



Improving transportation, infrastructure and encouraging rural women's participation in farmer organizations and cooperatives can help both to achieve economies of scale in access to markets as well as reducing isolation and building confidence, leadership and security

- **Time Constraint**

Time is a major constraint for women. In many instances, women have to spend a great deal of time traveling on foot to collect water and firewood, preparing meals and feeding the family, and traveling between the home and fields, forcing them to make difficult trade-offs. This has a negative impact on their ability to concentrate more on food production.

Recommendations for Action

If the nation envisages a gender-just food security, all barriers that limit participation of women should be removed. The following actions are key in improving women's participation in agriculture:

- **Eliminate legal and cultural discrimination related to ownership and access to assets.**

Improving women's access, ownership, and control over land and production resources has a great potential to contribute to greater investments in the land and increased agriculture productivity and food security. This can be achieved through reviewing and documenting all legal and cultural gender related impediments that bar women's access to key resources at local level and pushing for reforms at local level and in Parliament.

- **Gathering of sex-disaggregated data**

Gender disaggregated data in agriculture and food security, including on access to land and land tenure security, finance, extension services and agricultural tools forms a key basis for gender-responsive policy design and monitoring progress made on gender related issues. This can be achieved through advocating for mandatory formulation of gender sensitive implementation plans on agricultural activities together with continuous monitoring and evaluation on progress made on gender mainstreaming in these activities. This also includes designing of gender specific monitoring and evaluation indicators in food security programs.

- **Ensure women's voices are heard**

Needs and constraints of women in food security issues are better known and understood by women themselves. Therefore, ensuring women's voices are heard at all levels of governance and in all policy and decision-making processes are critical for attaining engendered food security. To achieve this, there is need to advocate for increased representation by women in all levels of governance and decision-making processes. Moreover,

continuous capacity development through community education and awareness raising programmes for women to fully understand their roles and rights at all levels together with the creation of clear channels to convey women voices to decision makers is key to attainment of this goal. In addition, there is need to design media programmes that comprehensively deliberate on gender and food security issues.

- **Increase women access to agricultural extension services and training**

Given the important role that extension services and training play in enhancing agriculture production, women should get access to extension services as major agriculture producers. This is achievable through calling for the design and implementation of the gender-aware agricultural extension strategy, to ensure that women use and benefit from vital information. There is also need to review agriculture extension curricular and incorporate gender issues to improve extension agents' understanding and consideration of women needs. Another key strategy is to advocate for recruitment of female extension officers to cushion other cultural barriers that bar women from getting extension services from men.

- **Design innovative financing models for women**

Access to low interest financing mechanisms is a critical factor for enhancing agriculture production and productivity by women who produce much of the food. Finance is key for easy access to production resources and promotes on farm investments that facilitate and sustain improved agriculture production. There is need to design and facilitate innovative lending mechanisms to women entrepreneurs working in agriculture to ensure engendered food security. To achieve this, there is need for government and private sector to create and make more accessible new and innovative market-based financing products to support rural women farmers, such as village saving and micro-loan schemes. There is also need to document all barriers women are facing in the access of agriculture finance and inform policy considerations and reviews. There is also need to increase support for women farmers to have collective action in the form of groups and unions that makes it easy for financing institutions to extend lending.

- **Continuous capacity development for policy-makers and planners**

Policies provide the overall framework in which agricultural and food security programmes are designed and implemented. The paucity of gender mainstreaming at policy level leads to gender insensitive programming and implementation of food security activities. Hence, there is need for policymakers and implementing agencies of food security policies to have adequate knowledge and skills for engendered policy-formulation, implementation and

project design. This can be achieved through providing policymakers and implementers training, capacity development and education on how to apply gender methodologies to the formulation, design and implementation of policies and programs. This will have a positive impact on gender mainstreaming at policy level and at implementing level thereby engendering food security programmes. There is need to extend this capacity building to women and local leaders to continue providing policy formulation and review with gender considerations using evidence-based advocacy.

- **Develop gender sensitive market infrastructure and technologies**

There is need to provide rural women with greater mobility and market information by facilitating access to roads, transportation, water and information technology services. Also need to ensure that agricultural programs consider the needs and preferences of both men and women when developing and introducing new varieties and technologies.

Conclusion

Food security is a human right and indeed a gender issue. Despite women occupying a central role in food production and distribution in Zimbabwe, they constitute the majority of food insecure population. Policy gaps continue to exist in key agricultural and food security policies that discriminate and bar women's equal access to key production inputs, land and employment. Removal of these gender barriers and acceleration of women empowerment is critical for agricultural development and attainment of engendered food security. It is imperative, therefore, to discard the systemic cultural and legal barriers that constrain women from making even more contributions to agricultural production to achieve gender-just food security.



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Introduction

Food security continues to dominate local and international debates as one of the central priorities for political leaders, policymakers and developmental practitioners. It has received great attention due to its enormous contribution to an all-inclusive growth and sustainable development. The right to food is in effect a Constitutional Right and Section 77 of the Zimbabwe Constitution states that every person has the right to sufficient food and that the state must take measures to ensure the progressive realization of this right.

Background

In Zimbabwe agriculture plays a critical role in advancing the attainment of food security and it is estimated that women provide 70% of the labor in the sector. Women are therefore a critical force in ensuring agricultural productivity and food security as they play a critical role throughout the agricultural value chain, from production on the family plot, to food preparation and distribution within households. Despite their central role in food production, women and girls constitute a large chunk of the food insecure population. Compounding this is the fact that roles of women are largely ignored and undervalued particularly in policies and practices. Thus, women face numerous inequalities and constraints that are embedded in norms, practices and laws that in turn institutionalize their discrimination. Women are discriminated mostly through limited access to resources, education and employment opportunities which weaken their bargaining power and decision making in food security outcomes.

Against this backdrop, this policy brief analyzes gender and food security in Zimbabwe focusing on policy gaps, challenges and priority interventions for action to facilitate the attainment of a gender-justified food security. Achievement of engendered food security requires elimination of gender-based barriers and empowerment of women who remain key agents for agricultural production. The World Bank (2009) postulates that expanding opportunities for women and ensuring gender equality can make a substantial contribution to a country's economic development and positively determine food security

outcomes. Therefore, accelerating the elimination of obstacles that limit the realization of gender equality and equity is key to attainment of sustainable food security solutions.

Food Security and Gender: Quick Concepts

Food security is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon whose definition has evolved over time to capture all aspects that evolve and revolve around it. The most currently accepted definition came out of the World Food Summit held in 1996 and reads as follows:

“Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. (FAO 1996)”

Underpinning this definition are key four 'pillars': **availability; access; utilization** and **stability**. The definition is engendered as it emphasizes inclusion of all people despite gender. In this vein FAO defines gender as:

“...the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labor, interests and needs. (FAO, 1997) ”

Why Focus on Gender and Food Security?

According to FAO (2014), there is more than enough food in the world to feed everyone, but the number of people affected by hunger and malnutrition remains 'unacceptably



high' with disproportionate impacts on women and girls. It is estimated that between 2012 and 2014,60% of at least 805 million people who experienced extreme chronic malnourishment globally were women, this is evidence of a strong correlation between gender inequality and food insecurity. This is a true reflection that women's own food security needs are being neglected at both national and household level, where discriminatory legal, social and cultural norms prevail.

Despite constituting the majority of food producers in Zimbabwe(between 60% and 80% of food production), women continue to be regarded as home producers or assistants on the farm, and not as farmers and economic agents on their own merit. They are mostly disadvantaged by the inequitable national economic and social processes that govern food production systems and distribution. This is further compounded by their perceived low status and limited access to productive resources, education and decision-making power, by the 'normalised' burden of unpaid care work and by the endemic problems of gender-based violence, and HIV and AIDS.

Noting the need for gender-justifiedfood security and roles that women play in agriculture, empowering women farmers is vital in lifting rural communities out of poverty especially in the face of the current economic crisis, food insecurity, HIV and AIDS, environmental degradation and increasing urbanization being experienced in Zimbabwe. Therefore, empowering women through recognizing their roles, increasing access to and control over resources is a critical prerequisite for attaining engendered food security in the country.

Agriculture and Food Security in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe, which once enjoyed the breadbasket status in Southern Africa, is currently facing food insecurity challenges. In the past decade, Zimbabwe's tremendous agricultural potential has been undermined by many issues that include among others liquidity constraints, climate change and shortage of agricultural inputs. A decade of turmoil beginning in 1999 reached a climax in 2008 with hyper-inflation, high unemployment and food insecurity. Although the country has made tremendous efforts to restore the economy, most Zimbabweans continue to face the double burden of food insecurity and unsustainable livelihoods. The 2015Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Report (ZimVAC) projects that about 1.5 million people will be food insecure in 2015–2016, a 163% increase from the 2014-2015 figure. Of this population, women will be more affected due to gender disparities in access to production inputs and land. ZimVAC (2015) also reports that 35.5% of rural household are female headed and these households are potential victims of food insecurity due to existence of gender imbalance dynamics in agricultural resource allocation.

Gender and Food Security in Zimbabwe;

Agriculture and Food Security Policies in

Zimbabwe: A Gender Lens

Zimbabwe has a wide range of policies, programs and institutions in place designed to protect the opportunities and rights of women to steer the country on a path towards gender equality. Zimbabwe is a signatory to numerous international and regional conventions, declarations, and protocols that promote human rights and gender equality. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) ratified in 1991, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the SADC Gender Development Directive of 1998, SADC Protocol (2008) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). By signing these conventions, the country is required to develop instruments necessary to ensure that it is in compliance with the conventions.

Agriculture and food security policy in Zimbabwe is guided by international, regional and local policy frameworks. These policies have considerable impact on individual, household and community food security given the high dependency of many rural households on agriculture. They greatly influence and shape the constraints and opportunities faced by all farmers.

Zimbabwean agricultural policy has drawn from the MDGs and in particular the MDGs 1, 3 and 7 which call for the eradication of poverty and hunger; promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in all economic activities and programmes; and environmental sustainability respectively. Going forward it is expected that the policies towards food security will be guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in particular goal 2, 5, 12 and 13 which call for nations to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture; achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; and take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts respectively.

Regionally, Zimbabwe's food security policies are guided by the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), an African owned programme to accelerate the attainment of MDGs. CAADP's emphasis is based on four main pillars which are;

- i) Reduce hunger and poverty,
- ii) Sustainable land and water management,
- iii) Increase market access, and
- iv) Increase research and development.

CAADP calls for increased gender mainstreaming in agriculture to strike a gender balance in allocation of key productive resources.

Further to this, food security policies in Zimbabwe are also informed by the SADC Regional Agriculture Policy (RAP) and the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) Agriculture Policy which guides agricultural development in the region. These policy frameworks are bold and fully pronounce the need to mainstream gender issues in all national action plans to promote all-inclusive growth and development.

Nationally, agriculture and food security is directly guided by key policies that include:

- **Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET),**
- **Comprehensive Agriculture Policy Framework (2015-2035) (CAPF),**
- **Food and Nutrition Security Policy, Irrigation and Mechanization Policy,**
- **National Livestock Policy,**
- **Agriculture Gender Strategy and Zimbabwe Agricultural Investment Plan (ZAIP).**

ZIMASSET, an economic blue print that directs national economic growth has its developmental strategies well aligned and informed by regional and international developments that call attention for gender mainstreaming. Achievement of food security and nutrition is one of ZIMASSET's main focus areas and its key strategic directions to achieve equity in socio- economic transformation is centered on availing equal economic opportunities to women, youths and physically challenged persons in conformity to the Indigenization, Empowerment and Employment Creation thrust. The blue print also emphasizes on the need for gender mainstreaming in all national policies, programmes and projects.

CAPF (2015-2035) is the main policy framework guiding the entire agriculture sector and food security in Zimbabwe. Still in its draft form following a review of the then Agriculture Policy Framework (1995-2020), the policy captures and responds to key developments on the regional and international arena that includes gender and climate change. The framework identifies gender as a cross cutting issue that needs to be mainstreamed in each activity in the agriculture sector. Sub-sector policies on agriculture such as the National Livestock Policy and the Mechanization and Irrigation Policy, whose formation is well guided by the CAPF, identify gender equality and equity as a key element to agricultural development.

The Food and Nutrition Security Policy was approved in 2013 and its main goal is to promote and ensure adequate food and nutrition security for all people at all times in Zimbabwe, particularly amongst the most vulnerable (women) in line with our cultural norms and values and the concept of rebuilding and maintaining family dignity.

Guided mostly by the human rights charter, key national and international policies, the policy seeks to crystallize the programming of food security activities and integrate nutrition aspects in food security. The policy recognizes that women play an important role in advancing nutrition issues and attainment of food and nutrition security hence their empowerment remains critical. Therefore, the policy fully advocates for increased empowerment and allocation of resources to foster increased inclusion of nutrition in food security.

ZAIP (2013-2018) is a plan that domesticates the CAADP process in Zimbabwe. It outlines key investment strategies in the agriculture sector to achieve CAADP set targets. Since ZAIP is a national implementation plan of CAADP and MDGs, issues of gender mainstreaming are well incorporated in the plan based on the thrust set by the MDGs. Gender mainstreaming is one of the ZAIP strategic focuses to attain agriculture sector objectives. The main emphasis on gender mainstreaming is to ensure that power dynamics between men and women in access, control and ownership to means of agricultural production are balanced.

Land is a key and important means for agricultural production and food security worldwide. Equitable land distribution is therefore a vital component in ensuring gender-just food security. Land distribution in Zimbabwe was done under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme where gender issues were not well mainstreamed. Women mainly owned land under the umbrella of their husbands thereby inhibiting their full control of land resources and making key investments that ensure sustained food security difficult. However, with full recognition of discrimination against women especially on inheritance, the Government has become more gender sensitive through issuing new land permits and leases that include both names of husbands and wives.

Also worth mentioning is the “Agriculture Gender Strategy” that was developed to facilitate full implementation of gender issues in the agricultural sector to foster equal opportunities and gender-just food security. The strategy was motivated by increased gender discrepancies on agriculture yields and food insecurity in women. The strategy tries to unpack key activities that need to be gender sensitive and outlines best ways to engender these activities. Such areas include extension services, access to inputs and mechanization, training and inclusion in economic activities.

Policy Gaps in Gender Mainstreaming

It is important to note that gender sensitive policy interventions can help close the gender gap in agriculture across a wide range of interventions such as agricultural

inputs, assets, services and opportunities as a key tool to achieve a gender-just food security in Zimbabwe. Gender issues have been incorporated into national policies, plans of action, programmes and projects, and promise to have a positive impact on women's access to equal opportunities and key production resources in the agricultural sector. Resettlement models have also set quotas for women in land allocation, as well as credit disbursement, and encouraged women to participate in agricultural training on various levels through provision of appropriate facilities at training centers and affirmative action. While there have been a number of positive developments in institutionalizing gender equality and equity in Zimbabwe, most policies have encountered challenges at implementation level resulting in women still unable to equally access and control land, assets and resources. This implies that policy gaps do exist in policies and practices.

One of the key policy gaps or stumbling blocks is the fact that "gender" is not always fully understood thereby making it difficult to fully interpret these policies on a gender dimension by policy implementing institutions. Despite the actual policy recognizing the need for gender mainstreaming in all activities, the design and programming of policy implementation plans are mostly done by non-gender experts, thus making it difficult for them to fully engender key activities thereby creating gender gaps and imbalances. Also, some policies contradict with cultural norms and this makes it difficult to fully implement gender strategies especially at ground level.

Overall, the implementation of gender mainstreaming at all levels and in all sectors has been slow with resource and capacity constraints being cited as the main reasons for the sluggish pace at which policy is being put into practice. In addition, less effort has been made to create awareness of these policies at community and household levels making it difficult for Zimbabweans to be aware of their legal rights and laws designed to promote gender equality, and this ignorance is more pronounced in women, particularly those living in rural areas. Monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming in policy implementation has also been weak in most agriculture and food security policies and this has had a negative consequence on informing programming and future policy designs and decisions.

Obstacles Women Face in Food Security

- **Limited access to land**

Land in Zimbabwe is predominantly owned by men and transferred from generation to generation to males in line with societal and traditional laws and norms that bar women from owning and inheriting land. Moreover, where women hold land, their plots are generally smaller and of an

inferior quality than men, and this creates a disincentive to invest time and resources into sustainable farming practices, which in turn lowers production and results in less income and food for the household.

- **Access to Production Inputs and Technologies**

Women often face challenges in acquiring key production inputs (such as seed, fertilizer and chemicals),appropriate technologies, tools and inputs for farming productively. Under the Government Input Support Programme, statistics show that most inputs are received by men compared to women farmers. A number of studies have also found that differences in yields between men and women exist not because women are less skilled but because they have less access to inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers and equipment. Some experts estimate that if women had the same inputs as men, household agricultural output could increase between 10 to 20 %.

- **Lack of Adequate Education and Training**

Generally, women and girls in Zimbabwe do not receive the same education and training opportunities compared to men and boys due to discriminatory cultural norms especially in rural areas. While education is an important vehicle for increased agricultural productivity and reduction of food insecurity, most girls often have less access to basic education and women receive less agricultural training resulting in both short and long term negative impacts on the achievement of engendered food security. Studies have also shown that girls who stay in school are more likely to be able to feed themselves and their families when they become adults.

- **Limited Access to Extension Services**

Due to cultural attitudes, discrimination, time constraints and a lack of recognition for their roles in food production systems and food security, women enjoy limited benefits from extension services and training in new crop varieties and technologies that are key for increased crop production and food security.

- **Limited Access to Credit**

Statistics show large discrepancies between men and women's access to credit from various institutions. Women have less access to credit than men, as well as less control over financial resources. Women mainly face this challenge because they lack the necessary collateral and land. Lack of credit limits women's ability to purchase essential agricultural inputs and equipment, hire labor, invest in irrigation and land improvements that could increase their crop production capacities and ensure food security.

- **Limited Access to Markets**

Increasing women's share of household income has broad benefits to improved food security and rural livelihoods.

Gender and Food Security in Zimbabwe;