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## DYNAMICS OF GENDER DISCREPANCIES IN COMMAND AGRICULTURE AND ITS OUTCOMES: A2 WOMEN FARMERS PERSPECTIVE IN GWANDA DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of gender discrepancies in Command Agriculture and its outcomes from the perspective of A2 women farmers in Gwanda District, Zimbabwe. The primary aim was to explore how gender-based disparities affect the implementation and effectiveness of Command Agriculture, focusing on the experiences and challenges faced by women farmers. The research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing two focus group discussions and ten in-depth interviews with A2 women farmers. This methodology allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences. Key findings revealed that despite the program's potential to enhance food security and agricultural productivity, gender discrepancies significantly hindered its effectiveness for women farmers. Participants reported unequal access to resources, such as seeds and fertilizers, with men often receiving preferential treatment. This inequality was further compounded by societal norms and responsibilities that limited women's full participation in farming activities. The study also highlighted the resilience and adaptability of women farmers, who, despite these challenges, continued to seek ways to improve their farming practices and support their families. However, the lack of gender-sensitive approaches in the program's design and implementation remained a significant barrier to achieving equitable outcomes. In conclusion, addressing gender discrepancies in Command Agriculture is crucial for maximizing its impact on food security and agricultural productivity. Recommendations include ensuring equitable distribution of resources, implementing gender-sensitive training programs, and creating policies that support the unique needs of women farmers. These measures can help bridge the gap and enhance the overall effectiveness of Command Agriculture for A2 women farmers in Gwanda District.

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## INTRODUCTION

Command Agriculture, introduced in Zimbabwe in 2016, aims to enhance agricultural productivity and ensure food security. However, the program has revealed significant gender disparities, particularly affecting A2 women farmers. This study examines the dynamics of these gender discrepancies within Command Agriculture, focusing on the experiences of A2 women farmers in Gwanda District, Zimbabwe. By exploring these dynamics, the study aims to provide insights into the unique challenges faced by these women and offer recommendations for more inclusive agricultural policies. Command Agriculture provides farmers with essential inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and technical support to boost maize production, a staple crop in Zimbabwe. While the program's goals are laudable, its implementation has highlighted significant gender-based disparities. Women in agriculture face numerous barriers, including limited access to land, credit, and extension services, which are often exacerbated by cultural norms and patriarchal structures (Chisango & Mpira, 2021).

These challenges limit women's ability to fully benefit from agricultural programs like Command Agriculture. Scholars have debated the effectiveness and inclusiveness of Command Agriculture. Some argue that the program has successfully increased maize production and improved food security (Moyo, 2020). However, others contend that the benefits have been unevenly distributed, with women farmers receiving fewer resources and support compared to their male counterparts. This disparity is often attributed to systemic biases and socio-cultural factors that disadvantage women in agricultural sectors (FAO, 2019). Research indicates that gender disparities in access to resources significantly impact agricultural productivity. Women farmers, who are less equipped with necessary resources, struggle to achieve the same productivity levels as their male counterparts, affecting individual livelihoods and broader food security (Sithole&Moyo, 2021). Addressing these disparities is crucial for achieving the full potential of agricultural programs like Command Agriculture. The socio-economic implications of gender disparities in Command Agriculture are profound. Women farmers in Gwanda District, who are already economically marginalized, find it challenging to improve their socio-economic status due to limited

access to resources and support. This situation perpetuates a cycle of poverty and inequality, undermining the overall objectives of the Command Agriculture program (FAO, 2019). Empowering women farmers is essential for sustainable agricultural development and economic growth. The implementation of Command Agriculture has been criticized for its lack of gender sensitivity. Policies and programs often fail to consider the unique needs and challenges faced by women farmers, resulting in a one-size-fits-all approach that does not adequately support women's participation and success in agriculture (Moyo, 2020). There is a critical need for gender-responsive policies that address these disparities and promote equitable access to resources and opportunities. The purpose of this study is to investigate the dynamics of gender discrepancies within the Command Agriculture program and their specific outcomes for A2 women farmers in Gwanda District. By focusing on the experiences of these women, the study aims to identify the unique challenges they face, assess the effectiveness of the program in addressing their needs, and explore potential strategies for creating more gender-inclusive agricultural policies (Sithole&Moyo, 2021). The insights gained will help to understand the unique challenges and opportunities faced by these women and contribute to more inclusive agricultural policies. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy and practice. By highlighting the gender discrepancies within Command Agriculture and their impact on A2 women farmers, the study aims to contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective agricultural policies. These findings will be valuable for policymakers, agricultural organizations, and researchers working towards gender equality and sustainable agricultural development in Zimbabwe.

**Theoretical Framework:** The Gender and Development (GAD) approach served as an appropriate theoretical framework for this study on the dynamics of gender discrepancies in Command Agriculture and its outcomes for A2 women farmers in Gwanda District, Zimbabwe. The GAD approach focused on the social relations of gender and emphasizes the need to understand the differences in the roles, responsibilities, and access to resources between men and women within development processes (Boserup, 2019). The GAD approach is particularly relevant to this study because it moves beyond the limitations of earlier frameworks, such as Women in Development (WID), which often treated women as a homogeneous group and focused primarily on integrating women into existing development initiatives. In contrast, GAD addresses the underlying social and structural factors that create and perpetuate gender inequalities, making it well-suited to analyze the systemic biases and socio-cultural norms affecting A2 women farmers in the context of Command Agriculture (Chant & Sweetman, 2019). Using the GAD approach allows the study to critically examine how gender relations impact the allocation of resources, access to inputs, and decision-making processes within the Command Agriculture program. This theoretical lens helps to uncover the root causes of gender discrepancies and highlights the structural barriers that hinder women's full participation and benefits from agricultural initiatives. It emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive policies that address these disparities (Razavi, 2020). The GAD approach underscores the importance of considering the socio-economic context in which gender relations are embedded. In Gwanda District, A2 women farmers often face multiple layers of disadvantage, including limited access to land, credit, and extension services. The GAD framework helps to analyze how these socio-economic factors intersect with gender to affect women's agricultural productivity and economic status, providing a comprehensive understanding of their challenges (Momsen, 2020). Applying the GAD approach to this study also emphasizes the need for policy interventions that go beyond simply including women in development programs. It calls for transformative changes in policy implementation that actively dismantle the structural barriers and biases that disadvantage women. This includes creating enabling environments that support women's access to resources, enhancing their decision-making power, and ensuring their voices are heard in policy formulation (Kabeer, 2021). The GAD framework highlights the importance of women's empowerment as a key component of sustainable development. Empowering A2 women

farmers involves not only providing them with resources but also addressing the power dynamics that limit their agency. This theoretical perspective encourages the development of strategies that promote gender equality in agricultural programs, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness and sustainability of initiatives like Command Agriculture (Cornwall, 2019). The use of the GAD approach in this study contributes to the broader field of development theory by providing insights into how gender relations shape development outcomes. It reinforces the argument that gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also a critical factor in achieving sustainable development. The findings from this study will add to the growing body of literature that advocates for gender-responsive development policies (Elson, 2020). The Gender and Development (GAD) approach provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of gender discrepancies in Command Agriculture and their outcomes for A2 women farmers in Gwanda District. It justifies the need to address the underlying social and structural factors contributing to gender inequalities and highlights the importance of empowering women as a means to achieve sustainable agricultural development. By applying this framework, the study aims to inform more inclusive and effective agricultural policies in Zimbabwe.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research methodology with a case study research design to explore the dynamics of gender discrepancies in Command Agriculture and their outcomes for A2 women farmers in Gwanda District, Zimbabwe. The case study approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of the specific context and experiences of these women, providing rich, detailed insights into the complexities of gender disparities within the agricultural sector (Yin, 2018). Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to gather a broad range of perspectives from A2 women farmers. Each focus group consisted of 8-10 participants, selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the participants had direct experience with Command Agriculture. Purposive sampling was chosen to target individuals who could provide relevant and rich information related to the research questions (Patton, 2015). The total sample size for the focus group discussions was approximately 16-20 participants. In addition to the focus group discussions, the study conducted 10 in-depth interviews with A2 women farmers in Gwanda District. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring specific issues while ensuring that key topics were covered. The target population for the interviews included women who had been actively participating in Command Agriculture for at least three years. This criterion ensured that the participants had sufficient experience to provide meaningful insights into the program's impact on their agricultural activities and livelihoods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collected from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis followed a systematic process: transcribing the data, coding the transcripts, identifying themes, and interpreting the findings. NVivo software was used to manage and organize the data, facilitating a thorough and systematic analysis. Ethical considerations were paramount in this study. Participants were provided with detailed information about the research, including its purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that their participation was voluntary and based on a clear understanding of the study (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning codes to participants instead of using their names. The study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the participants from any harm or discomfort. This qualitative study, using a case study design, aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the gender discrepancies in Command Agriculture from the perspective of A2 women farmers in Gwanda District. Through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, the study gathered comprehensive data to explore these dynamics. The rigorous data

analysis process, coupled with strict ethical considerations, ensured the reliability and validity of the findings, contributing valuable insights to inform more inclusive and equitable agricultural policies in Zimbabwe.

## RESULTS

**Extent and Nature of Gender Discrepancies in Access to Resources within Command Agriculture:** The study uncovered significant gender discrepancies in access to resources within the Command Agriculture program. Participants frequently highlighted barriers they faced in obtaining essential agricultural inputs. As one participant noted, *"We often find ourselves at a disadvantage when it comes to receiving inputs like fertilizers and seeds. It's clear that men get prioritized, and we end up struggling to get what we need"* (Participant 5). This aligns with research by Chant and Sweetman (2019), who found that women in agriculture often experience difficulties accessing critical resources compared to their male counterparts. Land and credit access emerged as particularly challenging for women. Several participants reported issues with securing both land and credit. *"Even when we manage to get land, the credit facilities are not as accessible to us as they are to men. The requirements are often stringent, and we lack the collateral to secure loans"* (Participant 8). This mirrors Moyo's (2020) findings that gender biases in land tenure and financial systems significantly disadvantage women farmers in Zimbabwe. The distribution of agricultural inputs also revealed notable gender disparities. Women participants frequently received fewer and less timely inputs. *"We get our seeds and fertilizers late, which affects our planting schedules and ultimately our yields"* (Participant 3). This observation is consistent with Sithole and Moyo (2021), who documented inefficiencies in input distribution that adversely affected women farmers' productivity.

Access to extension services was another area where gender discrepancies were evident. Women reported less frequent and less effective interactions with extension officers. *"The extension officers don't visit us as often as they visit the men. When they do come, they often focus more on the men's plots"* (Participant 2). This discrepancy reflects concerns raised by the FAO (2019), which highlighted that women farmers often receive less support from agricultural extension services compared to their male peers. Participants also highlighted disparities in access to modern farming technologies. *"We don't have the same access to modern farming technologies that men do. This limits our ability to increase our productivity"* (Participant 7). This finding supports Cornwall's (2019) discussion on how technological and knowledge gaps between genders can perpetuate inequalities in agricultural development. Socio-cultural barriers also played a role in these discrepancies. Participants attributed some challenges to entrenched cultural norms. *"Cultural norms sometimes prevent us from speaking up or claiming our rights to resources. It's hard to change these deep-rooted attitudes"* (Participant 6). This perspective aligns with Razavi (2020), who emphasized that cultural norms and gender roles significantly influence women's access to agricultural resources and opportunities. The study also revealed issues related to the gendered allocation of resources. Many women felt their contributions were undervalued compared to those of men. *"Despite our hard work and contributions, we are not recognized equally. The men's plots always seem to get more attention and resources"* (Participant 4). This observation is consistent with Boserup's (2019) argument that women's agricultural labor often goes unrecognized and under-supported in development programs.

The disparities in resource access had tangible impacts on agricultural productivity. Women noted that limited access to resources negatively affected their crop yields. *"Our yields are lower because we don't have the same access to quality inputs and support. This directly impacts our income and food security"* (Participant 9). This finding aligns with Momsen's (2020) research, which highlighted that limited access to resources constrains women's agricultural productivity and economic outcomes. The study also uncovered gaps in the

implementation of gender-focused policies. *"Policies are in place, but they are not always implemented effectively. There's a lack of follow-through in ensuring women get the support they need"* (Participant 10). This reflects criticisms noted by Kabere (2021), who argued that policy implementation often falls short of addressing the root causes of gender inequality in agricultural programs. Participants suggested several measures to address these disparities, including better resource allocation, more frequent and targeted extension services, and the implementation of gender-sensitive policies. *"We need more support and fair distribution of resources to ensure we can compete equally"* (Participant 1). This feedback supports the call for more inclusive and responsive agricultural policies as discussed by Elson (2020). The study's findings reflect both agreement with and divergence from existing literature. While the results corroborate documented challenges faced by women farmers in accessing resources (Chant & Sweetman, 2019; Moyo, 2020), they also reveal specific local issues and nuances in Gwanda District. This highlights the need for more localized and nuanced approaches to addressing gender disparities in agricultural programs.

**Impact of Gender Discrepancies on Agricultural Productivity and Livelihoods of A2 Women Farmers:** The study found that gender discrepancies in access to resources within Command Agriculture significantly impacted the agricultural productivity of A2 women farmers. Participants frequently reported lower crop yields compared to their male counterparts. As one participant noted, *"Our yields are consistently lower because we receive our inputs late and in smaller quantities. This affects our ability to compete effectively in the market"* (Participant 3). This finding aligns with research by Moyo (2020), which highlighted that limited access to essential resources constrains women's agricultural productivity. The impact of resource discrepancies on income and financial stability was pronounced. Women farmers reported struggling to achieve the same financial outcomes as their male peers due to lower productivity. *"Because our crops don't yield as much, our income is also lower. This puts us in a difficult position, financially"* (Participant 6). This observation reflects Momsen's (2020) findings, which indicate that reduced agricultural productivity due to resource disparities directly affects women's income and economic stability. The study also revealed that lower productivity due to gender discrepancies had direct implications for food security among A2 women farmers. *"Our family's food security is threatened because the reduced yield from our farms means we have less to eat and less to sell"* (Participant 8). This finding is supported by Boserup (2019), who argued that women's limited access to resources and lower agricultural productivity can lead to significant challenges in maintaining food security.

Participants expressed concerns about the long-term sustainability of their livelihoods as a result of these productivity issues. *"Our ability to sustain our livelihoods is compromised because we can't produce enough to support our families or invest in our farms"* (Participant 7). This echoes findings by Kabere (2021), who discussed how disparities in agricultural productivity can undermine the long-term economic resilience of women farmers. The study highlighted that limited productivity due to resource access issues affected women's ability to access and compete in markets. *"We struggle to get our produce to market because we don't have enough to sell. This limits our ability to earn a decent income"* (Participant 2). This point aligns with the work of Chant and Sweetman (2019), who noted that gender discrepancies in productivity can restrict women's market opportunities and economic participation. The impact on agricultural productivity also influenced women's social and economic empowerment. Participants noted that lower productivity and income levels affected their status within their households and communities. *"Our reduced productivity makes it harder to assert ourselves and gain respect within our households and communities"* (Participant 5). This reflects Cornwall's (2019) discussion on how economic constraints can impede women's social empowerment and influence. The negative effects of reduced productivity extended to health and well-being. Women reported experiencing stress and health issues due to financial strain and inadequate food security.

"The stress of not being able to produce enough for our families has taken a toll on our health" (Participant 9). This is consistent with findings by FAO (2019), which highlighted that economic difficulties stemming from low agricultural productivity can impact women's health and well-being. Participants highlighted how gendered resource allocation exacerbated these issues. "The resources we receive are often insufficient to meet our needs, which directly impacts our productivity and income" (Participant 4). This observation mirrors Sithole and Moyo (2021), who discussed how gender disparities in resource allocation lead to unequal agricultural outcomes and economic hardships for women. The study revealed that women employed various coping strategies to manage the impacts of these discrepancies, though these were often insufficient. "We try to make do with what we have, but it's challenging to keep up with the demands of farming and support our families" (Participant 10). This finding is in line with Razavi (2020), who highlighted that women often resort to coping mechanisms that are limited in effectiveness due to systemic inequalities. Participants suggested that addressing these discrepancies through targeted policy interventions could improve productivity and livelihoods. "We need more support and fair distribution of resources to improve our productivity and income" (Participant 1). This feedback aligns with Elson's (2020) call for more inclusive policies that address the specific needs of women farmers and enhance their economic outcomes. The results of this study both support and expand upon existing literature. While confirming the general issues of productivity and livelihood impacts due to gender disparities (Chant & Sweetman, 2019; Momsen, 2020), the study also provides new insights into the specific challenges faced by women farmers in Gwanda District. This highlights the importance of localized approaches to addressing gender discrepancies in agricultural programs.

**Strategies for Enhancing Gender Equity in Command Agriculture Policies and Practices:** The study revealed a strong demand for more gender-sensitive policies within the Command Agriculture program. Participants emphasized that existing policies often overlooked the unique challenges faced by women farmers. As one participant highlighted, "Policies need to be more inclusive and sensitive to the specific challenges we face. We need policies that address our needs directly" (Participant 2). This finding aligns with the work of Elson (2020), who advocates for policies that explicitly consider gender differences and provide equitable support to women farmers. Participants suggested that equitable resource allocation is crucial for enhancing gender equity. "We need a fair distribution of resources such as inputs, land, and credit. Without this, women will continue to lag behind" (Participant 5). This recommendation reflects Cornwall's (2019) argument that equitable resource distribution is essential for ensuring that women farmers have the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The study found that targeted training and extension services tailored to the needs of women farmers could significantly improve their outcomes. "Extension services should be designed to meet our specific needs, and training should include practical skills that are relevant to us" (Participant 7). This perspective supports findings by Kabeer (2021), who noted that gender-specific training and extension services can help bridge the gap between men and women in agriculture. Improving access to credit and financial services was highlighted as a key strategy for enhancing gender equity. "We need better access to credit facilities with less stringent requirements. Financial support should be accessible to all, regardless of gender" (Participant 8). This aligns with Moyo (2020), who emphasized that gender disparities in financial services must be addressed to support women farmers effectively.

Participants advocated for increased support for women's leadership within agricultural programs. "We need more women in decision-making positions. Women's perspectives are crucial for creating effective policies" (Participant 6). This recommendation reflects Razavi's (2020) emphasis on the importance of women's representation in leadership roles to drive more inclusive and equitable agricultural policies. The study highlighted the need to address socio-cultural barriers that limit women's participation and

access to resources. "Cultural attitudes often prevent us from fully engaging in agricultural activities. There needs to be a concerted effort to challenge and change these norms" (Participant 4). This aligns with Chant and Sweetman (2019), who argue that challenging cultural norms is necessary to achieve gender equity in agricultural programs. Participants stressed the importance of effective implementation of gender-sensitive policies. "It's not enough to have policies on paper; they need to be implemented effectively to make a real difference" (Participant 10). This feedback is consistent with the findings of Boserup (2019), who noted that policy implementation often falls short of its intended goals without proper execution and follow-up. The study also revealed a need for strengthened collaboration between government programs and local organizations. "Collaborating with local women's groups can help in understanding our needs better and ensuring that policies are effectively implemented" (Participant 9). This aligns with Momsen (2020), who emphasized the role of local organizations in bridging gaps between policy makers and beneficiaries. Participants suggested that effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are necessary to assess the impact of gender-sensitive policies. "We need systems in place to regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of policies on women farmers to ensure they are meeting our needs" (Participant 1). This perspective supports the work of Sithole and Moyo (2021), who highlighted the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation to ensure policies are effectively addressing gender disparities. The need for greater access to technology and innovation for women farmers was also emphasized. "Providing us with access to modern farming technologies and innovations would help us improve our productivity and income" (Participant 3). This recommendation is supported by the work of Cornwall (2019), which suggests that technological advancements can play a significant role in leveling the playing field for women in agriculture. Participants underscored the importance of capacity building and empowerment initiatives. "Empowering women through skills development and capacity building can help us become more competitive and self-reliant" (Participant 11). This aligns with the views of Kabeer (2021), who argues that capacity building is crucial for enhancing women's agency and effectiveness in agricultural activities.

**Conclusions and Implications of the Study :** The study concluded that gender discrepancies in resource access within Command Agriculture significantly impacted A2 women farmers in Gwanda District. Women faced persistent barriers in obtaining essential resources such as seeds, fertilizers, and credit. These discrepancies resulted in lower agricultural productivity and income levels for women farmers compared to their male counterparts. The unequal distribution of resources undermined the potential of women to contribute equally to agricultural production and economic growth. The findings revealed that the resource disparities had a direct negative impact on agricultural productivity among women farmers. Women experienced lower crop yields and reduced financial returns due to the late and inadequate provision of agricultural inputs. This gap in productivity not only affected their income but also their ability to ensure food security for their families. The implications are significant, as reduced productivity limits women's capacity to improve their economic status and enhances their vulnerability to food insecurity. The study highlighted that the gender discrepancies in Command Agriculture had broader implications for the livelihoods and economic stability of A2 women farmers. The lower productivity and income levels resulted in financial strain and compromised the sustainability of their agricultural activities. Women's economic instability was exacerbated by their limited access to financial services and market opportunities, affecting their overall economic well-being and social status within their communities. The study underscored the urgent need for gender-sensitive policies within agricultural programs. Current policies often failed to address the specific challenges faced by women farmers, leading to ineffective support and perpetuating existing inequalities. Implementing gender-sensitive policies could help in creating a more equitable environment where women have equal access to resources, training, and financial services, thereby improving their overall participation and performance in agriculture. Based on the findings, several strategies

were identified to enhance gender equity in Command Agriculture. These include equitable resource allocation, targeted training and extension services, improved access to credit, and addressing socio-cultural barriers. Additionally, strengthening collaboration with local organizations and implementing effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were recommended to ensure that policies and programs effectively address the needs of women farmers. The study's conclusions have important implications for policymakers and practitioners involved in agricultural development. There is a need for targeted interventions to address gender disparities and improve the effectiveness of agricultural programs. Policymakers should consider incorporating gender perspectives into program design and implementation, while practitioners should focus on ensuring that resources and support are equitably distributed and accessible to all farmers. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing detailed insights into the specific challenges faced by women farmers in Gwanda District. It highlights the importance of addressing gender disparities in agricultural programs and offers practical recommendations for improving gender equity. The findings also emphasize the need for more localized and nuanced approaches to understanding and addressing gender issues in agriculture. Future research should explore the effectiveness of implemented strategies and policies in bridging the gender gap in agriculture. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term impacts of gender-sensitive interventions on women's productivity and livelihoods. Additionally, research could investigate how socio-cultural factors influence the success of gender equity programs and identify best practices for scaling up successful initiatives to other regions.

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