



NTENGWE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

THE PATHWAY TO ECONOMIC JUSTICE ON WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS IN ZIMBABWE

This programme funded by the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), aims at strengthening women's access to justice that enable women and girls to claim their rights, strengthen national and local capacities and policy frameworks, and enhance the evidence to inform future policy and decision-making on women's land and economic rights. Besta was one of the women who started a business after taking part in this project.



"If we have land and economic rights, our dignity as women will be restored. If we are to be happy, we are to be healthy and are able to support our families",

BESTA'S STORY

47-year-old Besta Nyoni lives in Hanganovillage¹ of Kanablock ward Lupane district with 4 her children, her mother and 1 sister with 3 children. Due to lack of education, poverty, cultural practices and insecurity she was not valued by her family as much as her brothers – and was seen as a burden to her family. When Besta was 17 years of age, her family arranged for her marry to be married with a 30-year old man from a neighbouring village. Marrying at a young age was viewed as a way to ease economic hardship by transferring this 'burden' to her husband's family.

Besta's biggest wish was to succeed in school and have an independent income to exercise more control over her life, but her path has not been an easy one with Besta's husband's low wages and difficulties in find decent work. To meet their needs, she depended on the small piece of land she and her husband had farmed together. She contributed 80 per cent of all food production in her household. However, as a result of climate change, her traditional food sources became increasingly unpredictable and scarce, leading to her loss of income and access to food.

Unfortunately, gender disparities in land access remain very high around the world, regardless of a region's level of development (FAO 2010a). Some women, individually or in groups, "own" land on which they produce food and goods for their families, products to sell, or rental income, although their ownership is not legally recognized. In these cases, they may or may not control the decisions made about the use of the land, depending on how important their production and income is to their spouses, households, or other legal owners.

Across Besta's community rural women suffer widespread gender-based discrimination in laws, customs and practices, which have caused severe inequalities in women. For most rural women, land tenure is complicated, with access and ownership often layered with barriers present in their daily realities: discriminatory social dynamics and strata, unresponsive legal systems, lack of economic opportunities, lack of voice in decision making and lack of economic autonomy. The Gender Evaluation Criteria survey, conducted by Ntengwe for Community Development in three wards of operation in Lupane district in Zimbabwe, in December 2019, showed that 24 percent of women own land inherited from their late husbands, yet their ownership is not legally recognized. In the rural communities, land solely belongs to men with 75,2 percent of men holding lease documents, as observed during the survey. But the Statutory Instrument 53 of 2014 on Agricultural Land Settlement (Permit Terms and Conditions) Regulations, gives effect to the provisions of the Constitution by defining spouse rights when it comes to land acquired under the land reform programme, more women are now demanding their rights.

Besta's ability to access, control, own and use and operate her land or participate in decision-making processes affecting her life were very slim until Besta found out about the Ntengwe for Community Development's pathways to social and economic justice on women's land rights project in May 2019 where she attended an advocacy and lobbying for Women's land rights training at Gwayi Primary School.

During a community meeting, led by a group of grassroots women and local community leaders, Besta was invited in June 2019 to join the decision-making committee because of her energy and commitment to assist other grassroots women to stand up for their land and property rights.

“THE LITTLE KNOWLEDGE THAT I HAD, MADE ME UNDERSTAND THAT THE REASON WHY WOMEN ARE VULNERABLE IS LACK OF KNOWLEDGE”



Soon she created a social movement where she led and organized grassroots women and men to collaborate as key actors towards strengthening the formal and informal justice system. After attending 3 capacity-building sessions with Ntengwe, Besta began working with traditional leaders, government stakeholders and her community fighting for women's increased access and control over land and other productive resources in order to achieve socio- economic development, peace and security and environmental sustainability

MOVING FORWARD

With the attained knowledge of the Statutory Instrument 53 of 2014 on Agricultural Land Settlement (Permit Terms and Conditions) that Besta and her communities now have, Besta's husband agreed to equal ownership of the land. The Joint Land Lease Ownership document between Besta and her husband was then signed by the the Ministry of Land in March 2020. Having joint land lease ownership and learning about women and legal rights enabled Besta to contribute to decision-making in her community. With more women participating in information sharing in group settings, and inspired by Besta's story and her work in her community, more husbands realized the importance of women's land and economic rights and entered into joint land lease ownership with their wives. Besta has seen improvements in her community and beyond. Nearby villages have seen the results of her approach and are replicating her model. Local and provincial authorities are taking note of what's working and thus, authorities assist with expanding the scale of Besta's work – and its impact. Besta has worked tirelessly to educate communities about the law to respect, protect and fulfil women's rights to land and other productive resources. As a result of her work, 140 women together with their husbands signed joint land lease ownership documents between February and March 2020.

