

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN OF COLOR IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract: Despite the political freedom gained in 1994, black women labour tenants in South African still never tasted the fruits of democracy and live under very harsh conditions and face discriminations. However, such circumstances are seldomly reported in academic literature. Therefore, this paper investigates the challenges faced by women on farms in rural areas using a qualitative exploratory case study design. Primary data from 37 farmers in uMgungundlovu; was derived from the Qina-Mbokodo project case study to investigate barriers to women's participation in agriculture and support from the government. The results of the analysis identified five themes that embody the difficulties faced by women in farms of uMgungundlovu. These include a lack of community engagement in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and District Development Model (DDM), gaps in awareness and knowledge, gender issues, economic empowerment and development, and lack of Technical support. The paper suggests economic empowerment regardless of gaps to help beneficiaries address poverty, as well as social support, participation in integrated development plans, and district development model to address beneficiaries' low economic status.

Keywords: women, gender, rural farming, rural challenges, economic empowerment

Introduction

This paper explores the land and agrarian issues of women in farms in rural community in KwaZulu-Natal, uMgungundlovu district South Africa. Nearly half of all people who lived in rural areas in 2015 were women, who made up more than 40% of all women worldwide (Parliament of South Africa, 2018). According to the 2021 General Household Survey (GHS), women make up over 51% of the population in South Africa and, more than two-fifths (42,0%) of households are headed by females (StatsSA, 2023). Since the inception of democracy, rural development has remained among the top five priorities of the South African government (Republic of South Africa, 2019). The rural economy has enormous potential to promote sustainable development and economic growth by lowering inequality, unemployment, and poverty (Republic of South Africa, 2019). Women have been propelled to the forefront due to disparities in rapidly evolving settings, as they take on crucial responsibilities in the cultivation, processing, and dissemination of agricultural products to safeguard food stability within their localities (Balasha et al. 2022).

According to Moitse (2022) 60% to 80% of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa are women, but only 15% to 20% of them are landowners, which continue to be one of the major agricultural anomalies. Additionally, Moitse (2022) highlighted that nearly half of the global agricultural labor force comprises women. A recent online discussion organized by Standard Bank and UN Women revealed that women play a crucial role in rural Africa, functioning as producers, sellers, and heads of households who oversee the family's dietary needs (Vander Walt, 2021). The empowerment of women and girls is a key focus within the African Union Agenda 2063, specifically aligned with Goal 17 which aims for full gender equality in all aspects of life. Additionally, it is also linked to aspiration



number 6, which envisions an Africa whose development is driven by its people, particularly women and youth, while also prioritizing the well-being of children (African Union, 2023). An Africa developed by people and relied in particular on the potential of the African population (African Union, 2022). Almost 0.52% (19,096,392) of South Africa's population lives in rural areas (Macrotrends, 2023).

The South African Government's "New Growth Plan puts agriculture, particularly the development and support of new smallholder farmers as an important area for development that could impact positively on poverty alleviation and household food security"(Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele, 2014:147).The "rural economy holds significant potential towards reducing inequality, unemployment and poverty, thereby contributing to sustainable development and economic growth"(Republic of South Africa, 2019:149).

In general Women residing in rural regions of South Africa persistently encounter significant constraints and challenges when it comes to participating in economic endeavors. These obstacles arise from discriminatory gender and social norms, imbalanced engagement in unpaid labor, and inequitable opportunities for education, healthcare, property ownership, and financial and other essential services (CSV, 2023). Rural women, especially in the Vhembe district, face challenges or barriers that can be categorized into entrepreneurial, socio-cultural, personal and technical barriers (Karasi, 2017). Similarly, the study by Khuzwayo et al. (2019) with a focus on land that land remains an emotional issue in rural South Africa, especially among women who are excluded from state intervention measures in the UMnini region.

As a result, land grabbing in South Africa continues to have a particularly detrimental effect on women (Walker, 2017). It can be emphasized that "women in South Africa are rendered inefficient due to a lack of resources in agriculture, not that women are neither unable nor unwilling to work as some men make them believe" (Akinola, 2020). Women's empowerment has also been hampered by gender disparities in land tenure and rights (Akinola, 2020). These issues have also undermined efforts to increase agricultural and land productivity.

Additionally, Women on the farm are subjected to unequal treatment compared to their male counterparts, evident from the fact that they receive identical wages. This disparity in pay serves as a clear reflection of the prevailing gender inequality within society (Akinola, 2020). Although previous research has identified many challenges faced by rural women, very few studies have focused solely on the challenges faced by rural women in UMgungundlovu district. Furthermore, very few studies have attempted to identify specific empowerment interventions for rural women in UMgungundlovu district KZN. Nevertheless, the distinctive historical background of rural areas in South Africa presents significant obstacles to the development of rural areas. Even though women play a crucial role, they encounter numerous obstacles that hinder their ability to maximize their potential as farmers (Vander Walt, 2021). This study examines the related Sustainable Development Goals and the difficulties faced by women on farms in rural areas of uMgungundlovu districts. Therefore, it identifies women's challenges in the rural community using a variety of qualitative research techniques including focus group in order to accomplish this goal. Its findings help to recommend creative development initiatives.

This paper is divided into seven sections. The first section Introduction and Background; The second section deals with the theoretical framework related to women in rural sector; The third section provides a brief overview of broader debates on land and agricultural issues by women on farms in

general; The fourth section looks at the South African women involved in farming in rural areas. The fifth section deals with the methodology and in the sixth section the results are presented and discussed with the districts of uMgungundlovu. Finally, in the seventh section, the implications for research and politics are presented.

Theoretical framework explaining role of women in rural economic sector

The concept of modernization theory posits that industrialization and economic progress result in favorable social and political transformations (Wilson and Whitmore, 2000). Nonetheless, modernization theory inaccurately forecasted that progress would bring advantages to all members of a community, irrespective of their race, social class, or gender (Wilson and Whitmore, 2000). In contrast, Niaz, and Iqbal, (2019: 54) disagreed, stating that ““of the world's poor, 70% are women if we give them the opportunity to reduce an economically significant amount of poverty””. Before this perspective, practitioners in women's development were concerned that the advantages of modernization and economic progress would primarily benefit men instead of women. They also observed that women were frequently left out of new production methods and entrepreneurial opportunities (Drolet, 2010). The inclusion of women as equal partners in the development process benefits all individuals involved.

Additionally, the progress of women and the attainment of equality between women and men are essential components of human rights and social justice, and should not be viewed solely as women's concerns (Drolet, 2010). However, on the one hand, Agarwal (2015) argued that if women had equal access to inputs as men, production on their farms would increase significantly. On the other hand, he added that unless we close the gender gap in access to inputs and services, the growing share of women in agriculture is likely to be confined to low-productivity agriculture. Therefore, gender inequalities are an essential part of the problem and reducing these inequalities will be a crucial part of the solution.

Empowering women and girls is a key focus in the African Union Agenda 2063, particularly in relation to Goal 17 for full gender equality in all aspects of life. Aspiration 6 also highlights the importance of achieving this goal (African Union, 2023). The ““concept of gender equality embodies equal access to existing resources and opportunities by men, women, boys and girls, but prejudiced customary and statutory laws, socio-cultural and religious tenets, and gender-blind regulations inhibit women from accessing and relishing their rights”” (Agholor, 2019:52). The SDGs reaffirm commitments to gender equality in agriculture, with SDG2 targeting hunger eradication and SDG5 emphasizing gender equality. These goals recognize the importance of women in small-scale food production and the urgent need to eliminate discrimination against women and girls globally (UN, 2015).

Gender parity is now firmly established as a key element of the Sustainable Development Goals in the global development agenda, with a specific emphasis on empowering women through Goal 5 (UNWOMEN, 2022). Empowering female workers is crucial in achieving Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth, as gender inequality poses a significant barrier to inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all (UNWOMEN, 2022).

Gender equity, refers to ““impartiality and fairness in the sharing of benefits, including agricultural extension and advisory services and duties between women and men, faces serious challenges in organisational culture “(Agholor, 2019:53). Gender-based disparities are evident in the tasks

assigned, treatment of employees, and compensation and benefits provided in the workplace (Unwomen, (2022). As remedy, gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for increased development efforts (DAC, 2011).

Brief review of debates about Land and agrarian issues of women

Several studies have analyzed the land and agrarian issues of women in farms in rural areas (Agholor, 2019; Deere et al., 2013; FAO, 2011; Menon, Rodgers, and Tanjeem, 2023; Zhllima, et al, 2023). A study conducted by Zhllima, et al, 2023) examines gender disparities in land ownership and inheritance in rural Albania. They use a survey and five focus group discussions to reveal rural communities' lack of awareness of property rights, particularly affecting women's confidence. The study also shows the continued influence of customary laws, highlighting cultural factors in perpetuating inequalities. The authors stress the impact of Albania's patriarchal system on these issues, emphasizing the need to consider both cultural norms and legal frameworks in addressing land ownership and inheritance disparities (Zhllima,et al, 2023).Traditionally a patriarchal nation, Albania continues to be dominated by customary norms. Moreover, the results highlight the significance of inter-sectionality, particularly when patriarchy intersects with poverty, leading to an intensification of gender inequality. Consequently, their research proposes a comprehensive strategy that integrates initiatives to enhance legal knowledge, promote awareness among individuals of all genders, and alleviate poverty in order to enhance women's participation in the economy (Zhllima,et al, 2023).

In regards to land ownership in developing regions, women possess and manage significantly smaller amounts of land compared to men. This implies that “percent of individual agricultural holders (which includes landowners, producers, and managers) who are women in countries around the world that report gender-disaggregated data on landholdings and management” (Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023:19). Gender gap is much more pronounced in the Global South, where rural households have been undergoing changes in terms of internal composition and structure while facing external institutional transitions (Deere et al., 2013). To exemplify, Women in Latin America and the Caribbean typically acquire land through inheritance and community property rights that go hand in hand with marital laws. In contrast, women make up 8% of managers in Belize and Guatemala and 30% of agricultural owners in Chile (Menon, Rodgers, and Tanjeem, 2023:19).

The range of this region surpasses that of Asia, as land reforms in several countries appear to have made minimal progress in addressing gender disparities caused by inheritance traditions that typically prioritize men. Additionally, married women in Ecuador possess 44% of couple wealth, compared to 19% in Ghana and 9% in Karnataka. Ecuador's marriage system is defined by the partial community property regime, and inheritance laws ensure equal treatment for all children regardless of gender, with these norms being predominantly adhered to in reality (Deere et al., 2013). In contrast, “Ghana and India are characterized by the separation of property regime which does not recognize wives’ contribution to the formation of marital property, and by inheritance practices that are strongly male biased” (Deere et al., 2013:249)

Studies have been conducted to determine the obstacles that prevent women from participating in agricultural activities (Agholor, 2019; Baba et al.2015; Menon, Rodgers, and Tanjeem, 2015; and Ugwu, 2019). According to Ugwu (2019), women spend the majority of household time on food preparation and processing, suggesting that women's labor participation rates may well exceed 60% in many African nations. Small farmers, predominantly rural women, account for 80% of agricultural production in Africa (Ugwu, 2019). In Ghana, women-owned small farms contribute approximately

80% of the country's total food production. Similarly, in Tanzania, around 87% of rural women play comparable roles, while Zambian women dedicate up to 80% of their labor to household crops (Ugwu, 2019).

Nearly 43% of the labor force in the agricultural sector of sub-Saharan Africa comprises women. However, their involvement in farming is limited to unpaid family labor, resulting in their exclusion from agricultural statistics in many instances (FAO, 2011). It is imperative to reject customary laws, socio-cultural and religious norms, as well as gender-blind policies that hinder women from exercising their rights and gaining access to and control over productive resources, economic opportunities, and decision-making (Agholor, 2019). The “dominance of gender division of labour occasioned by gender dynamism constitute the most striking bottleneck to all the effort by women in this all important sector in the rural areas” (Baba et al, 2015:30).

The enduring disparity in gender participation within agricultural practices poses a significant barrier to the advancement of agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa (Agholor, 2019). The “main reason is that inheritance serves as the primary means through which women acquire land, and most countries are still characterized by male preference in bequeathal practices”. These “inequities have placed relatively more constraints on women’s ability to become successful commercial farmers as compared to men” (Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023:20). For example, “in Burkina Faso, plots controlled by women were farmed less intensively than similar plots simultaneously planted with the same crop but controlled by men within the same household” (Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023:21).

In term of land access, Drafor Amenyah and Pupilampu (2013) cited in Ugwu, (2019:7) reveal that “rural women are faced with the inability to access land and even when they do; they face tough land tenure systems that are often influenced by biased customary norms and traditions. Furthermore, these customary claims to land are often built on the basis of social differentiation and inequality” (Ugwu, 2019). The traditional customs, socio-cultural and religious norms, as well as policies that disregard gender, frequently hinder women from fully exercising their rights and obtaining equal access to and control over productive resources, economic opportunities, and decision-making (Agholor, 2019). These barriers need to be eliminated. The lack of clarity regarding land tenure systems in Africa hampers agricultural productivity, leading to increased poverty and marginalization of rural women. “Access to land and security of land tenure affects female farmers access to other crucial resources such as credit, technology, and extension services” (Ugwu, 2019:7). When “women farmers lack security of land tenure, as they do in many African countries, the result is that they will most likely have lower access to credit and productive inputs which unfortunately lead to an inefficient land use and as such decline in their agricultural yields” (Ugwu, 2019:7). The gender disparity that persists in farming activities poses a significant hindrance to the progress and advancement of agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa (Agholor, 2019). Women make up nearly 43% of the workforce in the agricultural sector of sub-Saharan Africa, yet their contributions to farming are often limited to unpaid work within their families. Consequently, they are frequently overlooked and excluded from agricultural data and statistics (FAO, 2011).

In contrast, according to Rangan and Gilmartin, (2002) there is contradiction particularly evidence in the case of land reform in many rural areas, where women’s right of access to land is denied though the practice of customary law. Inheritance primarily enables women to acquire land, with many countries still exhibiting a preference for males in inheritance practices. These “inequities have placed relatively more constraints on women’s ability to become successful commercial farmers as

compared to men” (Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023:20). For example, “in Burkina Faso, plots controlled by women were farmed less intensively than similar plots simultaneously planted with the same crop but controlled by men within the same household” (Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023:21).

However, challenges face by women in farms, “female farmers are less likely to succeed when compared to their male counterparts; this problem is often due to several setbacks that range from a lack of same access to seeds, credit, extension services and technology” (Ugwu, 2019:5). Unfortunately, they are also “less likely to own land as statistics show that only 20 percent of landowners globally are women” (Ugwu, 2019:5). Gender disparities become more evident when examining the agricultural sector, particularly in terms of unpaid reproductive and care labor in rural regions, as well as non-compensated productive work on the farm (Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023). The primary obstacle that stands out is the gender inequality experienced by women across various aspects of life. Women may encounter systemic gender biases through (1) traditions, beliefs, and attitudes that limit women primarily to household responsibilities, (2) the significant time constraints imposed by women's economic and domestic responsibilities, and (3) regulations and traditions that hinder women's ability to access credit, resources for production, job opportunities, education, or healthcare (Baba et al., 2015). One of the prominent characteristics of gendered labor patterns, particularly in the rural areas of developing nations, is the unequal distribution of unpaid family work between men and women, with women bearing a larger burden (Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023). In addition to their domestic responsibilities, such as childcare, cooking, and cleaning, women also dedicate a significant amount of their time to unpaid work within their families. This results in a lack of paid employment opportunities for women in these regions. (Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023).

Hence, women face various obstacles that hinder their capacity to acquire information, generate income, exercise control over their finances, acquire or obtain agricultural supplies, build connections with other key agricultural service providers, and engage in agricultural product associations (Agholor, 2019). Women face systemic gender biases due to their limited access to domestic spheres, customs and attitudes, heavy economic and domestic workloads (Baba et al. 2015:36), and limitations in accessing credit, production inputs such as manufacturing, employment or education through laws and customary practices. These barriers are obstacles to women’s participation in agricultural activities. These barriers are obstacles to women’s participation in agricultural activities.

SA women in farm in rural areas

Many studies have highlighted the challenges South African women face in the agricultural sector (CSV, 2023; du Toit, 2023; Khuzwayo et al, 2019; Ingutia and Sumelius, 2022; Loubser, 2020; Moitse, 2022; Ngarava et al, 2022; Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele, 2014; Moitse, 2022; Rangan and Gilmartin , 2002; and Vander Walt, 2021; Walker et al 2011. 1. South Africa still grapples with a multitude of challenges, particularly those linked to combating the widespread poverty that persists over two decades since the apartheid era came to a close. Women’s “agricultural activities range from agricultural production to marketing of the products, thus contributing to food security and better income levels” (Ingutia and Sumelius, 2022:137).

The challenges must be understood in the very specific context of the challenges facing South African women who differ significantly from other sub-Saharan African countries due to the specific history of colonization and settlement that led to the horror of apartheid (Walker et al 2011). South Africa

consists of a dual system of land rights, including statutory land law and municipal land law. The conflict between the two laws is that rural laws have preserved the status of women as secondary citizens and still consider them social and legal minors who cannot bargain or own individual land (Khuzwayo et al, 2019). As a result, women in rural communities are constantly forced to struggle with inequalities, such as poor access to basic services, employment and quality education (Ngarava et al, 2022). Rural areas in South Africa are characterized by a lack of socio-economic development, infrastructure, and opportunities for employment and income generation (CSVR, 2023). The problem lies not only in the lack of political will but also in the nature of the political framework created to guide land reform (Tembeka, 2021). The land is important in both rural and urban areas as a location for subsistence agriculture (especially horticulture and subsistence production) (du Toit, 2023). Access to land is only important to have a home without paying inflated prices or fear of eviction (du Toit, 2023). Thus, tenants or agricultural workers face challenges in this regard.

The Sustainability Initiative of South Africa discovered in a 2019 exploratory study on women and gender in South African agriculture that, on average, 20% of farm owners were women (Moitse, 2022). On average, there are 79% male farmers and 21% female farmers in South Africa (Loubser, 2020). In KwaZulu-Natal, the proportion of male to female owner/farmers is 80 percent and 20 percent, respectively (Loubser, 2020). The “majority of full-time workers were men (66%), while 52% of part-time or seasonal workers were women. However, women face limitations in accessing productive resources due to socio-cultural factors” (Ingutia and Sumelius, 2022:137). As a result, women lack secure land ownership and collateral to obtain loans from banks. Furthermore, “the historical marginalization of smallholder agriculture is examined for illicit challenges to the duality of agriculture in South Africa, characterized by a well-developed commercial agricultural sector and a poorly developed smallholder sector” (Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele, 2014:147).

Significant “gender disparities in agricultural productivity have arisen not because women are less efficient farmers, but because of unequal distributions of necessary inputs resulting from entrenched socio-cultural norms and expectations” (Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023:4). In South Africa, “women’s comprehensive rights are enshrined in the constitution, but not much has been done to ensure that rural women do not continue to face cultural vulnerabilities that negatively impact their access to land” (Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele, 2014: 154). Little has changed in “the traditional unequal power relations that continue to degrade rural women into subservient positions, either through restricted family, unequal man-woman relationships or through traditional authorities led by predominantly patriarchal chiefs” (Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele, 2014: 154). Gender equality is one of the challenges faced by the farmer. Gender inequality in rural areas includes land tenure and cultural practice (Khuzwayo, Chipungu, Magidimisha, and Lewis, 2019). Land ownership and adequate access to land as a productive resource are of vital importance to women farmers worldwide. In South Africa, the impact of land size restrictions on women wishing to work in agriculture is a serious concern. Securing land over the long term can improve the well-being of the poor.

A study conducted by Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele (2014:147) shows how “institutional dynamics are related to the socio-economic conditions of farmers; the political landscape and agroclimatic zones in which farmers reside in South Africa are not well aligned to position small farmers for meaningful market participation”. A look back over twenty years ago shows that issues related to “gender equality and land reform in South Africa were the result of policies that attempted to integrate post-apartheid constitutional principles into the established geographies of rural regions and at the same time, on the other hand, to avoid reforming institutionalized practices shaped by previous

colonial and apartheid regimes” (Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002:637). Furthermore, in a review nine years ago, “the lack of institutional and pro-poor measures was pointed out Sensitivity to women’s circumstances undermines the impact of many South African policies on local populations, particularly the poor” (Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele, 2014: 154). It seems paradoxical given that “only 20 per cent of the land in South Africa is owned by women are, while women make up 80% of small farmers but around 20% of landowners” (Lawry et al., 2016:61). This implies that making land available to women on a sustainable basis can improve the well-being of the poor. In recent years, there remains a particularly large funding gap in terms of adequately funding new farmers (Calicioglu,et al, 2019). This implies a lack of state funds for women farmers.

In terms of agricultural support for women, South Africa's top-down transfer strategy has been criticized for not involving local participation or considering factors like indigenous knowledge, available resources, and community aspirations (Alexander, 2022). The black farming sector in South Africa has received support in a number of ways, but these efforts typically favor the more commercially minded black farmers (Alexander, 2022). Women living “in rural communities would benefit from the creation of institutions that support grassroots efforts and rural women’s voices to build and strengthen assets and agencies to trade in markets for a better livelihood” (Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele, 2014:154). Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the conditions in rural areas and be aware of the diversity within the smallholder sector. Also, new and modified technology must be introduced to account for differences in knowledge, resources available at the farm level as well as motivation and goal setting among rural inhabitants involved in some form of farming (Booi, 2021 and Ramoroka, 2019). A study conducted by Loubser, (2020:12) highlights both abstract and practical barriers including: “1)Culture, patriarchal and traditional values influence gender roles,2)Women are expected to attend to household chores and are not encouraged to take up leadership roles,3)Women enjoy less respect than men from their male colleagues,4)Women view themselves as less than men and do not necessarily apply for higher position in the business and, 5)The notion that farming is “a "man’s occupation" results in discrimination, prejudice, and sexism among both genders”.

In a similar vein, Dibakoane, Siyongwana, and Shabalala’s (2022) study results show a variety of difficulties faced by female farmers, including their high vulnerability to climatic changes, their lack of financial resources, and their difficulty in gaining access to agricultural inputs and equipment (machinery, seeds, and fertilizers), as well as pests. Nevertheless, the primary means of assistance stems from both familial and governmental sources. Despite this, a significant portion of female farmers refrain from employing contemporary, science-driven and input-intensive agricultural techniques, such as irrigation systems. This can be attributed to their limited access to livelihood assets and lower levels of literacy. Moreover, the culture is reveals as hindering women farming.

In practice, a study conducted by Menon, Rodgers and Tanjeem, (2023:4) shows that “traditional culture plays a significant role in limiting women’s participation and advancement in agricultural activities”. Their findings reveal also Women are subjected to more income constraints than men, and this affects their ability to access adequate amounts of inputs and fertilizers. Equally a study conducted by FAO, the 2012 FAO report highlights obstacles women face in agriculture, including land ownership, resource management, financial services, education, and labor involvement. Women tend to be disadvantaged in regard to all these dimensions. In “poor rural regions since the lack of adequate compensation from a single agricultural activity implies that women have to engage in multiple opportunities for paid work, thus further exacerbating their long hours of labor” (Menon,

Rodgers and Tanjeem, 2023:5). Hence, women are confronted with numerous issues, such as "time burden and mobility limitation," lower chances of accessing formal education compared to men, unavailability of land, and lack thereof, while women encounter gender and inequality disparities.

Methodology

The study was a trans-disciplinary that largely dealt with gender-related phenomena in the humanities, social sciences, law and education. As a result, it required a certain amount of flexibility in methodological approaches, techniques and application to produce a nuanced understanding of the situation of women in Mgungundlovu surroundings farms challenged by huge human security vulnerabilities. They are beneficiaries of Qina Mbokodo.

The study adopted an integrative research approach, largely qualitative, with a specific focus on depth-interviews, questionnaire-based methods; and feminist, participatory and comparative approaches to address the research questions. They were questionnaire-based approach, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). A questionnaire was designed and administered by trained research assistants to collect data from a sample of 37 Qina mbokodo beneficiaries (women) between the age of 18-55 years. All women beneficiaries were selected from the list of beneficiaries of Qina mbokodo as per all local municipalities in the district. The second questionnaire targeted AFRA official. All in all, thirty-seven, three AFRA officials and two governments officials' in-depth interviews were conducted to make up for the weaknesses of the questionnaire approach, which invariably is a more useful tool for a snappy collection of statistical data, compared to other methods. A total of seven Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were carried out in all the seven local municipalities. As a result, the focus groups participants were chosen from among farmers who were knowledgeable or experienced in the subject and could provide details about the difficulties faced by women on rural farms.

This information was analyzed using descriptive qualitative data analysis, which is a moderately methodological technique for identifying, coding, categorizing, and interpreting information (Houghton et al, 2015). In the case of this study, the researcher employs a thematic analysis (TA) method, which helps to identify meaningful themes that reflect participants' perceptions, meanings, and experiences (Clark and Braun, 2006). Thematic analysis involves observing and categorizing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It begins with collecting information from interviews, notes, and transcriptions, leading to the identification of key themes. These themes are refined with new insights, and the data is organized accordingly. In this study, the researcher considered this processes

Braun and Clarke, (2006) provide six interesting steps to analysis data, which include: (1) Familiarizing with the collected data while identifying items of potential interest (2) Assigning preliminary codes (specific codes) to the collected data to describe the content, (3) Searching for themes patterns in the coded data throughout the participants views, (4) Reviewing themes, (5) Naming and defining major themes and sub-themes And (6) presenting the findings extracted from the collected data. The researcher utilized the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) for data analysis, which include: becoming familiar with the data, creating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, generating the report.

Findings and discussion

The five significant listed themes emerged from the primary data collected after engaging with key beneficiary's participant's views, opinions and experience in the study area:

- Awareness and knowledge;
- Gender issues;
- Economic empowerment;
- Technical support;
- Lack of participation to the IDP and DDM

The analysis and synthesis of emerging themes as incarnation of challenges face by women in rural area assisted the researcher to respond to the primary objective of the research, which is to identify the challenges women farmers face in rural area of UMgungundlovu district.

Economic empowerment

Economic empowerment is seen as a daily challenge by all participants. First and foremost, economic empowerment and economic development go hand in hand because they both concern a long-term process of generating economic opportunity for every community. The main goal of the Qina Mbokodo project was to create an inclusive and equitable society where men, boys, women, and girls all have equal rights and access to social and economic infrastructure, including land and public goods and services, and where democratic values are upheld. Some of respondents reported that:

Empower other women who do not have knowledge to empower other women who can also provide positive contributions to other women. Respondent number 9.

Also, with concern to children (Boys and girls) who need empowerment.

The challenge is with substance abuse; it remains a challenge the people are not participating in anything they opt for drinking alcohol because they are not busy. The mostly challenged age group is 15 to 20 years they don't want to work without pay. Respondent Number 9

The challenges of economic empowerment are acknowledged by all participants in relation to various factors. Support for farm women's economic empowerment, in particular, needs to be strengthened. There hasn't been much progress in this area, and stakeholders need to be more actively involved. Lack of capability and political support are just two reasons for this, among others. Respondent number 10 remarked:

They require extra income. They must be economically active, level of education for the unemployed, skills required within the community to conduct research on it. There are a number of skills within the farm dwellers, what is required is training for these skills and in order to get income and provide for their household. Respondent Number 10.

Also, one of the respondents indicated that:

Added that empowerment remains a loophole as Qina Mbokodo does not assist in bringing in money to at least buy bread after attending a workshop. Respondent Number 1.

Furthermore, another respondent reported that:

Requested that research should be conducted on farm dwellers and about their lives. Respondent Number 3.

In South Africa since 1994, Women's empowerment in general, especially in regard to poverty, unemployment, children, gender-based violence, poverty, inequality, HIV/AIDS, and service delivery (access to water and sanitation, electricity, housing, land, transportation, health, etc.) have dominated public discourse and government policy. Women specifically face challenges such as lack of access to land, credit, agricultural extension, technology, markets, and infrastructure in the study area, making them particularly vulnerable and affected by these issues. These opinions concurred with Kabeer's definition of women's empowerment, which he presented in 2005 and defined as "a process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life decisions acquire such ability." The Qina Mbokodo project's beneficiaries believed that particular challenges include a lack of access to land, credit, agricultural extension, technology, markets, and infrastructure. The obstacles are in line with the Rabobank's 2025 model, which serves as a framework for fostering a conducive atmosphere in agriculture and agro-finance. It also aids in comprehending the root causes of the difficulties encountered by women entrepreneurs in small to medium-sized agricultural businesses. This model was employed as a lens to examine the obstacles encountered by women entrepreneurs in the agricultural industry in Pietermaritzburg, specifically within primary and secondary agricultural cooperatives. Similarly, Ugwu, (2019) female farmers face similar challenges when it comes to accessing land and securing land tenure. These challenges also have an impact on their ability to access other important resources like credit, technology, and extension services. As a result, the study area uMgungundlovu district needs to empower women because doing so will increase women's access to economic opportunities and resources like jobs, financial services, wealth, and other productive assets as well as market intelligence and technological advancement. This suggests that the focus should be on empowering women in agriculture, and that the South African government should take full responsibility for improving the sector. One of the respondents indicated that Qina Mbokodo still face challenges as farm dwellers.

"The high rate of unemployment with the youth and other Qina Mbokodo members remains a challenge". Respondent Number 1.

Therefore, achieving the SDGs, specifically SDG (5) gender equality and empowering all women and girls, as well as sustainable development, anti-poverty growth, and women's economic empowerment are all prerequisites. According to this point of view, empowering women is crucial for achieving Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth, as gender inequality hinders inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all (Frey, 2017 and Schifman, Oden, and Koestner, 2021).

Technical support

All participants acknowledged receiving technical assistance pertaining to issues with the land, the social, and seeds. One of respondents indicated that:

A member added, when we get funding, we are not told the amount and when you need the amount to buy necessities you are told the amount has finished without knowing the exact figure, we also update our books but the problem we don't get any information about the funds received, if there can be transparency. Respondent Number 4.

Participants do, however, encounter difficulties with the means of production. Men have created technology for large, well-kept areas, leaving women with untidy, rocky lands unable to access advanced tools due to lack of expertise and confidence. The majority of the new technologies are too expensive and sophisticated for women farmers to use, and they lack the knowledge and confidence to do so. Most importantly, the participants acknowledge that Qina Mbokodo's lack of happiness over the land return caused a delay in their improvement in circumstances. One or respondents indicated that:

The farmers do not want us to be developed. A challenge other member has is that the name on the title deed are of the deceased and therefore it is difficult to convert the title deed to the other living person, and trust that if they are developed such issues can be easily resolved. Respondent Number 1.

Previous study conducted by FAO (2012) talk about challenges. The challenges that women encounter in the agricultural sector, as highlighted by FAO (2012), encompass various aspects. These include the ownership of land, livestock, and other agricultural resources. Additionally, women face difficulties in managing these resources effectively. Access to financial services and other necessary inputs for agriculture is also limited for women. Furthermore, there is a lack of opportunities for women to acquire education, knowledge, and skills related to agriculture. Lastly, women's participation in agricultural labor activities is often hindered.

"The only want farmers to develop their farms and themselves but not to develop the farm dwellers. Obtaining funding is a challenge they require planting of seeds and knowledge on how to maintain chickens". Respondent Number 1.

More importantly, the Qina Mbokodo project's beneficiaries lack the skills and backing of political leaders. The implication is that local and provincial governments should provide support for these beneficiaries. Beneficiaries of Qina Mbokodo have noted problems with "produce terminology." These beneficiaries "Women" should therefore be educated about all activities, terminology, and language. Additionally, networking with strategic partners presents challenges for 50% of Qina Mbokodo beneficiaries. Because of this, beneficiaries of Qina Mbokodo are only able to participate in a small number of local meetings aimed at improving living conditions.

Awareness and knowledge

More than 80% of participants were aware of the Qina Mbokodo project, which aims to combat the inequalities of women in farming. Awareness and knowledge are general information and perceptions that people possess and exhibit about something, in this case, the Qina Mbokodo project. One of the respondents indicated that.

There is assistance in the development of individuals and to stand on our own by providing in depth knowledge and providing awareness. Awareness on substance abuse was done in schools; the

municipality had also seen their initiative as good and also went to the schools to provide awareness on substance abuse. Respondent Number 8.

However, some of the participants indicated that they had only recently joined the project, and as a result, they had little prior knowledge of the project's departments, local municipalities, and district municipality officials. This perspective is consistent with the research by Gebaska, Grontkowska, Swiderek, and Golebiewska (2020), who support farmers' understanding and application of sustainable practices at various types of farm-related projects. The Qina Mbokodo was a subject about which a few individual informants showed a fair amount of knowledge, but this had no bearing on their strategic document. According to this finding, the province's departments, all municipalities, and the district still need to exert more influence over district planning, specifically regarding women's programs and vulnerable groups (such as women who live on farms). Project awareness encourages ownership and participation, which increases the efficiency of project conception and execution. Therefore, a project's planning and execution may suffer from a lack of awareness or limited knowledge about the project. It can be a barrier not only to positive ownership and participation but also to commitment and support for the goals of Qina Mbokodo interventions, both of which are essential for successful project conception and execution.

Gender issues

All participants exhibit silence when it comes to issues like population, development, and the environment as well as issues like gender, reproductive rights and health, HIV prevention, maternal and child health with a focus on safe motherhood. One of the respondents reported on Gender based violence.

Gender-based violence workshops on how to address issues of abuse as women are afraid of reporting the abuse. Police do not come in time when your report crime when you call them to assist you with burglars they take too long to respond. Respondent Number 1.

Nevertheless, the attainment of gender equality and empowerment of women is crucial for the accomplishment of all 17 goals. It is imperative to secure the rights of women and girls across all objectives in order to achieve justice, inclusion, sustainable economies, and the preservation of our environment for both current and future generations. Inequality in access to economic resources is the cause of poverty among women. This view is supported by Mabuane (2022) who found that women face Gender inequality in rural areas includes land tenure and cultural practice. Women not only experience these issues to a greater extent, but they also have the leadership skills and innovative ideas to find solutions. Our world is also held back by the gender discrimination that still affects too many women.

Lack of participation to the IDP and DDM

The consensus among all participants was that they had not participated in community engagement for the district development model (DDM) or the integrated development plan (IDP) in order to voice their concerns. These structures outline a municipality's priorities and strategies for economic and social development and address issues with service delivery by allowing all levels of government from local municipalities to the national government to cooperate. One of the respondents reported that:

There are challenges due to the employment of officials in the municipality what are happening is they are constantly changing officials therefore causing Qina Mbokodo to reintroduce themselves to the municipality workers. Respondent Number8

This results in a different perspective on participation in the IDP. They hinted that their views might be wrong, but they were acknowledged. Respondent number 3 remarked:

For instance, they will try to introduce the need to have a clinic, but the municipality will introduce Qina Mbokodo idea as the need of the community not giving enough credit to the idea from Qina Mbokodo.

Furthermore, one participant reported on integrated development plan challenges to integrate their views. Respondent number 10 remarked.

This suggests that Qina Mbokodo beneficiaries can influence sector departments' and municipalities' strategic meetings and documents.

The Community Development manager in the Municipality must forward our economic activities and development challenges to the DDM as farm dwellers and as women. They have not included our activities on the IDPs. This has been also one of the challenges and gaps to integrate women challenges.

The above themes are consistent with studies conducted by Ingutia and Sumelius, (2022), Ugwu, (2019), Dibakoane, Siyongwana and Shabalala's (2022) and FAO (2012) addressing the challenges faced since we have been dealing with women in the agricultural sector. These challenges resolve around access to land, livestock, agricultural products, empowerment, access to finance, technical support, access to education, the acquisition of knowledge and skills pertaining to agriculture, as well as active involvement in agricultural work tasks are all crucial components.

Conclusion

This paper examined the land and agrarian issues faced by women who work on farms in rural KwaZulu-Natal's uMgungundlovu district of South Africa. The analysis's findings revealed five themes that embodied the difficulties faced by women in the uMgungundlovu rural area. These include a lack of community engagement in the integrated development plan (IDP) and district development model (DDM), awareness and knowledge gaps, gender issues, economic empowerment, and technical support. The findings also show that the Qina Mbokodo project's beneficiaries are aware of the project's goal, which is to make sure that the marginalized, poor rural women who live on farms and influence the emerging policy and legal framework on land reform in South Africa are heard and add to the important national dialogue. However, the results show that their inability to improve their living conditions is largely due to a lack of economic empowerment, technical support, and participation in the integrated development plan and district development model. Specifically, beneficiaries of Qina Mbokodo sought lack of access to land; to credit; to agricultural extension; technology; to markets; and infrastructure as big challenges. The paper suggests economic empowerment regardless of gaps to help beneficiaries address poverty as well as social support, participation in integrated development plans, and the district development model to address beneficiaries' low economic status.

Further study could include investigating effective interventions for economic empowerment or exploring longitudinal impacts of current governmental policies.

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