

# GENDER AND RESOURCES: SOME MACRO AND MICRO LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Gender inequality, particularly in relation to access to and control over resources has been the subject of concern at international and national levels. We are all too familiar with the arguments raised and backed by research that illustrate the glaring discrepancies between women and men's access to and control over economic resources – from the allocation of national budgets to the control of financial and other resources at domestic and individual levels. While the socio-economic status of women was previously debated using the Women in Development approach, the paradigm shift to Gender and Development is increasingly being viewed as a more **qualitatively holistic** approach for assessing women's access to and control over resources in relation to their male counterparts. What considerations should we as African social scientists keep in mind in order to promote greater gender equity?

Much research has provided convincing arguments for gender mainstreaming at national levels. This, however, is happening at a time when resources in many African countries are scarce. While the scarcity in resources may result from political instability, economic uncertainties may arise as a direct result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is also worth noting that the continent continues to be subjected to the austerity measures of the Structural Adjustment Programmes as well as the reduction of financial support from many western donor agencies.

This paper discusses some of the interventions that have been aimed at improving gender equality in access to and control of resources at macro-national, and micro-domestic levels. The paper starts with a discussion of the economic and political challenges facing the introduction of gender budgets. With respect to the generation of gender disaggregated data, we outline some of the limitations of the Botswana Household Income and Expenditure Survey conceptualisation of household headship. Research that was conducted at household levels in Botswana, illustrates the need to review our units of analysis – particularly household headship to gain a more holistic and in-depth understanding of gendered patterns of access and control over resources.

Noting the importance of national interventions, this paper argues for the need to gain a better understanding of micro-level dynamics of decision-making between women and men which is informed by gender analysis frameworks that are cognisant of national and cultural diversities. Such research would be useful for informing policy as well as making an important addition to the body of knowledge on gender inequality in African countries.

## **Introduction**

This paper starts with a discussion of the economic and political challenges facing the introduction of gender budgets, which are by and large aimed at ensuring that the allocation of national resources is balanced. The second part delineates the key manifestations of gender inequality at the micro-domestic and individual levels. The paper will present some of the socio-cultural constraints facing women, and provide arguments based on research conducted at household levels in Botswana, that point for the need to review our units of analysis – particularly household headship to gain a better understanding of access and control.

## **Which Resources?**

The subject of gender manifestations of access and control of resources in Africa (as elsewhere) is a very broad, and potentially inexhaustible subject. In order to focus our discussion of this topic, it is pertinent that we delineate the parameters of discussion. What do we mean by resources?

Resources refer to those assets that may be harnessed productively to provide for human basic needs. These include: land, capital and labour. The distribution of resources depends to a large extent on power – the ability to own and control the processes that are key to providing, and/or denying access. The next section outlines the WID and GAD approaches. We look briefly at the concept of Gender Mainstreaming as the latest means of advancing the status economic, social and political status of women, and promoting gender equality between women and men.

## **WID, GAD and Gender Mainstreaming**

In the late 1970s and 1980s, under the auspices of the Women in Development (WID) paradigm, many advocated for the 'integration of women in development'. The current thinking has shifted to 'gender mainstreaming', which is associated with the Gender and Development (GAD) approach. The two approaches have been applied at various times in different contexts in the African region. While having some common aims

(primarily the advancement of the status of women), they represent different methods of analysis and action (SARDC, 2000).

The Women in Development approach arose out of concern, particularly among the ranks of scholars and advocates that women were being left out of the economic development processes, particularly in Third World countries. Ester Boserup's study (1970) which analysed women's labour force participation in Africa, Asia and Latin America is often noted as one of the key studies that provided the basis for the WID approach. Based on this and other empirical studies, many of which were carried out by international development agencies (United Nations and others), the concept of WID was effectively globalised during the first United Decade for Women (1975 – 1985). Arguing that women had been discriminated against, and effectively marginalized in development processes, advocates suggested the following measures to alleviate the situation:

- ?? Make women more 'visible' within national statistics, particularly as they relate to their labour force participation (in 'formal' employment as well as 'informal' sector activities);
- ?? Effectively reduce the productivity gap between women and men through education and training;
- ?? Provide policy measures for greater participation of women in decision-making positions in their respective governments;

Women's government-based focal points (Ministries, bureaux, departments and units) were established in the 1980s in order to facilitate the implementation of WID. Many of these focal points sought measures – largely through advocacy for the recognition of women's participation in various aspects of society (largely economic and social). A large amount of resources was provided (on the basis of western 'experts' advice) for the commissioning of studies to provide gender disaggregated data, and information on the status of women. This information in turn formed the basis for the establishment of income-generating activities within various communities.

Critics of the WID approach see it as being inextricably linked to the modernisation<sup>1</sup> paradigm that visualised progress only as westernisation of economic, social and political institutions and processes (Mies 1986; Beneira and Sen 1981). WID has also criticised as having limited impact on the status quo due to its failure to examine the status of women within the context of issues of class, race and imperialism (SARDC 2000). An additional failure was seen in WID's superficiality – the analysis did not include an acknowledgement of the underlying cause of gender inequality – patriarchy. Finally, the approach tended to leave men out of the analysis – having an isolated view of women as a socially, economically and politically homogenous group.

The concept of gender grew in prominence partly out of disillusionment with the WID approach. The shift in thinking is that GAD takes as central the contestations of power that are vested in the relationships between women and men. While some scholars were engaged in the process of developing global theories naming and analysing systems of gender oppression (see Mies 1986; Rogers 1980), others grappled with conceptualising 'gender' and 'inequality' within African societies. Gender and Development as an approach examines the impact of development on gender relations and how gender shapes women's and men's experiences of the development process. While the framework has been effectively used to *engender* the analysis of socio-economic processes at macro levels, it is increasingly being seen as the means by which qualitative insight can be gained into micro-domestic and individual dynamics that are hidden within the context of national data collection exercises.

Gender mainstreaming is the current international approach to promoting equality between women and men. In addition to the review of development policies and programmes, tools of analysis have been developed to assess and transform policy, particularly as it relates to control over resources within the context of national budgets. The following section outlines the justification for gendered review of national budgets.

## **Gender Budgets**

Gender responsive budgets are a variety of processes and tools which may be referred to as 'gender sensitive budgets', 'gender budgets', 'women's budgets' and 'women's budget statements'. These procedures aim at assessing the impact of government budgets mainly at national levels, on groups of women and men, through recognising the ways in which gender relations are based in the society and the economy. Within that context, they include an understanding of the economic, political and cultural situations of women and men within their particular societal contexts.

Gender budgets entail a review of government policies that influence budgetary decision-making; an analysis of gender targeted allocations. They include a gender disaggregation of the impact of mainstream expenditures across all sectors and services, and they review equal opportunities policies and allocations within government services (Hewitt 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> Associated with western economic development theories of scholars such as Myint, Myrdal and Rostow.

Gender budgets date back to the Commonwealth's impetus towards encouraging their member countries to integrate gender concerns into economic policy<sup>2</sup>. In 1989 the Commonwealth Expert Group called for interalia:

...the incorporation of gender concerns in the areas of public expenditure, taxation, credit policies, wage policies, trade liberalisation, and privatisation"

Hewitt: 2001: 1

Hewitt indicates that gender responsive budgets seek to create a direct linkage between social and economic policies through the application of a gender analysis to the formulation and implementation of gender budgets. These gender analyses would not only show the extent to which national budgets have either incorporated or overlooked gender (or be biased either towards women or men), but also demonstrate the ways in which institutions that seem 'gender neutral' may in fact transmit gender biases.

The justification for gender mainstreaming, and gender budgets has been provided by international and regional agencies (eg., the Commonwealth, UNIFEM, UNDP, SADC) as well as gender activists and scholars (see Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996; Elson, 1996, 2000). The main argument presented is that while most macroeconomic policies aim at improving human development and reducing poverty, the achievement of these goals is jeopardised by the failure to take into account gender relations, as well as the specific needs of women and men.

The efficient use of resources is important for improved targeting policies as well as for the delivery of services. Elson (2000) refers to their benefits in avoiding 'false economies' which occur when attempts to reduce or contain financial costs in one sector may transfer or perpetuate actual costs in terms of time use for individuals and groups, lowering their productivity in the process. Studies (eg Kabeer 1994) have indicated that the introduction of agricultural technologies and better seed varieties which are aimed at improving productivity among farmers, and reducing government spending on the provision of agricultural inputs often have the opposite effect on women by increasing the time spent on various aspects of the agricultural cycle (weeding and bird-scaring are typical examples). The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes and other fiscal austerity measures have led to the reduction of government spending on social services, particularly medical services (the closure of hospitals and clinics) in many African countries. The result is that patients receive limited institutional care, and are often discharged into their communities early. This transfers the burden of care to women, whose productivity for income-generation is lowered substantially.

While the data on poverty that is generated through household data may give a good indication of the income differentials between rich and poor households, the absence of an insight into intra-household dynamics of resource allocation and decision-making presents limitations by obscuring the larger picture<sup>3</sup>. The following section highlights some experiences and challenges to the gender budgeting process within the Southern African region, and specifically in Botswana.

### **Some Issues and Challenges to Gender Budgets in the SADC Region**

In 1998 the United Nations Women's Fund (UNIFEM) organised a forum in Harare to discuss and debate the importance of engendering budgets. The workshop was attended by parliamentarians, senior government officials, womens organisations, researchers, activists and the SADC gender unit. The workshop identified some issues from the region that prompted the need for action:

- ?? **Proportions of budgets spent on defence:** The workshop noted that nearly 1/2 of the fourteen SADC member states were at war. The expenditure of Zimbabwe (struggling under the weight of structural adjustment) on the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Africa on the conflict in Lesotho were given as examples. It was duly noted that the effects of war on national economies, as well as their detraction from the advancement of the status of women should be documented.
- ?? **Proportions of budgets spent on social expenditure:** While many governments are under pressure from the International Monetary Fund to cut social spending, this places an additional or additional burdens on the unpaid labour of women. It would be important to document the effects of cuts in social expenditure by gender, particularly the status of girls and women. This is particularly evident in the provision of care of the disabled and infirm, who, in most instances, is the direct responsibility of females.
- ?? **Land:** Since women's limited access to land is a common problem in most countries, the detailed documentation of land ownership patterns by women and men, as well as the cultural dynamics that determine

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<sup>2</sup> The impetus dates back to the report of the 1989 Commonwealth Expert Group *Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s* and the *Ottawa Declaration on Women and Structural Adjustment* which was endorsed by the Heads of Government in 1991.

<sup>3</sup> A more detailed discussion of the gendered dynamics of access to and control over resources in domestic units will be presented later in the paper.

access should be prioritised. Secondly it would also be important to know the budgetary resources going into land reform, as well as the proportion of them spent on bridging the gender gap. It would be pertinent, therefore, within the context of the ongoing Zimbabwean and South African land reform processes to produce gender disaggregated data for the purposes of policy formulation and to support appropriate legislation.

?? **Credit:** Women's lack of access to credit is also a widespread phenomenon in African societies. This is further exacerbated by patriarchal legal traditions that relegate married women to the position of minors who fall under the marital power of their husbands. Married women in Botswana, for example still face difficulties when opening bank accounts, or securing loans without their husbands' assistance. These issues are often ignored within the context of gender mainstreaming and national budgets.

?? **Regional Organisations:** Since this was a SADC forum, questions were asked about the proportion of the overall SADC budget spent on the advancement of women, or promoting gender equality. Regional organisations such as the Organisation of African Unity should be challenged to undertake gender analyses of their budgets in order to assess their levels of commitment towards gender mainstreaming.

Extracts from Budlender (1999)

One cannot refer to the process of national development planning without referring to power relations and issues of governance. Gender mainstreaming, and gender budgets often entail a radical departure from policy planning traditions that have been perpetuated over many decades. Within that context, the ideological shifts necessarily have to begin with the decision-makers -- politicians and decision-makers within the state machineries. Within that context, the role of parliamentarians -- particularly parliamentary finance committees are central. This remains a key challenge in most countries where the representation of women in political decision-making roles is limited. Similarly, the representation of women in the higher echelons of most governments is limited. It is crucial, therefore, to examine the inroads that have been made in creating awareness among policy-makers, as well as the barriers that exist.

Another key challenge to the process of gender mainstreaming of national budgets is that of access to gender disaggregated data across all sectors. While the situation has improved over time, particularly with respect to demographic, employment, health and educational statistics, much remains to be done to ensure that all sectoral planning is on the basis of gender disaggregated information. In addition, the links between sectors, particularly as they affect each other should be established. A pertinent example is that of the effects of HIV/AIDS on national economies, communities, families and individuals.

The UNAIDS and WHO figures consistently show that four out of every five HIV-positive women live in the Sub-Saharan region (UNAIDS/WHO 1998), with the majority in Southern Africa. HIV/AIDS has been referred to as a national crisis by the Minister of Health in Botswana. AIDS Sentinel Surveys<sup>4</sup> conducted by the Ministry of Health point to the fact that the age group 15 -- 49 years represented the highest rate of infection, with women being in the majority of those infected in that group. The economic implications of the pandemic are manifold -- loss of productivity among breadwinners, possible declines in agricultural production, human capital, etc. While the implications are duly noted in the Botswana National Development Plan 8 (1997/98 -- 2002-03), the inter-sectoral gender implications are not reflected. The absence of this discussion limits the ability of sectors such as agriculture, education, industry to put in place measures to adjust for the effects of the disease accordingly.

The discussion on gender mainstreaming requires researchers to identify gaps in gender disaggregated information, as well as to review the different mechanisms that either promote or prevent the effective 'engendering' of our national budgets. This is particularly pertinent in the examination of poverty and life chances.

### **The Gender Dynamics of Poverty, and Decision-Making at Households Levels**

The examination of the characteristics of poverty and life chances, focusing on the gender of the head of the household, has been the subject of increasing academic research and debate in recent years in developing countries. Census and household surveys conducted in Botswana reveal that almost half of all households in the country are headed by women, and that a significant proportion of them fall in the lowest income categories.

This section examines some of the dynamics of access to and control over resources among low-income households in Botswana. The evidence is from a quantitative study that I conducted in 1996 in Botswana. The study examined the implications of household organisation and gender relations of economic production and social reproduction on the life chances of women and their dependants. Research was conducted within a pool of low-income female and male headed/supported households in Manyana, a rural village and Gaborone, comparing similarities and differences in their composition, sources of income and survival strategies employed by women and men within them.

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<sup>4</sup> Sentinel Surveys are conducted every year among a selected sample of pregnant women and men presenting Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Tuberculosis.

The interviews with women and men pointed to the complexity of domestic organisation and the significance of gender hierarchies that are often obscured by focusing on discrete notions of 'headship'. Based on the evidence from this empirical study, as well as that presented by other studies, it will be argued that the utility of the concept (of household headship) within the context of Botswana is diminished by a lack of in-depth account of the culturally-based *gendered social relations* that shape identity and life chances.

### **Gender Disaggregated Household Income Data and Household Headship**

During the United Nations Decade for Women, researchers commissioned by UN agencies<sup>5</sup>, working in collaboration with national machineries and local researchers in developing countries, identified the gaps in data on the status of women, and sex biases in national statistics. The research pointed to the under-enumeration of women's work in the subsistence agriculture, the informal sector and unpaid work performed within the home by women in developing countries of Africa, Asia and South America (United Nations 1984).

On the basis of results of empirical studies conducted in different countries, various United Nations agencies (eg., International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Statistical Office) collaborated to develop social indicators on the situation of women, and guidelines for the generation of gender disaggregated data at national levels. The social indicators and guidelines facilitated the generation of data on the economic status of women; focusing primarily on their participation in the labour force and their access to productive resources.

In addition to identifying gaps in data on the status of women in the economy, WID advocates pointed to gender biases in data collection at the household level. Attention was focused on male biases in the identification of the household head in data collection exercises:

The concept of family head is based on the assumption that men head all nuclear families and provide for their economic needs while women take care of reproduction and home-care functions...The assumption of economic support by a male family head has become increasingly unrealistic as larger numbers of households are made up of single persons, particularly women living alone, and of women and children only. Also women are frequently the main or only providers for themselves and their children and larger proportions of women in all households are entering the paid labour force and contributing significantly to household income. (United Nations 1984: 26)

WID advocates lobbied for the gender disaggregation of household headship primarily to bring the attention of policy-makers to the existence of these household types, and also to establish the link between the subordinate status of women and the economic welfare of the households that they head. It is against this background that the concept of 'female headed household' emerged in policy-oriented household surveys in developing countries.

Evidence compiled during the last two decades estimates that at least one third of the world's households are headed by women (Moser 1989). The research points to the prevalence and increase of these household types especially in Third World countries of Latin America and parts of Africa. Studies have shown that the proportions of households headed by women are particularly high in the Caribbean and some Sub-Saharan African countries (Rosenhouse 1989; Folbre 1991; Mencher and Okongwu 1993; Kabeer 1994).

### **Debates on Female Headship**

The generation of gender disaggregated household income data arguably had the benefit of making women more visible within the context of poverty analysis, however, literature on female-headed households in developing countries illustrates the ongoing struggle to define female headship. Scholars have encountered difficulties in reconciling a) definitions of headship adopted by policy-oriented national surveys; b) the criteria used by individuals in their identification of household heads, and c) the lived experiences of women and men with regard to resource provision, household management and decision-making within different cultural contexts.

Sandra Rosenhouse (1989) and Nancy Folbre (1991) posit that while the use of the headship concept in censuses and household surveys partly serves to identify a reference person to whom to relate the various household members, the application of the concept is loaded with implicit assumptions about decision-making processes and resource provision within households. The identification of one household head, whether female or male, is based on unitary models of household organisation which assume that one person is the primary income-earner and decision-maker. This approach under-emphasises the complexity of economic provision under conditions where there are multiple earners and decision-making within households, and socio-economic co-operation between individuals, especially those with limited economic resources.

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<sup>5</sup>The Department of International Economic and Social Affairs Statistical Office, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.

Another key criticism raised by feminist scholars refers to the asymmetry of headship, defining households as female headed only if no adult male is present, while defining a household as male headed whether or not an adult female is resident (Rosenhouse 1989; Folbre 1991; Kennedy and Peters 1992; Moser 1993; Kabeeb 1994).

While various household members (female spouses/partners, children and relatives) may not readily identify themselves as household heads, or be identified as such within the context of national censuses and household surveys, their contribution of economic resources within households often has direct implications for the allocation of resources within households. Rosenhouse's discussion illustrated the limitations of reported headship for the reliable identification of the economic support base of the household.

Women who identify themselves as household heads due to the temporary or permanent absence of husbands or cohabiting partners may have limited authority due to their reliance on non-resident male kin for representation in matters relating to their well-being as well as that of their children. Case studies conducted in rural Egypt (Saunders and Mehanna 1993) and rural Bangladesh (Islam 1993) illustrate that while widows identified themselves as the heads of their households, they were reliant on senior male kin representation in public matters, especially those relating to the acquisition of land for agricultural production.

### **Typologies of Female Headship in Botswana**

During the 1980's, a number of scholars (Izzard 1982; Brown 1983; Kossoudji and Mueller 1983; Kerven 1982) pointed to the prevalence of female headed households in rural Botswana. These scholars developed typologies of headship based on the marital status of women, their ages, as well as temporary and permanent male absence utilising data from various government surveys.

The National Migration Study (NMS) was conducted in the late 1970's to document patterns of internal migration between rural areas, and between rural and urban areas. Recognising that migration resulted in the fluidity of household membership over time, the NMS adopted the following definitions of household membership:

- a) **De Jure:** household membership referred to those individuals who were regarded as 'usual' household members;
- b) **De Facto:** household membership referred to those individuals who were present at the time of the study.

These classifications were utilised for the definition of household headship. *De Jure* female household heads were defined as those individuals who were identified as the 'usual' or 'permanent' heads of their households, while *de facto* female household heads were identified as women who assumed temporary headship in the absence of *de jure* male household heads.

Peters (1983) pointed to the limitations of utilising marital status as a central criterion for defining female headship within the context of Botswana, based on anthropological accounts (Schapera 1933; Comaroff and Roberts 1981) on the lengthy process of marriage and the fluidity of consensual unions in Botswana. Based on this evidence, she argued that female headship may be ephemeral, rather than a permanent phenomenon within women's life cycles; that many women who may be identified as *de jure* or permanent household heads could later be incorporated into male-headed households through marriage. She also alluded to the fact that the discrete headship typologies largely ignore the social and economic relations that occur between women within households with men who may not necessarily reside within them.

Athaliah Molokomme (1991) also pointed to the limitations of female headed household concept within Tswana culture:

A household may appear *de facto* to be headed by an unmarried adult woman in the sense that there is no adult male who resides in it and exercises decision-making functions on a daily basis. At the same time, some man somewhere such as a father, brother or uncle may *de jure* head it, in the sense that only he may legally make certain important decisions, such as the capacity to litigate or represent the household in other traditional activities reserved for men (Molokomme 1991: 59).

Molokomme's objection to the labelling of such households as female-headed is based on the implication that headship suggests an embodiment of power, which many women do not wield under cultural circumstances. She therefore recommended a cautious application of the term by analysing headship and single motherhood separately.

### **The Ambiguity of HIES Classification**

The Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) of 1984/85 and 1993/94 disaggregated household data by the gender of the head. While the data from the latter survey were used in the analysis of

poverty by the Botswana Institute of Development Policy Analysis (1996)<sup>6</sup>, the HIES 2 did not provide a precise definition of headship.

The HIES 2 utilised the *de facto* approach to household membership, due to the fact that population mobility would create problems in the operationalisation of the concept of 'usual member', as it would entail detailing exact or appropriate proportions of time spent at each of the places where members reside (Government of Botswana: 1995a).

There is no clear indication of the basis of conceptualisation of the 'household head'. The following background information was obtained from several sources including: a paper on methodology that was presented by a CSO official at a seminar held to disseminate Census findings (Government of Botswana 1995a), a report on living conditions in Botswana from 1986 to 1994 (Government of Botswana 1996) and the enumerators' manual for HIES2 (Central Statistics Office 1993). The HIES 2 utilised a very broad framework for household headship:

Logically, every household must have a head. The head of a household has to be a member of the household...It was the responsibility of the household members to name from amongst members who their head was. In the case of couples, where either the wife or husband is present, one of them is the head. There were exceptional instances where from amongst the members, none, due to age, qualified to assume headship of the household. In such cases, the oldest was appointed head of household...(Government of Botswana: 1995a: p.32)

While the Central Statistics Office does not provide a detailed definition of household head, it is evident that the concept is based on the notion that the household head is the 'focal point' of decision making within the household (Government of Botswana 1996: 11). While no reference is made to the head's central role in procuring resources for the household, it is implied in the focus on certain demographic aspects of the household head; eg., gender, age, educational status, etc. The ambiguous conceptualisation of headship raises questions about its utility as an indicator of economic welfare and household organisation over time.

The ambiguous definition of the headship concept within the HIES supports the critiques that have been leveled by Rosenhouse (1989) and others. This ambiguity is reflected in the lack of an indication of the relevance of decision making to economic welfare at the household level. While the disaggregation of household data by the gender of the head has been used as the basis for the identification of gender-based income inequality at the household level, the question that comes to mind is the extent to which the broad conceptualisation of headship provides a reliable basis for the analysis of gender and socio-economic inequality at the household level in Botswana based on the HIES data.

### **What is A Household Head?**

My study of household organisation within forty households in Gaborone and Manyana provided the opportunity for a closer examination of the concept of household head or *tlhogo ya lolwapa*<sup>7</sup> would provide insight into perceptions and experiences relating to the links between income generation and decision making and the social contexts within which these processes take place. The guide for the in-depth interviews included questions that were aimed at gaining insight into decision-making, particularly the definition of household head. I asked women and men to define the term *tlhogo ya lolwapa* and to describe the responsibilities that were associated with this role.

The discussions showed that the designation of household headship is determined by a complex interplay between cultural norms, economic conditions and gendered individual agency. They also showed that the designation of headship is often determined by significant social relationships that extend beyond the boundaries of the physical residence. The views and experiences of the respondents have been divided into three main spheres of decision-making. The first was culturally-sanctioned male authority, the second was social reproduction, while the third was economic provision and income generation. The terms *tlhogo ya lolwapa* and *tlhogo*<sup>8</sup> are retained throughout the discussion in order to keep their socio-cultural and linguistic significance.

### **Male Culturally-Sanctioned Authority**

When asked the question 'What does *tlhogo ya lolwapa* mean?', nineteen women and three men immediately gave the following response: "*Go raya Monna*"("It means a man"). Among the women, the response was given by ten self-identified household heads, as well as by five individuals who had identified women as the

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<sup>6</sup> The study indicated that 47% percent of households in Botswana are below the poverty datum line, and interalia that female-headed households constitute the majority of income-poor households.

<sup>7</sup> *Tlhogo ya Lolwapa* refers to 'head of the household' in Setswana.

<sup>8</sup> *Tlhogo* refers to 'head' in Setswana.

heads of their households. From these immediate responses, it was evident that the term *tlhogo ya lolwapa* had specific gender connotations -- and was synonymous with 'man or maleness' within the context of cultural beliefs and practices.

Men continue to assume responsibility for public political affairs, such as active participation in *kgotla*<sup>9</sup> meetings. While women are now permitted to attend meetings in the traditional meeting forum, their participation is largely passive. Men dominate discussions and make overall decisions. At the family level, they play a key role in marriage negotiations, funeral rites and other significant cultural practices. The synonymy of *tlhogo ya lolwapa* and *monna* (man) is constantly reinforced in these cultural rituals.

Kgalalelo, a widowed single mother in Manyana who lived in her younger brother's compound identified him as the head of the household during the screening survey. During the in-depth interview she alluded to the role that her non-resident elder brother played as head of the family, showing the importance of gender and age-based hierarchies in the determination of household headship. She mentioned that when important traditional events such as wedding negotiations and funerals take place in her family and community, her non-resident elder brother would represent her household as the most senior male member of the family:

The head of this household is my older brother who lives on the other side of the village. He is the one who is consulted as the elder in the household. He often arbitrates in issues that are relegated to the uncles (*bo malome*). He is older than both of us [herself and her younger brother]. When someone from the *kgotla* brings an important message, they will want to consult a man, even if he is younger than me, to give him the message from the elders. He is my *kgosi* (chief). I cannot supersede him in authority. If he is absent, I can receive the information as a woman only if he doesn't have a wife. If he is married, the message will be delivered to his wife, who in turn will deliver it to my brother.

Kgalalelo pointed to the subordinate status of women in culturally-based gender and age hierarchies. During marriage, she had been under the authority and guidance of her husband. After the death of her husband, she had been forced to return to her natal compound that had been bequeathed to her younger brother following the death of their parents. She effectively fell under the immediate guidance and authority of her younger brother. Her younger brother was in turn superseded in authority by her elder brother in terms of age and by virtue of his having completed the passage into adulthood through marriage.

A woman in Manyana who resided in her natal home initially identified her mother as the head of the household. She later indicated that her elder brother who lives and works in Gaborone was *tlhogo ya lolwapa* because he was *kgosi* (chief), even though he had virtually no input in maintaining the household financially.

Some respondents alluded to their dependence on *tlhogo* for guidance, and saw that position as being associated with dealing with and resolving disputes within the homestead, as well as dealing with problems that faced household members from outside. These roles were largely associated with men. Moatlhodi, a self-identified male household head in Gaborone voiced this view:

The main thing that I am responsible for in the household as *tlhogo ya lolwapa* is to ensure that the male responsibilities are taken care of. Care of the children and their mother. I am the one responsible for maintaining discipline in this home.

The views expressed by Moatlhodi indicate that there are defined power relations within consensual relationships and that women occupy subordinate positions in relation to their consensual partners. The culturally-defined gender-specificity of the concept was also reflected in the men's immediate reference to themselves as heads, while many women were ambivalent about the implications of bestowing the title upon themselves within the context of culture.

When asked whether a woman was ever regarded as *tlhogo ya lolwapa* within the context of Tswana culture, many indicated that women could only assume that role in the absence of men; especially if their partners were deceased. Many said that these women would still be required to consult with male relatives when making important decisions that are considered as falling in the male domain, as was clearly illustrated in Kgalalelo's case. A woman in Gaborone indicated that while culture was changing, she was still expected to contact her uncle in the event of a death in her nuclear family, as the arrangement of funeral rites is the responsibility of men.

While the views of respondents illustrated the cultural assumptions reflected in patriarchal definitions of household headship that were alluded to by various scholars (Folbre 1991; Chant 1991), they also supported the concerns raised by Molokomme (1991) regarding the applicability of the term 'female headed household' within

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<sup>9</sup> *Kgotla* is the village political forum.

the context of Tswana culture. Molokomme's views relate to the cultural framework that continues to promote patriarchal relations of power and authority, whereby men are the key players in matters of cultural importance such as marriage negotiations and inheritance practices. While single women are considered as legal majors in the acquisition of property under the law, they continue to be subjected to the authority of male relatives within the cultural context. Married women are doubly disadvantaged by being subjected to traditional male authority within marriage, as well as under statutory legal practices that relegate them to the position of minors in relation to their husbands.

It can be argued that a growing proportion of single women who spend the majority of their adult lives and establish homesteads in the urban areas are affected less by kinship influences than those single mothers whose lives remain embedded in their natal families out of economic need. The degree of autonomy that women exercise over their lives and the lives of their dependants is highly contingent on the degree of economic power that they possess. While the autonomy of some of the single women may be adversely affected by economically-motivated cohabitation eg. 'marriage for maize meal', there is a large proportion of women who remain alone by choice or due to the failure of co-resident consensual unions.

### **Domestic Social Reproduction**

For the purposes of my study, domestic social reproduction was defined as including childbearing, child-rearing and the performance of activities that are related to the daily maintenance of household members as described by Laslett and Brenner (1989) and Fox (1993). These activities are often subsumed under 'housework' within national household surveys and labour statistics, and are not considered to be economic activities. The Botswana Labour Force Survey of 1995/96 mentioned the following about female labour force participation rates and housework:

Females generally show lower rates of economic activity than males and many are engaged in housework which is still very much work but is not included as an economic activity internationally largely because of the problems of putting monetary values on such activities (Government of Botswana 1996: 3).

Respondents pointed to the central significance of social reproduction especially with regard to the maintenance of life. In addition, it was clear that the realm of housework extends far beyond domestic chores to include the procurement of resources -- especially food that is consumed by household members.

Several respondents remarked that *tlhogo ya lolwapa* is the person who takes responsibility for the daily survival and welfare of members of the household. The qualification of the terms 'survival' and 'welfare' varied according to the gender of the respondents, with men alluding more to general welfare, while women provided details regarding home-management tasks ranging from catering for their children's nutritional and educational needs to food acquisition and preparation. Men subsumed 'welfare' under their culturally-sanctioned authority. Three men in Gaborone alluded to their responsibility for the overall material welfare of their families, indicating that they were responsible for 'bringing home the food'.

The views expressed by women reflected their pre-occupation with making ends meet on a daily basis. Most of the female heads of households indicated that they undertook these responsibilities single-handedly, while the women who were married and cohabiting indicated that they consulted their husbands and partners as they were partly responsible for meeting the financial requirements for household expenses.

### **Provision of Resources**

The procurement of resources includes the production and/or acquisition of cash, goods and food for consumption within the household, as well as the provision of basic necessities such as shelter. While some of the respondents alluded to the links between culturally-sanctioned authority and resource provision, it appeared that the link between social reproduction and resource provision was stronger.

The link between culturally-sanctioned authority and resource provision was expressed in the comments made by couples, and women who were single due to the disintegration of resident consensual unions, or the deaths of consensual partners. The latter link was evident in the views of women who had never cohabited; some of whom had established their own households, and those who resided in the households of their single mothers. The discussions also illustrated the complexity of provision of resources and ownership of assets between and within households, and the likelihood that households headed by women would rely on informal networks that sometimes had direct implications for their personal power and autonomy.

Several widows referred to the fact that their late partners had been the primary income earners in their households. A widow in Manyana mentioned that if her husband were still alive, he would assume responsibility for supporting the household financially. She indicated that she was the head of her household because she was a widow, and had assumed primary responsibility for catering for the needs of her children. While seeming to be

certain about her role, she felt that her migrant son could be regarded as *tlhogo* due to his regular contribution to her welfare as well as that of his siblings.

Several widows in Manyana indicated that they relied on their non-resident adult children for the upkeep of their homes. An elderly widow who had originally identified herself as the head of her household in Manyana indicated that she depended on her son to provide food for her, and saw him as the main decision-maker. Another elderly widow mentioned that it was difficult to determine who the head of her household was, as her sons assisted her financially. She finally said that she thought it was her eldest son, as he was the one that she appealed to for financial assistance. Another widow who lived with her daughter and several grandchildren said it was difficult to determine who the head of her household was, as her resident daughter and non-resident sons contributed to her welfare.

The complex interface between economic provision and headship was also reflected in the households of cohabiting and married couples. While men assumed the role of breadwinner and principal decision-maker, it was evident that women played a prominent role in food provision. This was reflected in the case of Mmantho and Mmoshe, a couple in Manyana. While Mmantho had originally indicated that her household relied on her partner's income from casual work, she later indicated that she had been feeding her family of ten with maize and sorghum that she jointly produced with her mother. She indicated that the little income that Mmoshe made was used to supplement the food supply, pay for the children's educational expenses, clothing needs, and to purchase fuel for lighting.

Ownership and control over major assets are important aspects of headship. Several respondents referred to *tlhogo* as *monnga lolwapa* (the owner of the home). The patterns of home ownership were largely determined by partnership and marital status in both locations. The proprietary consequences of marriage in Botswana subject married women to the marital power of their husbands, who are appointed the legal administrators of their marital estates. Husbands effectively have the right to acquire and sell property without reference to their wives (WLSA 1994). These proprietary consequences of marriage have dire implications for women.

Another area of complexity in the ownership of housing is reflected in the lives of single mothers who reside within the households of their natal families. Kgalalelo, a widowed mother of five in Manyana was compelled to return to her deceased parent's home when her marital homestead had physically collapsed. She indicated that the home was left to her single younger brother who is a migrant worker in South Africa. Kgalalelo is unemployed, and does not have the financial means to build a home for her family. She said that while she was occupying and looking after the home for her younger brother, she was concerned about the welfare of her family once her brother returned and established a family in the compound.

## Observations

The forgoing discussion has illustrated the complexity of household headship and decision-making which occurs within and between households. The predominance of patriarchal patterns of male authority over women within and between households continues to be reproduced through cultural norms and legal traditions. The dependence of women on men has largely been reinforced by gender patterns of wage employment and the creation of the male breadwinner ideology over time.

The prominence of single women as decision-makers in their households is largely due to the absence of senior male adults in the household, and the economic 'independence' that they gain from earning their own income. While many of these women are subjected to male authority within the context of traditional rites, and many identified men as the heads of their households, they assumed primary responsibility for the daily provision of resources and the welfare of their dependants.

The contribution of wives, female cohabitantes and other household members to economic provision and social reproduction largely goes unnoticed within conceptualisations of headship. The delineation of the different spheres of headship pointed to the close interface between social reproduction and economic provision through processes of mothering.

## Conclusions

The mainstreaming of gender into national policies, budgets and programmes remains a challenge for African countries in the new millennium. Many of the barriers to achieving this objective lie in the paucity of resources for development in general as a result of SAPs, conflicts and ongoing crises such as HIV/AIDS. It is important for us as scholars, researchers and gender activists to ensure that we make an active input in the gender mainstreaming process undertaking studies that will:

2000 Generate gender disaggregated data across all sectors of our economies

2001 Investigate the dynamics of resource allocation within policy and national budgetary exercises;

2002 Participate in the gender sensitisation of other researchers to add to the body of literature on resource allocation at macro and micro levels within our different contexts.

The lessons learned from a study that focuses on the roles that individuals undertake with regard to economic production and social reproduction within domestic units stem from their ability to provide a more holistic picture of the interface between structural factors (eg., culture and the economy), patterns of social and economic co-operation at the domestic level, and the shaping of individual ideology over time. The strength of this type of analysis rests in the ability to look beneath convenient conceptualisations such as household headship in order to examine the different configurations of gender relations and socio-economic welfare; particularly the dynamics of access and control over resources among women and men.

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