as belonging to women. Finding ways to enhance women's production of "women's crops" may be an important strategy in light of the fact that primary access to land for married women and/or joint ownership is still far from politically acceptable.

From the point of view of an "efficiency" paradigm, it is also clearly crucial to understand these gender relations in extension or market-related interventions to improve productivity in certain crops. Since women control groundnut production, for example, they should be targeted in any interventions in this crop. Also, the fact that men perceive many crops as "shared" with women or the family also suggests that men would accept female involvement in extension efforts on most crops. This is important given that women still provide the bulk of agricultural labour regardless of male presence in resettlement.[50]

It remains clear, however, that giving formal land-use rights only to the man in a married

[50] Agritex worker for Sengezi Resettlement, Interview July 10 1996.

household increases a wife's vulnerability to losing control over produce from the land. Wives are dependent on a husband's goodwill and prevailing cultural norms in the area. They have no guaranteed rights to land. At a recent conference,[51] women farmers expressed concern that the Land Tenure Commission's recommendations to change from permit system to long term leases, do nothing to change this insecurity. If the husband's name stands alone on the lease or title deed, nothing changes for the wife. Only jointly issued permits, leases, or title deeds will increase women's land security in resettlement areas (Chenaux-Repond (ed) 1996: 24). This would help divorced women as well as those who remain married.

For widows, the innovation of resettlement policy in allowing widows to succeed to permits on the death of a husband has clearly had profound material and social benefits. Women speak with relief of being released from the tyranny of their husband's relatives, who in the Communal Areas may insist on her remarriage to a brother of her husband, and/or confiscate her property and her land rights. The loss of this provision in resettlement through the adoption of the Land Tenure Commission's recommendations for a shift to long term leases and the application of common law is one of the most profound losses to women in the current land reform process. It is hoped that current changes to inheritance law that improve the right of widows to property will soon be expanded to include inheritance of rights to land.

[51] Organized by Chenaux-Repond, and supported by all of Zimbabwe's major women's organizations and some human rights organizations.

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