

# Religion and Gender Policy Implementation in Zimbabwe: Women's Access to Land Ownership in Gwanda District

**Christina Landman**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8905-0738>

University of South Africa

landmc@unisa.ac.za

**Shumba Sibiziwe**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3695-0617>

University of South Africa

shumbasibiziwe@gmail.com

## Abstract

African women's histories show that economic marginalisation of women is rampant. This article evaluates how the implementation of African Traditional Religions, Christianity and the new *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* impact on women's access to land ownership in the Gwanda district of Zimbabwe. The land reform programme, initiated by the Zimbabwean government, endeavoured to alleviate the limited access to land by women through a quota system. The new *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* asserts that women should constitute 20% of all recipients of A2 farming land. Women now have the right to apply for A1 and A2 agricultural land, and it gives women authority to control land as a means of production. This marks a departure from the traditional custom where women would acquire land only through their husbands, fathers or any male relative. In this study, a mixed-method approach and case study design were applied to explore if this could eradicate gender inequality caused by religions on women's access to land ownership? The instruments were questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 80 participants. The findings are that the patriarchal system and cultural practices of African Traditional Religions and Christianity hinder women from accessing land. Some women have a fear of the unknown. The study recommends that women should be conscientised against the marginalising effects of religious, cultural and patriarchal practices, and informed on the contents of the current *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)*. There should also be more female representation on the Land Allocation Committee.

**Keywords:** gender policy; gender and land; Gwanda District; Zimbabwe; gender conscientisation; church and land; culture and land; religion

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## Introduction

Gender inequalities have been in existence in the spheres of life and development in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa. All these were perpetuated by the patriarchal system and traditional cultural practice from African Traditional Religions and Christianity. In southern Africa, where Zimbabwe is included, a majority of women could not question that women did, nor could they own land. Women were not only without belongings, but they themselves belonged to men. According to tradition, when the women got married, they gained marriage status in society. However, they had to change their surnames, since after marriage they had to use that of their husbands. To make matters worse, the women lost their land, their medical aid scheme and had to register as minors/dependants/charges of their husbands.

In line with cultural inheritance systems of African Traditional Religions, the women would not get anything as inheritance once the husband died. Only male children and male relatives would inherit. The widow was not allowed to return to her home area but was supposed to remarry a younger brother of the husband. Therefore, this article sought to examine how the patriarchal system and religious cultural practices of African Traditional Religions and Christianity affected women's access to land ownership in the Gwanda district, especially in line with the current *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* implementation.

## Missionaries Domesticated Black Women and Took them off the Land

In line with the approach of colonial masters throughout the missionary history of southern Africa (to which the Gwanda district of Zimbabwe also belongs), (white) missionary women deliberately domesticated the black women; they were not only converted to Christianity but to a Western way of living. When the missionaries converted black women to Christianity, they took them off their lands where they worked in their tribal clothes and dressed them to clean and cook in Western households. The black women were thus not only estranged from their (tribe's) land, but they were "domesticated." They were dressed in long dresses with head covers. They had to work in the kitchen, cooking and cleaning the whites' houses. In the mission schools, the girls were taught cookery and needlework, not farming and building (Landman 1999, 55). The women were taught domestic duties. The type of education was limited to home chores. The women had no professional academic training. More so, in line with the patriarchal nature of the Christian Bible, the black women were taught to be submissive and subordinate to men.

## Women in the Bible

From the Christian Bible, we note that there were indeed women in the sacred Scriptures who owned land. For instance, the five daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 36:1–13 owned land as part of property inheritance. The woman from Shumen in 2 Kings 8 did the same. This also happened to Job's three daughters in Job 42:15, of whom it is said

that they inherited with the brothers, although land is not specifically mentioned but implied. The highly regarded woman of Proverbs 31 in verse 16 “considers a field and buys it; out of her earning she plants a vineyard.”

We also note that, even though the Christian Bible shows that there were some women who owned some pieces of land, the Holy Bible is also patriarchal in the sense that there are certain passages which perpetuate the subordination and suppression of female voices, by referring to the stories as patriarchal narratives in the book of Genesis—as if the stories are about “man” only.

In Christianity, the theology of subordination is based on a male headship of the order of creation (Genesis 2–3), manifested in the charismatic leadership that is associated with paternalistic notions of God the Father. Patriarchy is thus viewed as a divinely created order and willed by God. The role and status of women are even distorted in the Creation narratives when a male God first creates man and then, secondly, woman (Genesis 2:22). In this context we conclude that “first” means superior and “second” means inferior. Women are portrayed as inferior to males to the extent that they are not capable of independent life, compared to males. They should be obedient followers of males. They cannot initiate ideas or exercise their will independently. In the patriarchal narratives both Abraham and Isaac lied that their wives were their sisters, sacrificing the wives to serve themselves. This scenario triggered the authors to examine how the patriarchal system and the traditional cultural practices of Christianity affected women’s access to land ownership in the Gwanda district of Zimbabwe.

## Statement of the Problem

It is quite disturbing to find that the gender discrimination regarding access, ownership and control of land has been in existence throughout pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. The major form and source of this unequal land distribution is the dominance of patriarchy, customary land tenure systems and traditional authority instigated by African Traditional Religions and Christianity. Since the current *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* is committed to the eradication of gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development, we have to ask the question if it could really help to eradicate gender disparities in the Gwanda district pertaining to women’s access to land ownership. This study seeks to explore the implications of the new *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* on women’s access to land ownership.

## African Women Theologians

African women theologians point out that the economic marginalisation of women forms part of the oppression of women at international level and in Africa in general. What was highlighted above is also in line with what Oduyoye (1995) regards as the “feminisation of poverty.” Oduyoye (1995) asserts that such a scenario is revealed by numerous property and inheritance rules and regulations which seem to marginalise women, with the exception of those few individuals who may take their issues to court.

Johnson (1997, 532, cited by Musasiwa et al. 2010, 103) notes that wide-ranging economic marginalisation is quite rampant in Africa. According to this scholar:

Women are denied economic, legal and educational rights, paid less money for the same work, and in many places cannot buy land without the signature of a man. As UN statistics show, while forming one-half of the world's population, women do three-fourths of the world's work, receive one tenth of the world's salary and own one hundredth of the world's land. Over three-fourths of starving people are women and their dependent children.

From the foregoing statement we conclude that, in Africa, women are largely economically marginalised.

What was raised by Johnson (1997, cited by Musasiwa et al. 2010, 103) is also in line with what was noted by Ajala (2017), when writing about the situation in Nigeria. For this writer, gender discrimination in Nigeria denies women the equal economic and political empowerment, especially regarding access to land ownership. The lack of access to land ownership makes the women vulnerable to poverty, since possession of land constitutes a major source and means of wealth creation (Aigbokhan 1998, 31).

Key practices and causes of the gender-imbalanced land distribution and tenure are promoted by the dominance of patriarchy, religious customary land tenure systems and traditional authority structures of African Traditional Religions and Christianity. To make matters worse, the customary structures of power and authority continue to perpetuate women's failure to own land.

### Context of Land Gender Imbalances in Zimbabwe

On the African continent, including Zimbabwe, land forms the basis of agricultural production. It has been very difficult for women to access land in Zimbabwe and on the African continent, due to multiple issues—most of which are embedded in patriarchy, a system which breeds gender inequality (Tshuma 2019, 9). Gender relations have always been biased against women.

Tshuma (2019, 9) also points out that most southern African countries experienced some historical injustices when land was expropriated from them by the colonial settlers. Upon attainment of colonial independence, some of these southern African countries engaged in land reform to redress the colonial injustices. The Zimbabwean government has made notable strides in addressing both the colonial injustices and gender politics in land ownership in the country.

In Zimbabwe, customarily, all married people have right of access to arable areas. Local government authorities, together with the traditional leaders, would govern that within the authority of the Rural District Council Act (1988) and the Communal Lands Act (1982). In this case, from the African Traditional Religions' perspective, traditional

leaders play a role since they are custodians of the land in the country. The land reform programme, which was initiated in the previous years by the Zimbabwean government, endeavoured to alleviate the limited access to land by women through the quota system. This policy asserts that women should constitute 20% of all those given A2 farming land. The above statement is reiterated by Toro (2016, 78), who says: “It is not clear how and why this quota was arrived at and what validation was given for this quota as a yard stick for fair distribution of land to women.” Women have the right to apply for A1 agricultural land in their own right. Such a stance marked a departure from the traditional custom where women would acquire land through their husbands, fathers or any male relative. This, then, gave women authority to control land as a means of production.

In 2013 the Zimbabwean government initiated a Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013. Chapter 2, section 17 of the current Constitution notes:

It is the obligation of the State to promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society by making sure that the State, all institutions and the agencies of the government in all the levels should ensure that women have access to resources including land equally with men.

Chapter 2, section 17, reiterates the fact that the State should also take positive measures to correct gender discrimination and disparities resulting from the past systems. Thus, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 is strongly against all forms of gender discrimination.

Together with this, Chapter 16, section of 289, also outlines the guiding policies on agricultural land. In that section it is said: “In order to redress the unjust and unfair pattern of land ownership that was brought about by colonialism, and to bring about land reform and the equitable access to by all Zimbabweans to the country’s natural resources, certain policies have to be followed.” Chapter 16, section 289, goes on to point out that the allocation and distribution of agricultural land must be fair and equitable, having regard for gender balance and diverse community interests. More so, the Chapter also says: “No one should be deprived arbitrarily of their right to use and occupy agricultural land.” Thus, the Zimbabwean Constitution is vehemently in support of the fight against gender discrimination in regard to women’s access to land ownership.

In 2013, Zimbabwe also initiated a new *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)*. This second *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* replaced the first *National Gender Policy* of 2004. Ajala (2017, 1) says: “Gender policy is a socially constructed component that reflects a society’s views regarding what it deems as the appropriate roles for men and women. The United Nations (UN) (2010) noted that gender is a social construction that defines and differentiates roles, rights, responsibilities and obligations of men and women.” Thus, the new *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* was crafted socially, so as to stipulate the functions of men and women in Zimbabwe. While the first *National*

*Gender Policy* (2004) had a number of initiatives to address gender inequalities, this second one seeks to address the weaknesses of the *National Gender Policy* (2004) and the developing issues prevalent under the changing political, economic and social contexts at local, global and regional levels. Some of the chief developments at global and regional levels comprised the 2005 Beijing+ 10 global reviews that made endorsements to areas which called for special action, and the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development that set forth 28 substantive goals for accomplishing gender equality by 2015. At national level, vital developments comprised the elaborate new constitutional requirements, with a thrust on gender equality as well as the Land Reform Programme implemented over the past 10 years, whose gains will to a great extent be profoundly consolidated under the new gender policy provisions.

The current *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* stipulates that Zimbabwe is dedicated to economic equity. It is important to note that the vision of Zimbabwe's *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* is to have “a gender-just society in which men and women enjoy equity, contribute and benefit as equal partners in the development of the country.” Its goal is to “eradicate gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development.” This new *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* points out that, on control and access to resources, the latest statistics on the Land Reform Programme from the University of Zimbabwe showed that women constitute 18% of the recipients under A1 and 12% under A2—falling far short of the gender parity model. Since the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the current *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)* are committed to the eradication of gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development, this article sought to assess the gender policy implementation in Zimbabwe with regard to women's access to land ownership. This is done against the background of the patriarchal and religious cultural background of the African Traditional Religions and Christianity existing in the country.

## Research Methodology

A mixed-method approach was used in the research article. We used both qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the research data. Quantitative research is linked to positivism, where reality is seen as stable, observable and measurable (Creswell 2010, 39). Quantitative research seeks contributory determination, prediction, and generality of findings. It actually focuses on collecting numeric data, which is then scrutinised statistically. Some researchers are of the opinion that qualitative and quantitative research approaches can be excellently combined in the same research study—see for example Strauss and Corbin (1990, 67) and Patton (1990, 34). Caruth (2013, 112) denotes quantitative researchers as positivists and qualitative researchers have been referred to as hermeneutists. Thus, quantitative data may be utilised in a way that supports or expands upon qualitative data and effectively deepens understanding of women's access to landownership in the Gwanda district.

In this study, we used quantitative methods so that we would be able to describe, explain and predict the phenomenon of the implications of women's access to land ownership

in the Gwanda district. Quantitative research is based on pre-determined variables and research questions, which we investigated independently. Data collected through quantitative research may be regarded as objective, since it is obtained through structured questionnaires. This ensures a high degree of reliability of the results.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is based on an interpretive paradigm. Interpretive approaches to research have the purpose of understanding the world of human experience (Cohen and Manion 1994, 36). This suggests that reality is socially constructed, as propounded by Mertens (2010, 12). Creswell (2010, 38) asserts that the interpretive researcher relies on the participants' views of the situation under study and takes cognisance of the impact on the research of their own experiences. Creswell (2010, 38) goes on to say that the interpretive researcher mostly relies on qualitative data collection methods and analysis, or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In this study, we used qualitative methods to adequately describe or interpret the situation with regards to women's access to land ownership in the Gwanda district.

We used both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to triangulate data. This mixture of methods made it possible to understand the research problem and tackle it from any relevant angle, while using only one methodology does not provide all the information required (Castro et al. 2010, 343). Mixed-methods research offered the best of both worlds: the in-depth, contextualised, and natural but more time-consuming insights of qualitative research coupled with the more efficient but less rich or compelling predictive power of quantitative research (Stange, Crabtree, and Miller 2006, 293). Creswell and Plano (2011, 39) contend that mixed-methods research helps to answer questions that could not be answered by qualitative or quantitative approaches alone.

## Research Design

The study employed a case study design, which allowed a lot of detail to be collected from the Gwanda district that would not normally be collected by other research designs like the descriptive survey design. The data that were collected are deemed substantially richer and of greater depth than would have been the case through the experimental design. Hence, the use of the case study method had a number of advantages regarding religion and gender policy implementation, regarding women's access to landownership in the Gwanda district.

## Sample

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants of the study from the Gwanda district. The method was useful in making sure that the researchers excluded people who did not fit the requirements of the study. A sample was chosen consisting of 80 participants (40 women land owners; 5 land officers; 5 gender officers; 15 local traditional leaders; 15 church leaders). The traditional leaders chosen were village

heads, since according to African Traditional Religions they are the custodians of culture and land.

### **Research Instruments**

Focus group discussions were conducted with the selected 40 women from the Gwanda district. Using such an instrument saved money and time, as compared to individual interviews. In addition to that, the researchers were able to get comprehensive information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions on access to land ownership. The other advantage was that it allowed women to discuss their thoughts freely with others.

Semi-structured interviews were used to interview local traditional and church leaders from the Gwanda district. This instrument assisted us to uncover rich descriptive data on the personal experiences of the participants. Information gathered through the interviews could move the innovation process from general topics to more specific insights. The interviews were used so that the participants would stay focused on the gender policy implementation regarding women's access to land. The interview results were recorded. The other advantage of using interviews was that we were able to interview the participants in their mother language. This created a free environment which allowed the participants to reveal their inner-most feelings and experience on women's access to land ownership.

Open and closed questionnaires were used to gather data from the land and gender officers in the Gwanda district. Using questionnaires had many advantages. Phellas, Bloch and Seale (2011, 184) note that questionnaires are cheaper to administer. For instance, in this study, the only costs that we incurred when using self-completion questionnaires were those associated with the printing or designing of the questionnaire. The absence of an interviewer provided greater anonymity for the respondents (Phellas et al. 2011, 184). When the topic of the research is sensitive or personal, a questionnaire can increase the reliability of the responses. In this study, we assured the respondents of their anonymity.

For document analysis, we analysed the new *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)*, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013, and the Land Policy in Zimbabwe to get information about women's access to land ownership. The registers from the district land officers were analysed to get the relevant statistics relevant to the research study.

### **Discussion of Findings**

From the focus group discussions, questionnaires and interviews it was revealed that women had access to land ownership of both A1 and A2 farms in the Gwanda district. To a greater extent, the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate and Rural Resettlement officers are following the stipulations of the new *National Gender Policy's*



(2013–2017) vision. The vision is to have a gender-just society in which men and women enjoy equity, contribute and benefit as equal partners in the development of the country. It was discovered that they are also following the *National Gender Policy's* (2013–2017) goal to eradicate gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development, because women in Gwanda are offered their 20% quota system whenever the land allocations are done. What we found is in line with the Constitution of Zimbabwe, which says in Chapter 16, section 289, that the allocation and distribution of agricultural land must be fair and equitable, having regard to gender balance and diverse community interests. One of the gender officers confirmed the above idea saying that, in the quota system, whenever there is a piece of land to be distributed, the women, the civil servants and the war veterans were taken into consideration as well.

Local traditional leaders (the village heads), church leaders and women land owners also reiterated the fact that all women had access to land ownership in the Gwanda district, but the common trend was that only a few women were forthcoming. The abovementioned respondents also pointed out that those who had access to land ownership were generally women who were educated. One of the gender officers even pointed out that widows and single women took a leading role, compared to the married ones, since they showed resolve to have land registered in their own names. The widows and single ladies were taking a leading role since they were regarded as the breadwinners and they were not accountable to any husband. This was confirmed by one of the local traditional leaders who said: “The single women and widows register under their own names, whilst the married ones accessed land under their husbands’ names. The wives were written as beneficiaries.” This is against the provisions of African Traditional Religion and Christianity, which do not allow women to own land due to their patriarchal system which strongly believes in a male-dominated society.

It was also revealed by the questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions that between the widows and single women, widows had more challenges of accessing land compared to single women in the Gwanda district. This was perpetuated by the fact that the widows were considered to be in possession of the late husbands’ land, while the single women had everything registered in their own names.

From the findings, it was revealed that normally women have access to own both A1 and A2 farms. In this case, like men, women must register with the village heads who will then take the information to the rural district council office. More so, everyone who is allocated land is supposed to have an offer letter or a lease agreement. However, the majority of women in this study who occupied land were occupying the A1 type of land, being smaller plots that are less expensive to run. Few women occupied the A2 type of land, which requires more inputs and machinery. More so, it was revealed that most women own the A1 type of land, since the size of the A2 farm is 1 000 or more hectares, so most women felt they could not opt for such large farms. Instead, they opted for smaller ones that they could manage. The A2 farms need big machinery, large heads of cattle and farming on a large scale.

The A2 land requires a lot of finances to fence, to establish fire guards and buy the necessary farming equipment. More so, the allocation of model A1 farms is done through a user permit, which is granted by the district administrator. We also observed that for the district administrator in Gwanda to give a woman any piece of land, the village head would have given approval. This hinders the women's access to land ownership, since generally the village heads are men, a result of the patriarchal and cultural practices emanating from African Traditional Religions and Christianity in the Gwanda district.

In line with what was observed by Roth and Gonesse (2003, 271), under the A2 model the few women who occupied this type of land in the Gwanda district, did small-scale, medium-scale, large-scale or peri-urban farming. We also noted that those few women who were allocated land under the A2 model were supposed to have shown that they had the capability to finance their farm operations. The knowledge to farm the land and the capacity to put the farm to good use were also prerequisites for the women to get access to the farming land. Therefore, only a few women in the Gwanda district got land under the A2 model.

On the question of whether women in the Gwanda district own land, we noted that 10 of the women said they own land in their own names. Twenty-five women said land was registered in the names of their husbands. This group of women also pointed out that, from the perspective of African Traditional Religion and Christianity, women should be subordinate to men, playing a submissive role. Five women said land is registered in both names of the spouses, which is in line with the government policy that allows spouses to have joint tenure. Further discussions revealed that the 10 who said the land was registered in their names were educated and were involved in the management decisions of the farms. The majority of women who said land was registered under their husbands' names were not educated, and were not aware of the legal frameworks of land ownership.

The study also showed that regarding those rural women who had unregistered customary marriages, in the event of the death of the husband, the land would be taken over by the late husband's male relatives, since that was in line with the demands of the African Traditional Religious cultural practices of the Shona, Ndebele, Sotho or Venda ethnic tribes. The majority of those women in unregistered customary marriages further revealed that land was registered in their husbands' names because they were the ones who processed the papers. More so, the women reiterated the fact that from African Traditional Religions and Christianity perspectives they were supposed to be subordinates and submissive to their male counterparts. They further pointed out that it was even exacerbated by the fact that the procedures to acquire land were complex for illiterate women.

In line with Tshuma (2019, 9), the questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions revealed that the women's access to land ownership in the Gwanda district

was also governed by African Traditional Religions customary law, which gives rights to land to the male head of the family. In this case, we noted that land was under customary law and was only given to married men; women had access to that land only through their marriage. In this case, the land was allocated by traditional authorities who were males who endeavoured to protect men's rights and access to land. Hence, the women's access to landownership is hindered by the customary law that is in existence.

From the findings, it was clear that in principle and in theory, Gwanda district women have equal access to land ownership with men, but the patriarchal system and cultural practices from African Traditional Religions and Christianity remain a hindrance. Some of the women pointed out that the patriarchal system reiterates that males are the heads of the families and women should be submissive. The study showed that customs and traditions of the Shona, Sotho, Venda and Ndebele cultures took precedence, and generally women had a strong belief in them to the extent that they override the available legal framework.

The above view is in line with Toro (2016, 78) who points out that Mpahlo (2003) says: "Despite women's central roles in agriculture production across the region, it is agonising to see that they are often excluded on gender grounds. In general, a woman's rights to land are extremely insecure. The major forms and sources of this unequal land distribution and tenure problem are derived from the dominance of patriarchy and customary land tenure systems and traditional authority structure." Thus, the African traditional structures continue to play a significant role in marginalising women regarding access to land in the Gwanda district.

It was further revealed that under the customary law in Zimbabwe, land is owned by the husband; widows cannot inherit the land, but it goes to the sons of female relatives who are believed to be able to pass it on to the next generation. This is due to the fact that Zimbabwe has institutional dualism, which consists of customary law and general law. When it comes to land rights, normally customary law will be applied in the Gwanda district, meaning that women may be taken advantage of by male traditional leaders who will be distributing land.

More so, the findings showed that those involved in land distribution are generally males. For instance, from the focus group discussions and interviews we noted that in the Gwanda district, local traditional leaders and land officers are generally males. We observed that the village heads were all males. The chiefs in the Gwanda district are generally males, except for two chiefs, namely Chief Mathe for Bulamba area in Gwanda South, and Chief Mabhena in Nswazi area in Gwanda North. Currently, the provincial administrator and district administrators for the Gwanda district are ladies. Since women are few in the land distribution process in the Gwanda district, the women have less influence in land allocation if one considers the number of men in the land distribution process.

The study further revealed that some women in the Gwanda district have a fear of the unknown regarding access to land ownership, while some women lack knowledge of the procedures regarding access to land ownership. It was further revealed that some women did not register for land ownership because of lack of interest. Thus, although the officers in charge of land distribution try their best to apply the *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)*, women still remain poor, since they face a number of challenges in trying to access land—yet land is a key economic factor to development. In addition to that, since most of the women indicated that land is registered in their husbands' names, they often lack collateral security. Hence, if women do not have access to land, they still remain without access to credit facilities.

The findings revealed that even though few women have access to land ownership, whatever pieces of land married women own, they own it together with their husbands. The women have to request permission from their husbands to farm it, due to the patriarchal and cultural dictates of African Traditional Religion and Christianity observed by members in the Gwanda district. If it was a beast to be sold or killed in the family, the women would request permission from the husbands as well. Thus, literally, married women have nothing, since everything belongs to men. They actually have limited decision-making power and control on how to make use of the land or the harvest they produce.

Above all, the study showed that in the Gwanda district, some of the women who have access to land ownership are able to utilise the land effectively depending on the resources they had. That would have improved their livelihoods. This is shown by the fact that some women have engaged in government programmes like Command Agriculture, and Livestock and Crop production. In the end, they have become self-reliant.

## Recommendations

- Since women's unequal access to land ownership is perpetuated by the patriarchal culture and cultural practices from African Traditional Religions and Christianity, African women in the Gwanda district should follow what is propounded by African women theologians, namely that they should become the agents of their own liberation. Mosala (1986, 132) says on this view: "Liberation does not fall into one's lap. It must be claimed and be protected. You cannot give me my liberty and I cannot give you yours." Thus, the women should take part in fighting against the gender inequalities perpetuated by the patriarchal system and cultural practices emanating from African Traditional Religions and Christianity.
- The churches like Shecanaiah Baptist Church, Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Zimbabwe, Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe Roman Catholic Church, Dutch Reformed Church and the Anglican Church in the Gwanda district, should make women aware of women in the Bible who indeed owned land. For instance, the five daughters of Zelophehad

in Numbers 36:1–13, who owned land as part of property inheritance, while the woman from Shumen in 2 Kings 8 did the same.

- As was observed by the African women theologians, the women in the district should recognise that behind oppressive patriarchal structure lies an androcentric ideology that privileges masculinity as a standard of humanity. Therefore, the African women in the district should take note that the battle for achieving their full humanity of women has to be fought at an ideological level.
- The women in the Gwanda district should be conscientised by the Christian churches on the biblical passages where women are portrayed as equal to men; by participation in every level of the church to challenge the patriarchal order. Citations can be given of Priscilla, who appears to be at least the equal of her husband Aquila in their joint work as teachers in the early Christian church in Acts 18 verse 2 and Acts 18 verse 26. The theology of equivalence in Christ cited in Galatians 3 verse 28—where the baptism into Christ is seen as making all humanity one male, female, Jew and Greek—should be given to women to empower them to fight against the patriarchal system of the Christian Bible in line with women’s access to land ownership in the Gwanda district.
- More women should be put in the Gwanda district land allocation committee, since we noted that most of the land distribution officers were generally men starting from the village heads going upwards.
- Women should be educated in civic or citizenship matters by civil society, gender experts and local female leaders, and capacitation should be made to reinforce their land tenure rights.
- Women should be equipped with farming skills like cattle feeding and cattle rearing, since the Gwanda district is in the cattle ranching area.
- Financial support should be channelled towards women’s organisations that are actively involved in formulating land reform and land policies, so that women’s access to land ownership can be increased.

## Conclusions

Even though the gender policy implementation regarding women’s access to land in Gwanda district is done in line with the current *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)*, this may not eradicate gender disparities in the Gwanda district, but only reduce it due to the patriarchal system and cultural practices from African Traditional Religions and Christianity. In actual fact, reducing gender inequality is the short-term objective, but eradication will take place in the long run, since eradication is a process. More so, a majority of women are not forthcoming to apply for landownership, because of a number of challenges caused by the African Traditional Religions and Christianity’s patriarchal system and cultural practices within the Gwanda district. There are too many challenges associated with women’s access to land ownership in the Gwanda District; challenges that will have to be overcome.

Although the right to land for women has been enshrined in the law, the practice of law in reality has not delivered women’s empowerment and control on vital resources such

as land. This is a result of the patriarchal systems and cultural practices from African Traditional Religions and Christianity, which hinder women's access to land. Despite efforts to bring about gender equality at various levels, customary law has been allowed to prevail over legislative instruments, leaving women vulnerable to harmful traditional and cultural practices. Women still believe they only have the subordinate rights to land, thus making them dependent on their husbands, male relatives and the social network.

The study also concluded that the majority of rural women in the Gwanda district are poor and illiterate, making it difficult to deal with bureaucratic procedures that are necessary to gain access to land ownership or fight for their land rights. This lack of access to land threatens women's security and leaves them susceptible to poverty. The main obstacles to women's access to land are institutional barriers to their social recognition. Women's land rights are still limited by African Traditional Religions and Christianity's social norms, customs and government legislation, hampering their economic status and opportunity to overcome poverty. Despite the fact that the government of Zimbabwe has ratified several international conventions and declarations to improve women's access to land ownership through the Constitution of Zimbabwe and *National Gender Policy (2013–2017)*, the gender disparities still exist due to African Traditional Religions and Christianity. Most women in the district are not able to inherit family farms because of the dominant patriarchal culture and cultural practices.

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