

Editorial: Land and Labour in Gendered Livelihood Trajectories

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This issue of *Feminist Africa* seeks to explore the interconnections among economic liberalisation policies, land and resource tenures, and labour relations in the structuring of gendered livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa. The focus on livelihoods departs somewhat from *Feminist Africa's* niche in providing cutting-edge feminist analysis of issues of sexual politics and identities, national politics and democratisation processes, higher education and feminist research methodologies. The importance of land and labour rights to women in sub-Saharan Africa is on account of the predominantly agrarian nature of livelihood activities, whose low technological base makes labour a critical factor. Beyond agriculture, land has a wide array of uses in the organisation of livelihoods and is also the basis of social and political power, and therefore at the heart of gender inequalities in the control of resources.

In its decision to publish this issue, *Feminist Africa* signals its recognition of the enormous significance of production systems and livelihoods, and the social relations undergirding these. This issue, FA12, was conceived at a workshop jointly organised by the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town, the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research of the University of Ghana and the African Institute for Agrarian Studies in Zimbabwe¹ on land, labour and gendered livelihoods with a view to developing a pan-African research agenda to rekindle interest in these issues of longstanding concern, which have been neglected by contemporary efforts to develop African-centred feminist analysis on women's lives. FA12 demonstrates the value of the frameworks and approaches emerging from that workshop and makes the case that more needs to be done. Our contributors also offer a discussion of critical issues with activists lobbying for land and livelihoods rights on the ground. The features we have included draw attention to the ways in which land and labour are not just interlinked, but also integrated elements of the livelihood activities and outcomes of

women and men. The authors propose preliminary elements of a research agenda that will significantly deepen the gender analysis of the land-labour nexus in livelihoods.

All the feature articles explore, to different degrees, four gender characteristics of livelihoods – the longstanding gender segregation and segmentation of livelihood activities, the disproportionate burden of reproductive activities or care work on women, gender inequalities in the control of land and labour, and the role of economic and social policies and institutions such as markets and households in sustaining gender inequalities in livelihood outcomes. In keeping with FA's editorial commitment to activism, FA12 discusses efforts of activists to change the terrain of policy and to tackle the livelihood insecurities resulting from gender inequalities in resource tenures and labour relations.

The decision to publish FA12 is well-timed. It coincides with a sensitive period in African development, when the inability of production systems and economic policies to deliver a decent living to many is so topical. The ongoing global food, financial and energy crises, manifested by food riots in several African countries, have brought to the fore once again the failures of decades of market-driven economic policies to solve the challenge of food and livelihood security in Africa. The discourses on the crises have identified rural women and the poor as those likely to experience its worst effects, which include hunger and poor nutrition, falling incomes and rising livelihood insecurity, an increase in reproductive work to cushion households from market failures and a worsening of social indicators. This recognition of class, gender and location as important dimensions of the crisis has however not influenced policy prescriptions, which – in keeping with the continuing dominance of free market ideas – are promoting further economic liberalisation. What is different this time, though, is the growing recognition that the removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs, the closure of state-owned crop marketing agencies, the low level of public investment in the food sector and agricultural infrastructure, the lack of attention to access and equity in market-led reforms in labour and land tenure policies – all policies instituted in the early 1980s – cannot deliver agrarian transformation and industrialisation.

Such costly policy failures create an urgent need for new research, to which FA12 seeks to respond. Contributors to this issue have reviewed conceptual approaches to analysing land and labour issues in gendered livelihoods and demonstrated the relevance of macro, institutional and micro issues in

the making of livelihoods, taking into account regional, country, local and sector specificities. The volume considers the relationship between women's reproductive labour and gender inequalities in the control of productive resources, together with policies and institutional processes underpinning gender inequalities in land and labour relations and livelihood insecurity. Colonial histories and post-colonial trajectories have resulted in broad differences between the ex-settler colonies in East and Southern Africa, which have experienced land concentration and plantation agriculture, and West Africa with its small producer-based production systems. Regional differences within one country are also highlighted, as are the specificities of different land use issues, for example, between farming and fishing.

Dzodzi Tsikata's article draws attention to the different bodies of literature on land tenure, labour relations and the livelihood approaches which provide a starting point for the consideration of resource tenures and labour relations in the organisation of livelihoods. She argues that while the separate literatures on land and labour provide insights into the implications of gender inequalities in labour relations and resource tenures for livelihoods, their separation has resulted in partial analyses which the livelihoods approaches have attempted to remedy. The livelihoods approaches, though promising, have with few exceptions been unable to adequately take account of social relations in the organization of livelihoods, and have thus failed to account for the gendered land and resource tenures and labour relations at the heart of production systems. The article identifies promising efforts in feminist anthropology, economics and political economy to account for the labour and land relations in production systems, discussing useful insights such as the control of the labour of women and other household members which facilitates male control over land and other resources, and the importance of women's responsibility for reproductive activities for their resource and labour deficits. Other themes taken up in this overview are the ways in which labour relations are embedded in land tenure arrangements such as share contracts and non-market transactions at the level of households, some of which are increasingly the subject of market transaction. Last but not least is the effort in the overview to extend the discussion to the analysis of gendered livelihoods in the urban informal economy.

Some of the issues raised in Tsikata's article are pursued in greater depth by the other feature articles. An example is the question of whether land or labour is the most important constraint in women's livelihoods. Tsikata

argues that this intractable debate has its roots in the failure to recognise the inextricable linkages between land and labour relations or to examine the ways in which they influence livelihood trajectories. Dede-Esi Amanor-Wilks tackles this and related questions through a comparative analysis of Ghana and Zimbabwe that explores variations in access to and control over land for women in West Africa, as compared with East and Southern Africa. She explores the perception that access to land is easier for women in the former peasant export colonies, as compared with the former settler colonies. She finds that women appear to have stronger historical entitlements to land in Ghana, but that patterns vary in different parts of the country and that these patterns have been changing in a deregulated economic climate post-liberalisation. In Zimbabwe on the other hand, women's access has been constrained historically by the form of settler colonialism that took root there in the late 19th century, but there too patterns appear to be shifting. Amanor's paper challenges the notion that women can negotiate access to and control of productive factors in patriarchal societies, even those with strong matrilineal traditions. She argues that conflict-free access to land is determined less by negotiation and more by the relationship between scarce and abundant factors of production and that it is technology that can liberate women from their position of inequality.

The conjugal contract at the heart of productive systems is discussed in all four features in more or less detail. This identifies cooperation and conflict as two sides of the coin of production systems, emanating from intra-household production, reproduction and exchange relations between spouses, between parents and children and between household heads and other members. These relations, which are juridical in character and governed by various institutions, are also essentially economic relations of access to and control of livelihood resources, including land, labour and capital. In an article concerned with the gendered effects of farm production regimes on women's livelihoods in Northern Ghana, A. Atia Apusigah finds that whether constructed as farm hands or non-farm hands, women's access to productive resources is unequal due to the care responsibilities they shoulder in either regime, forcing them into unjust bargains that maintain the status quo. She places her analysis within the context of land struggles in northern Ghana, drawing on Sen's concept of negotiative bargains to explore how women position themselves in those struggles. Cultural appropriations of women's labour mean that even when women have economic rights, they are sometimes unable to claim

them, with disastrous consequences for the farm enterprises initiated by them. Alternatively, women resort to weapons of the weak including feigned illness and outright sabotage to persuade husbands to support their ventures. Weak entitlement to land pushes women to seek alternative livelihoods that further undermine their historical entitlements and their recourse to political activism.

The notion of resource tenures suggests that land is not the only naturally occurring livelihood resource. Indeed, studies of resource tenure have explored how the nature of particular resources such as gold and mangroves and the resources needed for their exploitation are implicated in gendered questions of livelihood. Akua Britwum demonstrates the specificities of certain resources by focusing on the gender dynamics of fish production in three coastal fishing communities in Ghana's Central Region, where both the positioning of women and their livelihood security is determined by what Britwum terms a "mode" of accessing fresh fish. Fishing is a highly gender segregated activity in which men catch the fish, while women process it. Processing adds value to the fresh catch and provides the wherewithal to increase household wealth and security, including food, income and capital security. Yet, even in matrilineal societies, this does not bestow the power and control that goes with ownership of the fresh stock, and the industry is heavily male-dominated. Occasionally women can accumulate sufficient capital to purchase and own fishing equipment, but the fact that they are barred from going to sea reinforces their position in the production chain. Direct access to fresh fish often depends on acceptance of patriarchal norms and though women may recruit the labour of children and other household members to boost the success of the enterprise, few women can rise to the top of a clearly structured hierarchy, and many become vulnerable when men migrate. Britwum argues that the shift to a market economy has undermined the traditional fish production system by distorting household, community and market boundaries and redefining gender identities and conjugal roles in ways that do not favour women. In this context, Britwum questions whether a focus on individual negotiation skills of women is useful in understanding how power relations between women themselves affect the ability of women to form an interest group.

Other themes running through this issue include the implications of female headship for a household's control of land and labour resources, the impacts of lineage systems, particularly matriliney and shifts towards matrifocality on the strength of women's land and labour rights. Another theme focuses on the state. On the one hand, the direct and indirect impacts of economic policies

on inequalities in resource tenures and production systems are discussed. On the other hand, expectations of the state as a key player in the redistribution of land to women and the protection of women's access to land in a deregulated economic environment are also evident. The impacts of macro-economic policies on the care economy, which are not sufficiently analysed as an integral part of the economy, is another broad theme.

The relationship between conflict and negotiation in the struggle to gain control over land is perhaps the most contentious theme of this volume, creating an unresolved tension that lingers in some of the articles. Though Apusigah draws our attention usefully to Sen's linked concepts of "negotiative conflict and cooperative bargains", the tension has to do with unanswered questions about what opportunities exist to choose negotiation over conflict or why so many long-running ethnic or social conflicts remained unresolved despite repeated negotiations. These questions are important in the context of the current preoccupation with negotiation in much of the recent literature on land struggles. Amanor-Wilks argues that the violence that accompanied Zimbabwe's land reform programmes prompted widespread condemnation by scholars and human rights activists alike. However, little attention has been paid to the historical record or the evidence emerging that land access and control has expanded since the land reforms of the 2000s. Whether these processes have benefitted women's land and labour interests and their livelihood outcomes needs to be an important aspect of future research on Zimbabwe's land tenure reforms.

The persistence of different kinds of resource conflicts arising from gender inequalities, the poverty of policy responses to these inequalities and the resulting livelihood insecurities underline the importance of gender justice struggles at local, national and regional levels and at different entry-points of research, policy advocacy and organisation. Three contributions to this issue – a profile, a standpoint piece and a conversation with a women's land rights campaigner – highlight the importance of organisation and campaigns for policy change. The profile of the Tanzania Gender and Advocacy Project (TGNP), which is authored by two of its members, Marjorie Mbilinyi and Gloria Shechambo, is a fascinating account of land struggles in Tanzania and the effort of one organisation in concert with others to ensure the broadest possible transformation of society and politics to promote sustainable livelihoods for all. TGNP's focus on struggles over land tenure and natural resources, associated with land (water, forests, minerals, wildlife) at the family and

community level, and increasingly at the national and regional level was, in recognition that it was a major issue for many women's/gender organisations and activists. The profile examines some of the memorable moments in TGNP's struggles, lessons learned and the organisation's future work on land and livelihoods. Significant among these were the organisation's efforts to navigate its differences with liberal feminist positions on the one hand and those of the male-led organisations on the other. TGNP sought to maintain its conceptual and political clarity while forging relationships with key allies with different standpoints. As the account explains, liberal feminists have tended to treat women as a homogeneous group and focus on the achievement of gender equity, while ignoring equally important questions about the limitations of neo-liberal reforms for tackling inequalities in resource tenures and labour relations. The male-dominated organisations on the other hand, while recognising gender inequalities, have tended to relegate them to the background while promoting community interests as though communities were homogeneous with equitable land tenure and labour relations. The TGNP account is a salutary tale which shows that constant vigilance and long-term engagement are required to protect even the small achievements of land policy struggles.

The difficulties of implementation of gains and their sustainability is a theme taken up in Patricia Kameri-Mbote's analysis of the recently passed Kenya National Land Policy. As she notes, this policy, with its strong equity principles, makes detailed provisions for tackling gender inequalities through the reform of existing legislation and the enactment of new laws to promote women's rights to land and related resources. It promotes gender equity in inheritance and in market transactions in land through provisions such as the co-ownership of matrimonial property and seeks to protect the rights of women before, during and on the dissolution of marriage or the death of a spouse. Kameri-Mbote argues that if the provisions of the National Land Policy are implemented, it would reduce gender inequalities in access to, control and ownership of land and enable women to leverage their labour investment in land and other reproductive duties in their families. However, the history of land struggles in Kenya and elsewhere and the opposition to the policy from the Kenya Large Landowners' Association suggests that implementation will be an uphill task requiring pressure from the women's movement.

Recognition of the importance of organisation and advocacy is at the basis of a recent campaign by ActionAid on land rights. The conversation

between the guest editors of this issue and Kujejatou Manneh-Jallow, Country Director of ActionAid in The Gambia, is about this campaign, which joins social movements worldwide to demand a new agrarian reform agenda. The campaign calls for activists to take up the question of women's land rights and to give women's land rights the place that they deserve in mainstream agendas for social justice and poverty eradication. In The Gambia and in 20 other countries where ActionAid works, women developed Charters of Demands which took national specificities into account. While the conversation focused on the Gambia campaign, it demonstrates the power of an international campaign to galvanise national-level efforts. It also demonstrates the value of multiple strategies to execute a campaign of this nature – research to identify problems and build a gender analysis of women's ownership and control of farmland; sensitisation of key stakeholders, lobbying and engaging policy makers in a dialogue; forming partnerships with different groups; using caravans to collect the voices of women to present to policy makers; fundraising to assist women to increase the productivity of their farmlands and to develop a model farm demonstrating successful commercialisation of women's communal farms.

There are questions of mandate and legitimacy raised by the frontline role played by an international NGO in a series of national campaigns. However, it also points to the organisational and resource challenges facing social movements across Africa. How they can transcend the limitations of the NGO vehicle and their donor dependency to lead national land and other struggles remains a critical issue. These challenges are compounded by the strictures of the policy advocacy terrain – the lip-service governments and donors pay to local participation in policy processes; the rigid framework of neo-liberal thinking and its preference for market solutions, authoritarian states, and the relegation of equity principles – all these mean that the transformation of policies remains a huge challenge.

In the light of the concerns of FA12, it is entirely appropriate that it includes a review by Cassandra R. Veney of a new book by Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change*. As Veney notes, the book provides a detailed historical documentation of the multiple productive and reproductive roles that women in various parts of Yorubaland performed, both during and after colonialism. McIntosh's book examines the organisations, activities and actions in various social, political, religious and economic sectors of Yoruba women, paying attention to their multiple roles and responsibilities

as daughters, mothers, wives, sisters and in-laws. McIntosh argues that within Yoruba society, seniority was important, but it alone did not confer status on women or allow them agency. In addition to seniority, women needed resources in the form of money, dependants, land, and other property. This finding is important in the debates about the importance of gender differences in the lives of Yoruba and other African women. Veneay argues that McIntosh overly focuses on agency, ignoring the hierarchies among women at the heart of resource control in Yoruba society, which sanctioned the exploitation by successful women of pawns, slaves, and junior wives. This, Veneay argues, suggests a need for more emphasis on unequal relationships among women.

It is hoped that this issue – the first FA to focus so clearly on the deeply gendered and foundational issues of land and livelihoods – will initiate and stimulate others to contribute to a research agenda that sharpens the conceptual tools for addressing land and labour issues in gendered livelihoods. The goal is to provide cross-disciplinary analyses which account for macro, institutional and micro elements of agrarian stagnation, informalisation of work and livelihood insecurities taking into account regional, country and sector specificities. FA12 challenges readers to extend this research towards gaining a fuller measure of the resource tenure and labour relations which are responsible for gender inequalities in livelihood trajectories in sub-Saharan Africa. Only then will we be in a position to pursue the transformation of unequal and unjust socio-economic relations and systems that currently undermine women's livelihoods prospects in so much of Africa.

Endnotes

1. The workshop was held from 26–28 June 2008 in Accra, and brought together 23 researchers, activists, students and policy makers from nine countries in East, West and Southern Africa.