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An Analysis of the Factors Influencing Women's Control and Access to Agriculturally Productive Resources, with a Focus on T/A Kalembo and Chanthunya in the Balaka District in Southern Malawi

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Abstract

The primary driver of household and national food income and nutrition security in Malawi is still agriculture. In the agricultural sector, women make up between 70 and 80 percent of the labour force and generate about 80 percent of the household's food, but they also encounter a number of obstacles when carrying out their agriculture-related tasks (GoM 2015). Due to a multitude of issues, including women's limited access to agriculturally productive resources, the agricultural sector performs considerably below its potential. The forces behind this difficulty include institutional, knowledge-and skill-related, and socially produced. This study sought to determine what factors influence women's control and access to agriculturally productive resources in Malawi's southern region. According to study findings, all of the study area's land is held in a freehold system under a matrilineal inheritance system. Because men are married off to women from neighbouring villages under the lineage system, women have greater access to land than men. But men (the maternal uncle, known as "mwini mbumba" in the area) are in charge of the land. The study also revealed that males are equally responsible for making important decisions on finances, developments, and other matters at both the home and communal levels. According to the findings, societal norms and culture also have an impact on women's access to and control over productive resources.

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Introduction

Since agriculture is the foundation of Malawi's economy, it contributes 30% of the country's GDP and accounts for more than 80% of export revenue (GoM, 2015). The MGDS II highlights how important agriculture is to the country's economic development and progress, and the Malawian government is cognizant of these facts. With a total area of 211,716 ha, the Balaka district is made up primarily of smallholder farmers who employ an average land holding size of 0.6 ha as well as a few estates that operate on a commercial basis on 188,062 ha of customary land (BDC, 2017–2022). The district's main income crops are cotton and tobacco, while the food crops include maize, groundnuts, sorghum, roots and tubers, and pulses. There are gender disparities related to access and control of livestock species in Malawi. The percentage of households with male heads owning or

keeping livestock is higher than the percentage of households with female heads, 61 percent versus 48%, respectively (GoM, 2006/07). Farmers in the district keep a variety of classes of livestock, including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and different types of poultry (BDC, 2015/16). Women play a significant role in agriculture in Malawi, where they make up 70% of full-time farmers, perform 70% of the agricultural work, and produce 80% of the food consumed at home, ensuring household nutrition security (GoM, 2015). However, due to gender-specific restrictions, women typically have less access to agricultural productive resources than men (FAO, 2011). Ownership of land, livestock, or other agricultural resources; management of agricultural resources; use of financial services and other inputs for agriculture; access to education, knowledge, and skills related to agriculture; participation in agricultural labour activities. These are just a

few of the factors that go into gaining access to agriculturally productive resources. Studies have indicated that women typically have disadvantages in relation to each of these factors (FAO, 2011). For instance, in Malawi, women possess less land, livestock, and other agricultural resources than males do, and the resources they do own are often less in scope (GoM, 2006/07). In addition, compared to men, women typically have less control and decision-making authority over agriculturally productive resources. Both men and women are vitally essential in agriculture, yet there is a gender gap that harms female farmers because of differences in power regarding access to and management of resources. Female farmers typically produce less than men farmers due to this gender difference. In addition to decreased agricultural yields, low productivity can also result in environmental issues like over-cultivation, soil erosion, and land degradation (UN Women, UNDP, and WB, 2015). In contrast, 14% of men appear to have slightly easier access to credit than their female counterparts (10.7%), albeit some of the established barriers to lending at banks and microfinance institutions, such as the need for collateral and security guarantees, still exist. The perceived importance of women's roles, as well as their authority and decision-making ability in agricultural processes, are sometimes diminished since they are seen as assistants rather than farmers (Fink 1991, 21). The belief that males have the right to make decisions about women's employment and their overall wellness without taking into account women's needs, preferences, and aspirations is occasionally promoted by gender relations that devalue women's responsibilities and contributions. A study conducted in Malawi clearly demonstrates this (Jafry, Moyo, and Mandaloma 2014). It found that women who do not have their husbands' support are less likely to use extension services than women who do (Jafry, Moyo, and Mandaloma 2014). In addition, most studies have not gone very far in analysing the contributing reasons for these gender inequalities. All of these gender gaps occur because of a combination of different drivers that negatively impact women rather than just one, as most research claim. In order to fill in the knowledge vacuum that most studies have not addressed, this social research has applied the Harvard analytical theory to assess the influential factors.

Statement of the Problem

Women's economic, political, and social potential are limited by inequalities in access to and control over agriculturally productive resources, which also has high costs for the agricultural industry, food security, and economic growth. Collective drivers, which include external drivers like cultural and social norms and social relationships, internal drivers like knowledge and skills, and structural drivers like affordability and availability, are some of the things that prevent women from having access to and control over certain things. Women's access to and control over resources have been impacted by a mixture of these factors. Balaka is one of the districts where women's inferior access to agriculturally productive resources and benefits has significantly reduced their ability to contribute to both agricultural development and food production. According to research-based evidence, in Balaka, women's access to and control over resources and benefits are influenced by household headship, which is tied to culture and suggests that men make the majority of choices in their capacity as the head of the home. July 2020 (NSO). The factors that influence women's access to and control over agricultural resources in Balaka, TA Chanthunya, and

Kalembo remain unknown, despite the fact that some of these factors have been discovered in prior studies. In a number of ways, social and cultural norms discriminate against women and girls (Masson, January 2016). Women are largely responsible for child care, which limits the amount of labour monitoring they can provide on their plots compared to male plot managers (Kilic, Lopez, and Goldstein, 2013). The fact that women own less livestock puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to obtaining the necessary financing for buying practical agricultural implements and inputs, particularly in informal credit markets, which are the main source of credit for the majority of people in Malawi (Gondwe, 2018). In each of the research mentioned above, a particular element that affects women's access to and control over resources that might be used to lower poverty and boost yield output has been found. However, in order to boost crop output and reduce poverty, it is necessary to recognise and address all constraints that limit women's access to and control over resources, as well as their influencing variables. Thus, the study has combined all of the factors that affect women's access to agriculturally productive resources and has found the influencing aspects that most social science studies have neglected to investigate. In the Balaka districts of TA Chanthunya and Kalembo, the study examined the factors that affect women's access to and control over agricultural productive resources. Every driver has been considered from a variety of angles, including political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal. By using the Harvard analytical framework, this has been accomplished.

Literature Review

The secondary data on factors influencing women's access to and control over agriculturally productive resources are examined in the literature. Despite making up a significant portion of the labour force in agriculture, evidence from numerous studies has revealed that women confront obstacles in controlling and gaining access to agricultural productive resources.

Cultural and Social Norms Associated with Access to and Control

According to a study by Nkhonjera and Chaula (September 2021), households owned land through matrilineal inheritance rather than buying it through a self-land acquisition scheme (*kuzigulira malo*), and the entire study area had a freehold land tenure system. In the lineage system, women control the land when men have married villagers from neighbouring villages. When a female child marries, a portion of the land is handed to them, whereas men from the community stay to live in the villages where their marriages take place. The survey also showed that women own land and have control over how it is used. Even though they had access to land, the *mwini-mbumba*, or family head, was designated as the matrilineal group of sisters' and their children's guardian, and has power over the land in accordance with culture. Women and girls are discriminated against in various ways by social and cultural standards (Masson, January 2016). The general wellbeing of women and girls is hampered by harmful traditional practises, such as early and forced marriage, courting rape, and female genital mutilation/cutting, as well as restricted access to and control over sexual and reproductive health (Michelis, Opondo *et al.*, 2016).

Availability and Accessibility of Inputs

The fact that poverty is particularly pervasive in female-

headed households in Malawi suggests that investing in agricultural expansion has advantages for both reducing poverty and promoting gender equality. According to a research by Kilic, Lopez, and Goldstein (2013), plots in Malawi that are typically managed by women are 25% less productive than plots that are typically managed by men. The use of inorganic fertiliser, household adult male labour, development of high-value export commodities, and access to agricultural equipment are all banned in female-managed plots. The application of inorganic fertiliser and disparities in the returns to the utilisation of home adult male labour account for the remaining 18% of the gender gap caused by the structure impact. A gender-based knowledge gap may also be to blame for female farmers' relatively inefficient use of fertiliser. According to a study by Gondwe (2018), households keep livestock and poultry for a variety of reasons, including as a source of farm work, a way to save cash, a guarantee for loans, and a crucial safety net in times of emergency. Female farmers have substantially smaller livestock holdings than male farmers do. It was inferred that labour shortages for women in agriculture were greater than for men. Given that livestock can also be used as collateral for loans, particularly in Malawi's informal credit markets, which are the main source of credit for the majority of the population, the fact that women own less livestock puts them at a disadvantage when trying to get the much-needed financing for buying practical agricultural inputs and tools. In most developing nations, female-headed households own fewer livestock (and poultry) than male-headed households (61%), at 48% versus 61% respectively. All main livestock species, including cattle, goats, pigs, and chickens, fall within this category (NSO, 2010).

Women's Participation in Agricultural Decision-Making Process

It was found that the guy is still the one who takes important decisions for the family in matrilineal communities where women own the land. Men make the decisions on what crops to cultivate and what agricultural inputs to utilise. Women are underrepresented in decision-making in the agricultural sector (Peterman, Quisumbing, Dick, Dardón, md. Hassan, Kamusiime Malapit, n.d.). The findings of a study by Chayal, Dhaka, Poonia, Tyagi, and Verma (April 2013) indicate that women's participation in agricultural decision-making is quite low. The marketing of agricultural inputs and farm products, the type of manure/fertilizer application, and manure/fertilizer application were the activities where participation was very low, according to the results. According to Damisa and Yohanna (2007) and Enete and Amusa (2010), illiteracy and limited access to farm information were the main obstacles that prevented farm women from participating in the decision-making process. Other obstacles included a lack of knowledge about farming and the belief that women are inferior to their male counterparts.

According to a concept created by Longwe (1999), women's empowerment is the ability for women to participate equally in the development process and hold equal control over the factors of production to males. The framework seeks to achieve the same objectives as Malawi's national gender policy (MoG 2015), which is to lessen gender disparities and increase participation of men, women, girls, and boys in socioeconomic development processes. It contends that this method of studying equality by sectors focuses more on

distinct spheres of social life than it does on women's equality throughout the development process. Different levels of equality are acknowledged, including those related to welfare, access, control, and participation, as well as the degree to which women's issues are taken seriously. Marx and Engel's (n.d.) conflict theory applied the concept to the family unit, showing that relationships between exploiters and exploited also occur in the family's household. In terms of the roles played by men and women, the idea distinguishes between modern and pre-modern societies. Because there was nothing to be exploited, there was little disparity between the genders in pre-modern society. Due to the fact that women in modern countries are not paid for their domestic labour, their work has come to be considered as superfluous and males have taken on the role of the primary provider (Lindsey, 2011). Three aspects of capitalism are described that strengthen male supremacy (Engel, no date). First, by giving men the opportunity to have private property and large incomes, capitalism gives males power. Second, because they do not earn anything but instead receive money from their husbands and spend it on things they want or like, women have evolved into the consumer class in society. Thirdly, the way that men and women labour is divided by capitalism. It assigns men to work in factories while assigning women to take care of the home, but it pays men for their labour in factories, giving the latter employment more value (Macionis, 2010). In the same career, men are more prestigious than women (Weber, no date). Gender is one of the elements of social inequality and conflict, according to the conflict theory. Men benefit from gender disparity, but women suffer. Despite the fact that these investigations were conducted by different authors, neither one was able to pinpoint the fundamental causes of production disparity or capitalism. Both ideas failed to identify the key drivers of inequality and male domination.

Scope of the Study

In order to provide a comprehensive picture, the study has concentrated on factors that affect women's access to and control over agricultural productive resources using a case study of T/A Kalembo and Chanthunya in the Balaka district. T/A Kalembo is dominated by the Yao tribe, while T/A Chanthunya is dominated by the Ngoni tribe. Land, agricultural supplies and technology, capital, and services for agricultural extension are some of the resources. The access to and control over benefits and assets accumulated following agricultural harvest were not evaluated in the study. The study has also given attention to the difficulties women have in getting access to resources.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify cultural and social norms associated with access to and control over agricultural productive resources.
- To determine women's access to Agriculture Extension services as a productive resource
- To determine the effectiveness of programs promoting women's participation in agricultural decision-making process
- To assess availability and accessibility of agricultural productive inputs

Suggestions and Recommendations

Key Issues	Recommendations
The impact of culture and social norms on women	Addressing social and cultural norms that limit women's access to and control over agriculturally productive resources is necessary.
	Targeting families, community leaders, and religious leaders with trainings on gender equality and women's empowerment, the government should increase capability.
	Targeting couples, community leaders, and church leaders, local councils should promote conversation that challenges some of the key behaviours associated with the norm.
Increase in gender-based violence	To make reporting incidences of gender-based violence (GBV) easier, local governments should connect communities with organisations that address GBV, such as the police, social welfare office, and NGO that addresses GBV.
	Government should increase knowledge on gender-based violence by creating awareness on gender-based violence in communities
	In order to combat gender-based violence (GBV), the government should improve community structures, such as child protection committees, community police forums, and victim assistance units.
	To advance gender equality in communities through peer-to-peer education, local councils should establish male gender champions.
Women access extension services in informal mode (community meetings)	Government should deliberate include women when conducting agriculture trainings to close the knowledge gap.
	Government should promote good agriculture practices through demonstrations and farmer field schools
Women still locked out in decision making	Economic empowerment programs and other government program e.g. AIP should deliberately target women to increase their access to agricultural productive resources and increase programs impact areas to target more women
	Government should ensure women with diverse backgrounds and from different socio-economic strata are given opportunities to meaningfully engage in structures and processes at all levels
Limited capital to engage in viable income generating activities and purchase farm inputs amongst women	Link women groups private banks for better amounts of loans
	Local councils should facilitate formation of cooperatives among women to increase their capital
	Implement the pass on programmes on small stock production like goats and chickens targeting women.
Women are most vulnerable to disasters	Local governments should encourage women to engage in integrated homestead farming.
	When necessary, local councils should encourage irrigation.
Limited access to improved inputs due to high costs and long distances to markets and disasters	Government should maintain roads affected by disasters to ease access to agricultural inputs to women
	The idea of seed multiplication should be adopted by local councils.
	Government should fast track delivery of agricultural inputs to markets

Research Methodology

A mixed method descriptive and diagnostic research approach was used in the study. It has to explain how structural, internal, and external factors relate to women's access to and control over agriculturally productive resources. The research employed mixed research methodologies, which integrate qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques, to achieve its goals. A simple random and stratified sampling technique was used to select 1280 participants from two T/As. Of these, 80 farming households were chosen for individual interviews (II), 40 participants were chosen for focus groups discussions (FGD), 20 adult and young men and 20 adult and

young women, and 8 participants were chosen for key informant interviews (KII).

The population was divided into strata depending on gender and age group, and each member of the population had a chance to be chosen. To elicit extra information, an open-ended questionnaire was utilised to interview farmers, including extension agents and district officers. To achieve the goals of the research, a set of questions were created to extract statistical data from the sample. As well, observations were utilised. Key informant interviews with local leaders were conducted after random selection. According to this study, the families that were chosen were both those that are

affiliated with farmer's organisations and those that are not. The study used secondary data from a review of academic publications, journal articles, research studies conducted by other academics, and other sources in addition to primary data from surveys and observations. The Strategic Package of Social Science (SPSS) was used in the study to analyse the data and produce tabular reports and charts. The correctness of the data was used as the foundation for the interpretation. The study's conclusions about women's access to and control over agriculturally productive resources have opened up new vistas for further intellectual exploration.

Consent and other ethical issues were taken into account. Before providing any information, each participant could express their consent. Keeping data private was a top goal when performing the study. The institution considered providing an introductory letter so that the researcher could be quickly identified.

Conclusion

The study used both qualitative and quantitative through individual interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The study has revealed drivers on women's access to and control over agricultural productive resources both at household and community level. Women are the most victims to limited access to these resources despite contributing to the major labour force in agriculture. The drivers have not only affected women's access and control over these resources, have also escalated other issues like gender-based violence at both household and community level. Addressing the key issues will improve women's production yields and promote gender equality.

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