

Re-writing women's economic narratives: intergenerational passage of small grains disrupt Capitalism.



IYWD Member and Area Facilitator, Constance Mushayi admires one of the young women farmers organic seed display.

On the 26th of September the Institute of Young Women Development (IYWD) hosted its annual Small Grains Seed Fair in Guruve District in Mashonaland Central Province. This was an agricultural seed fair hosted by young women for other young women. Young women from across the province came together for this sisterly learning exchange where they displayed organic small grains ranging from rapoko, millet, sorghum and a wide range of leguminous seeds. This event was a build up from young women's visit to Zimbabwe Smallholder Organic Farmers' Forum (ZIMSOFF). On the face of it one might take it lightly that young women came together, and show cased their small grain seeds so what? This seed fare demonstrates how young women are rewriting women's economic narratives as well as practically shaking the walls of patriarchy and capitalism.

Young women and capitalism

Capitalism [is defined as](#) an economic system in which a country's trade, industry, and profits are controlled by private companies, instead of by the people whose time and labour powers those companies.¹ It can be submitted that a capitalist economy is controlled by the "haves" and the "elites" at the expense of the "have nots". Walking down memory lane it is apparent that money matters have been man matters to the exclusion of young women and women, a disempowering phenomenon that feeds well into capitalism and patriarchy. Feminism can be summed up as passionate bid to achieve equality of the sexes in all spheres of life including but not limited to politics, economics, education and social. At the core of feminist economics is the appreciation and acknowledgment that women have been denied of their slice of the cake through gender discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, yet they contribute significantly and actively to the greater economy. Young women in rural areas work twice as hard as their male counterparts as the trailblazers of unpaid care work and after it all they still participate in formal work as other people's employees as farm workers, house maids, sales persons etc. The lived realities of women working long hours with minimal compensation if any has been normalized in today's rural communities.

According to the United Nations, economic value of unpaid care work accounts for 40% of GDP.² Zimbabwe continues to benefit from the undervalued and unpaid care work that young women in rural areas contribute to the annual GDP. It is alarming that this form of work has not been appreciated enough to enter the national finance and economics discourse through being quantified like other forms of work. Similarly young women are excluded from the rural economy. They are limited to control the production of small grains which have been relegated to home consumption and do not fetch as much as cash crops on the market. Elizabeth Mpofu of the Zimbabwe Small Holder Organic Farmers Forum (ZIMSOFF), a movement of farmers who are mentoring and supporting young women on the politics of the small grains in Zimbabwe rightly put it,

¹ <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/what-capitalism-is>

² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/Unpaid-care-work-in-times-of-the-COVID-19-crisis.Duragova.pdf>

'there is no law to [protect and promote](#) our indigenous small grains the same way they protect and promote hybrid seeds'. She encouraged young women to advocate and lobby for laws to protect our indigenous small grains such as millet and sorghum, rapoko as a way to commercialise the gendered crops and make sure that women realise the financial value of their produce. The seed fare therefore symbolically and practically provided marginalised young women an organising opportunity to disrupt capitalism. Yes, capitalism continues to take away from young women and women including through low-waged work in service and manufacturing and reclaiming rural economies provides an entry point to challenge women's undervalued work.

Young women and patriarchy

Young women face various barriers in accessing land to perform their agricultural activities. Due to the injustices of the past, the widespread financial muscle in Zimbabwe is in the hands of men. Land is costly as such most of it is owned by men in this country. This is the same case in rural areas where traditionally and culturally the family land must be owned by a male member of the family. Although we are seeing streaks of affirmative action, the question of young women and access to land ought to be directly addressed. Even in a country like Zimbabwe that repossessed land under the famous land reform program at the beginning of the millennium, the process of repossessing and redistribution of the land was not gender sensitive. It side-lined the prejudicial history of women. This distribution mirrored the white male patriarchal ideologies around land and transplanted it on to the indigenous black man with class or political power privileges.

Historical socio-economic and political processes have structured hierarchical power relations, stratifying societies based on class, occupational status, level of education, gender, geography among others.³ They shape environments that facilitate or impede the ability of young women to effectively and meaningfully participate in the economy both formally and non-formally to their monetary and non-monetary advantage . It is

³ <https://www.bmj.com/content/368/bmj.l6985>

difficult for an already marginalised young woman to access a farming loan as most banks require immovable property such as land as collateral security. It is worth spelling out that young women living in rural areas face a triple tragedy, by virtue of being young, a woman and living in the impoverished rural areas of Zimbabwe. These traits place women at the very bottom of the value chain, also not forgetting that their black skin does not help them much either. As Liziwe Kondo a talented young woman farmer championing small grains in rural Guruve pointed out, *'I fought very hard to finally settle at my farm after having been evicted and lost the land for years to men in my community. From a total of six farms that were taken illegally from villagers, only two of us are women who managed to get their land back. The fight was tough we could have easily lost it'* The discourse around the structural prejudices associated with young black women living in rural areas ought to be openly discussed and realised.

It is a common sight to arrive at a rural home and find the greater part of the land belonging to the husband, the son, the uncle or the nephew whoever is the male figure of that rural homestead. On such large and fertile pieces of land capitalist induced 'cash' crops will be planted for example tobacco, cotton, wheat and maize. This is the land that the whole family including the women will wake up to toil on concurrently with their house chores. At the end of the farming season the so-called cash crops are sold for cash and Mr so and so will collect his funds and brag to the community at how **HE** is a master farmer. History has shown us that in most instances the economic abuse manifests as the young women are now deprived of the profits of the cash crops even though they laboured daily on the crop and made a massive indirect contribution by taking on the unpaid house work. The young women at the Seed Fair unanimously agreed that the ownership, access and control of profits from the sale cash crops such as tobacco and cotton and maize lies with the male head of the family. 'What we control are groundnuts. We produce peanut butter for our families and not for sale', said Shamiso Gotami, another young woman farmer from Guruve.

Rewriting young women's economic narratives

From the above analysis one can critically appreciate that the Seed Fare is a deliberate move that to organise young women to continue productively using the land at their disposal for organic farm produce and the small grains to feed their families and communities while bringing in funds to their purse. One of IYWD's members Tambudzai Gean Kasukvere is the [Founding Company Director](#) of Ndiro Yakazara/ Rainbow Plate. She is monetising small grains, indigenous herbs and her business is expanding into manufacturing. Her transformational journey began when she participated in a ZIMSOFF organised Small Grains Seed Fair as part of a learning exchange visit in November 2019 in Masvingo. As the saying goes to educate a woman is to educate a nation. Young famer and now known businesswoman Gean is influencing young women in her community to participate in farming and other entrepreneurial activities. Indeed, Seed Fairs like the one we held are practical steps in shifting the position of marginalised young women in society and largely tackling dominant systems like capitalism and patriarchy. This opinion piece would be incomplete without noting that this initiative by the IYWD members is timely in that small grains are drought resistant and a direct response to the droughts that have affected SADC including Zimbabwe over the last couple of years. As Zimbabwe is battling the global [COVID-19](#) pandemic small grains are inherently healthy and will contribute towards one's good health and overallly fighting the potential devastating effects of COVID -19.