

Changing gender contracts in self-help housing construction in Botswana: the case of Lobatse

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to identify gender contracts in self-help housing construction. Gender contracts have been defined as invisible power relationships that determine roles, responsibilities, privileges, status, sexuality and behaviour of men and women within households, communities, the market and the state. Gender contracts shape social, economic, political and sexual relationships in what people often refer to as 'our culture'. Various gender contracts constitute a gender system (e.g. patriarchy or matriarchy) under which general rules, perceptions, hierarchies and privileges are formulated, refined and preserved.

The paper notes that although the advent of colonialism and capitalism did not replace patriarchal structures in Botswana, they set in new political and production systems that upset the traditional power base and provided opportunities for women to challenge traditional gender contracts—notably the marriage contract that had hitherto been used to oppress women. The paper further notes that despite women having made inroads into male domains, there has surfaced new sites and forms of female subordination largely due to gendered inequalities in accessing and controlling contemporary critical resources (land, money, modern technical skills and formal employment) as well as continued male dominance of community and state structures.

Taking Lobatse as a case study, the paper tries to identify gender contracts formed as a result of men's takeover of construction activities which were traditionally undertaken by women in Botswana. It notes that besides dominating construction work, men control access to land, building skills, housing finance, and the entire self-help housing process in Lobatse, thereby forcing women into subordinate positions from which they have to bargain or negotiate new gender contracts.

Keywords: Gender relations; Gender contracts; Self-help housing; Botswana

1. Introduction

The positions, status and roles of men and women in socio-economic and political developments have changed considerably all over the world during the last two or so centuries. Earlier commentators attributed the changes to two major factors: population increases and technological innovations. Boserup (1970, 1990), for example, argued that shifts in gender roles were mainly due to increases in population density and farming methods and tools employed in agriculture and food processing. She argued that in sparsely populated regions men undertook less farm work than women while in densely populated regions characterised by extensive plough cultivation, men undertook more farm work than women. She further argued that in very densely populated regions characterised by intensive agriculture and irrigation initiatives, men undertake as much farm as women do (Boserup, 1970, p. 35). She also noted that while men improve their labour productivity through the use of modern scientific methods and technology, women's labour productivity tends to remain low because they continue to use old hand tools (Boserup, 1970, p. 53).

However, as de Groot (1991) observes, gender roles and relations do not change automatically as societies transform from traditional or primitive conditions to modern ones. Gender roles and relations are, in practice, shaped by class and community solidarities and conflicts, men's and women's interests, men's power and kinship relations, and state interventions (or lack of it) in everyday life (de Groot, 1991, p. 122). Men's power is derived from the authority and privileges they enjoy within the family and community organisations and from control of property. To survive, women have to create and sustain both material and cultural autonomy and subvert, adopt, or resist their disadvantaged positions within the structures of male power taking into consideration their economic needs, family interests, state interventions and the ideological and practical sexualisation of women (de Groot, 1991, pp. 123–125).

According to de Groot women define themselves and are defined by the 'others' from a disadvantaged position as (i) gendered persons dealing with men, (ii) as wives, mothers, sisters or daughters within kinship groups, (iii) as employees, workers or professionals within production systems, and (iv) as objects of state socio-economic and political policies. Through the process of self-definition, subversion, adoption and resistance to change, new gender contracts or social norms are created and old ones redefined as men and women reposition themselves in new power relationships. "Indeed, a good deal of what is [today] socially passed off as natural and indisputable, including women's roles and modes of behaviour, may be the outcomes of past ideological struggles" (Agarwal, 1997, p. 19).

Thus the starting point in this paper is that within any given society, gender roles are but expressions of power relations between men and women—those with power determining and defining the status and roles of the 'other' according to class, race, caste, religion, age and/or sex. In examining changes in gender relationships in self-help housing construction it is assumed in this paper, as de Groot (1991, p. 123) does, that the powerless are not passive and exotic victims but have to make difficult choices about their lives within the constraints and possibilities available to them as well as according to priorities that seem relevant to them.

The paper is divided into three main parts. The first part, which follows this introduction, provides a discussion on the adopted theoretical framework: the concept of 'gender contract and system'. The second part discusses, albeit briefly, social, economic, political and cultural

transformations experienced in Botswana over the last century in order to provide a context within which changes in gender contracts must be seen. The last part tries to identify and account for the emerging gender contracts in self-help housing in Lobatse.

2. Conceptual framework: gender systems and contracts

The gender system and contracts theory questions and rejects the association of female and male tasks with nature and the physiology of women and men. Hirdman (1991), to whom the gender system and contracts theory is credited, argues that explanations which seek solutions on gender inequalities and subordination of women through the traditional premises of biological differences between men and women and historical evolution of human kind should be rejected because they are inherently based on circular reasoning and suppositions without theoretical validity. While historical evolution is used to attribute present gender inequalities “to traditions carried over from [the past] agrarian society”, biological determinism suffers from a syndrome of “obvious circular reasoning: a ‘difference’ arises because there is a ‘difference’” (Hirdman, 1991, p. 188). Having attributed contemporary gender inequalities and female subordination to the past and/or nature, theories based on biological differences and historical evolution (e.g. modernisation and dependence) tend to assume that “a levelling of differences between sexes will immediately and automatically occur [in the near future]” (Hirdman, 1991, p. 188). However, past experiences have shown that the disappearance of one form of subordination, discrimination or exclusion on the basis of sex, race, caste, etc. is often immediately replaced by another.

On the other hand, sex role theories avoid discussing the issue of power as a feature of social structure and, instead, tend to generalise by classifying all women as part of the women’s role and all men as part of the men’s role and by creating normative stereotypes and deterministic theories to which deviations can be discovered (Hirdman, 1991, p. 189; Franzway, Court & Connell, 1989, p. 15). Hirdman accuses sex role theories of failure to explain why women and men accept roles assigned to them. She notes that with gender systems, it is possible to discern differences between women in terms of class, age or family status and the role played by gender-differentiation in social, economic and political spheres.

Hirdman sees ‘gender contract’ as a way of giving a name to a complicated process by which relationships between men and women are shaped and the consequences the process has in institutional, cultural and biological terms (Hirdman, 1991, p. 190). The shaping of men’s and women’s roles, attitudes, positions and behaviour according to sex, race, caste or age implies power relationships and creates explicit and implicit differences and inequalities. To Hirdman, gender contracts are abstract phenomena or invisible relationships between men and women based on perceptions of how men, women, girls and boys ought to behave (Hirdman, 1991, p. 191). According to Hirdman, several gender contracts constitute a ‘gender system’ under which “a number of ‘irrefutabilities’...[and] ‘obvious statements’ about how things are...[or] they should be” (Hirdman, 1991, p. 191). “The gender system operates by creating new segregation and new hierarchisation in societies as conditions change ... [such as] what machines men and women should use, what work they should do and how they should behave” (Lee-Smith, 1997, p. 70. See also Larsson & Schlyter, 1995, pp. 213–215 for similar observations). Tasks are assigned

to women and men according to social rules that are subject to negotiation and redefinition over time.

Hirdman identified three levels at which gender contracts are negotiated—namely, interpersonal, community and institutional levels—while Agarwal (1997), in her discourse on bargaining power and gender relations, identifies four levels: being the household/family, the community, the market and the state. Agarwal correctly splits Hirdman's institutional level into two—the market and the state. The household or family level refers to relationships between married, cohabiting or casual sex partners as well as between female and male members of various ages and status in a household or extended family. According to Agarwal (1997, p. 29), a community may be defined either in spatial terms (e.g. village, town or region) or social identity (e.g. race, class, ethnicity, tribe, clan or religion). Of course, many people belong to several communities both simultaneously and sequentially. While the 'market' refers to the extra-domestic arenas where goods and services are traded, the 'state' refers to public structures including central and local government, the parliament, the judiciary, police and other organs that define, interpret and implement policies and/or enforce legislations.

Gender systems and contracts at various levels are subject to negotiation, re-negotiation and change (Hirdman, 1991, p. 191; Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). Negotiation is a process through which women as individuals, or groups of individuals, position themselves to benefit from or access resources and services owned, produced or controlled by men. Negotiation seeks to challenge gender inequalities within households, communities, the market and the state. These negotiation or bargaining processes are characterised by cooperation and conflict and may be explicit or implicit in everyday life. The extent to which women or men are willing to cooperate or not to cooperate depends on the expected outcome. For example, "Household members cooperate insofar as cooperative arrangements make each of them better-off than non-cooperation" (Agarwal, 1997, p. 4). At this stage, it is worth emphasising that gender contracts are formed over long periods of time through day-to-day interactions rather than arrived at in a couple of days through individual or face-to-face negotiations.

According to Agarwal (1997) the outcome of any negotiation process depends on each member's bargaining power which, in turn, is dependent on numerous factors including:

1. *Personal assets and endowments*: ownership and control of property (land, house, cattle, etc.), education, job training, skills, type of employment and level of income. For women, personal endowments may include their sexuality and presumed weaker positions.
2. *Exchange entitlement mapping*: the possibility of using personal assets and endowments for production and trade such as seeking employment.
3. *Fallback support position* which refers to a person's ability to survive outside a given relationship (e.g. marriage), household, family or community. These include access to parental wealth, non-wage income (e.g. remittances and pensions), access to communal resources (e.g. land, forests and water), social support systems (e.g. the extended family, kinship, friendship and patronage), legal structures governing marriage and divorce, as well as welfare facilities offered by the state and non-governmental organisations.
4. *Social norms*: which define and set limits on issues that may be negotiated as well as behaviour that is acceptable and tolerable. Social norms reflect the dominant perceptions on the needs and rights of women and men in a community. They define the extent of women's voices and

impinge on the possibilities of exit, say, from unhappy marriages. Furthermore, social norms may set limits on women employment outside the home or in certain fields (e.g. army or mining), which in turn restricts women's income earning capabilities and weakens their bargaining power.

5. *Social perceptions*: which refer to how society value women's contributions, needs and abilities and whether women's work is 'visible'. Perceptions which undervalue work undertaken by women and label as 'skilled' work undertaken by men (even if they require same skills as those undertaken by women) diminish women's bargaining power at home, within communities and in the labour market.
6. *State support*—the extent to which the state structures (e.g. the police and the judiciary) are democratic, interact with women groups or sensitive to gender-related concerns.

As Agarwal (1997) emphasises, the above factors are interactive and interdependent—complementing and substituting for one another. For example, women's employment and ownership of land and property tend to strengthen their bargaining power as well as their fallback positions. A woman's loss of job and/or property not only does it diminish the income she brings into the family but could "lead to marriage dissolution and family abandonment in periods of severe crisis (such as famine)..." (Agarwal, 1997, p. 9). On the other hand, a woman's bargaining power at household level stems partly from her individual economic and political positions as well as from gender-progressive coalitions within the community.

According to Larsson and Schlyter (1993), gender contracts at various levels are developed in relation to the existing gender contracts. Women elaborate their strategies within the space of action and entry points available in a given gender system or they try to expand the space through negotiations (Larsson & Schlyter, 1993, p. 14). Rural–urban migration has been cited (Lee-Smith, 1997; Datta, 1995; Phizacklea, 1996; Larsson, 1999) as one of the non-cooperative actions utilised by women to escape poverty and oppressive patriarchal structures in rural households and communities. Manipulation has been cited as an example of cooperative strategy employed by women in Asia to strengthen their fallback positions if their marriages were to break up. Women in Asia often waive their inherited land rights to their brothers, which strengthens their future claims on their brothers' resources (Kabeer, 1999, pp. 443–444; Agarwal, 1997).

Individual women have also challenged patriarchal social norms through making inroads into male arenas. Examples of women who have defied traditions and entered the male sphere include politicians such as Margaret Thatcher, Indira Ghandi and Golda Meir; women bus drivers in South African cities (Khosa, 1998); early female architects (Stratigakos, 2001); and female contractors (Radebe, 2003). Individual women such as Laeticia Mukurasi, Unity Dow, Wambui Otieno and Holalia Pastory (Stewart, 1996; Tamale, 1996), among others, have openly challenged and questioned laws, attitudes and practices that treat women and men differently or deny women access to certain jobs or resources. By utilising the national judicial systems, individual women in the above cases were able to expose weaknesses and injustices in national laws, customary practices, unfair job dismissal and harassment.

Group solidarity and collective actions have also been used to question and challenge sources of inequality. Group solidarity takes two forms: open confrontation or social/political movements. Confrontation is characterised by impulsive upraising due to intolerable domination or threat requiring immediate action in order to redress or pre-empt female victimisation or

subordination. Confrontation requires a “high degree of organisation and shared vision of oppression and the necessary action to counter it” (Tamale, 1996, p. 12). Women have demonstrated naked in several protests in a number of countries including South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana.

Vargas and Wieringa define women’s movements as “the whole spectrum of conscious and unconscious actions of individuals, groups or organisations with the aim of combating gender subordination” (Vargas & Wieringa, 1998, p. 5). Like all other civil societies, women’s movements serve as negotiation platforms between communities and the state.

Although the gender system theory enables us to account for geographical and temporal differences in gender roles as well as identify power relationships between men and women in changing socio-economic circumstances, it does not attempt to search for origins of gender separation and female subordination nor does it “really give space for explanations on why it is that women and men reconstruct the system” (Mapetla & Schlyter, 1998, p. 2). The gender system and contracts theory may also be criticised for assuming that both parties—women and men or the suppresser and the suppressed—negotiate or challenge each other with equal force. However, as Larsson and Schlyter (1995, p. 214) note, gender contracts are drawn by the party that defines the other who may strategically accept the terms and develop practical solutions to deal with the situation. Although gender contracts and systems are dynamic, they are also dialectic and cyclic with specific gender contracts at a particular time providing points of departure for both men and women (Larsson & Schlyter, 1995, p. 214).

This essay is an attempt to identify past and emerging gender contracts and negotiation strategies adopted by women and men in determining gender roles in self-help housing construction.

3. The changing Botswana society

3.1. The traditional system

Pre-colonial Botswana was composed of several tribes based on patriarchal structures and institutions that were characterised by male leadership and dominance and corresponding female subservience (Dow & Kidd, 1994, p. 1). These structures and institutions could be spatially divided into two separate but complementary geopolitical spheres—namely, the public sphere of politics and government inhabited only by men and a subordinated domestic sphere that was the realm of women (Dow & Kidd, 1994, pp. 1–2; Larsson, 1999, p. 72). Tasks and responsibilities assigned to men and women in each sphere were clearly defined according to sex, age and hereditary status.

Located in the domestic sphere, women (with the assistance of daughters and young sons) were responsible for reproductive roles—child rearing, taking care of the sick and the elderly, growing crops, collecting wild fruits and vegetables, food processing, cooking and serving, and house building (Kalabamu, 2001b; Larsson, 1989, 1990). Within each compound or homestead, women built several houses for sleeping, cooking and receiving visitors. They built houses for themselves and their husbands, children and other dependents. Besides building houses and growing

subsistence, again with the help of daughters and young boys, women looked after goats, sheep and other small stock that graze close to homesteads.

Just before adolescence, boys received training in cattle management from their fathers and moved out of the domestic sphere while girls received home management training from their mothers and remained in the domestic sphere. This process was developed over generations going on from father to son, mother to daughter and so on until it created a way of life known as Tswana culture and customary law (Dow & Kidd, 1994, p. v).

Adult men, with the assistance of adolescent boys, were generally responsible for cattle management, hunting and defending the tribe—activities that were usually located several kilometres from homesteads. By virtue of their hereditary status or class, some men constituted a civil-military-bureaucracy headed by the chief and responsible for political, military, judicial and legislative matters. In all tribal and community meetings, courts and gatherings, each “family and its members were represented by the husband, the head of the household. Decisions [at such gatherings] were taken by the chief in collaboration with married men...” (Larsson, 1999, p. 72).

Marriage was a vital gender contract through which men subordinated women and controlled their sexuality. Men employed a number of strategies to achieve this. First, according to Schapera (1994, p. 171), any unmarried woman who became pregnant was publicly scorned and humiliated. Often her child was killed at birth or made to grow under pronounced stigma if allowed to live. If such a child was a boy, it could never inherit from the biological father.

Second, upon marriage a woman was required to adopt the home of her husband as her domicile throughout her life—unless she divorced the husband. As de Groot (1991, p. 126) observes, this worldwide practice of women adapting their husband’s home upon marriage has the effect of limiting the freedom and power of the new wife as it places her not only under the authority of the husband in unfamiliar environment but under the authority of the husband’s parents and relatives.

Third, and related to the above, divorce was strongly discouraged. Although men were permitted to marry more than one wife, women were not accorded similar privileges. Furthermore, infidelity by men was condoned and more tolerated than infidelity by women (Dow & Kidd, 1994, p. 28). Fourth, because boys were preferred over girls, any woman bearing daughters only was considered to have failed in her most important duty to the husband (Schapera, 1994, p. 28).

In brief, pre-colonial communities in Botswana, as elsewhere in Africa, were patriarchal societies *par excellence*. Not only did men dominate and exclude women from administrative, political, judicial and religious spheres, but subordinated and humiliated women within families to the extent of granting sons authority over their mothers and older women. They also controlled women’s sexuality and preferences. In terms of gender roles, women were confined to reproductive and subsistence tasks within the domestic sphere. Patriarchy was the dominant gender system while marriage was the dominant gender contract through which women’s roles and positions in society were defined.

3.2. Transformations

According to some researchers (e.g. Datta, 1996; Larsson, 1999) the advent of colonialism, capitalism and Western influences into Botswana during the last quarter of the 19th century,

tended to augment rather than replace indigenous patriarchal structures. However, introduction of poll tax, mining activities, urban centres and cash employment created opportunities for negotiating and challenging the indigenous patriarchal gender system and its attendant marriage contract.

First, due to frequent and prolonged men's absence from home while working in towns and mines (mostly in South Africa), women who remained behind became de facto household heads. As de facto heads, women had to make decisions that would, customarily, be made by men. Second, employed as clerks, nurses, teachers, etc. some women gained economic independence and freedom from the control of men (Schapera, 1994, p. 33). Consequently, a number of women (including unmarried girls) bore and raised their children outside marriage—subverting the traditional gender contract that punished unwed mothers and their siblings. Unmarried mothers become de jure heads of households. The increase in the number and frequency of unwed daughters falling pregnant may also be attributed to the absence of fathers who were, traditionally, expected to monitor and scorn daughters who fell pregnant. Third, besides increased de jure and de facto female headships, some men and women (notably the latter) tended to marry late in life—again subverting traditional gender contract that required youths to marry as soon as they became of age. According to some commentators, (e.g. Datta, 1995, p. 186; Dow & Kidd, 1994) women in Botswana have come to regard marriage with growing ambivalence while unmarried women are no longer scorned but respected.

As a result of the above, Botswana is characterised by a large proportion of female headed households, men and women who have never married, and numerous children born outside marriage. All children born before marriage or payment of the bride price (*bogadi*) belong to the mother and no biological father may lay claim on them (Schapera, 1994, pp. 138–145; Dow & Kidd, 1994: passim). In 1991, women headed households accounted for 47% of all households in Botswana and 52% of all households in rural areas (Government of Botswana, 1994). In urban areas, they constituted 34% of all households. Ingstad (1994, p. 214) estimates that women may be heading as much as 75% of all households in some rural settlements. Increase in women headed households is by no means confined to Botswana. Women-headed households constitute about 24% of all households in sub-Saharan Africa (Habitat, 1999, p. 8). In Zimbabwe, they account for one-third of all households in that country (UNDP, 1996, p. 4).

Fourth, despite early endeavours by traditional leaders and colonial administrators to confine women to subsistence farming in rural areas, some women did migrate to urban areas. According to Datta (1995) and Larsson (1999) women migrate to urban areas due to three major reasons: in search of cash employment and earnings; to escape marital discord and family disputes; or to be independent of marital and familial subordination. Thus urbanisation has provided women new sites for resisting male subordination and forging self-esteem thereby challenging the traditional female subservient contract.

With attainment of independence in 1966, more opportunities for challenging patriarchy and traditional gender contracts were created through the adoption of a constitution that sought to uphold and guarantee equality for all and promote democratic governance. Chiefs' powers have been weakened through the introduction elected state president, cabinet and parliament; local and central government structures; the judiciary and land boards. The latter are responsible for the allocation, management and administration of tribal land—duties that were formerly executed by chiefs and headmen. Women participate freely in all works of life: parliament, top-level

management, tribal administration, land boards and employment in all sectors of the economy except mining and the armed forces. At present, Botswana has one female 'chief' and several female 'headmen' and high court judges. The governor of the central bank is also female. The administrative and political public sphere is no longer the exclusive male domain—which questions the basic foundation of patriarchy.

As a result of women's widespread participation in economic life, a high proportion of women in Botswana are no longer just 'home managers' but 'breadwinners' as well. Whether married or single, many women make substantial contribution to the survival, livelihood and generation and management of household wealth (Larsson, 1999, pp. 77–78). The traditional gender contract whereby men were expected to provide households with the essentials of life (land, meat, protection, etc.) is no longer valid.

In summary we note that the traditional patriarchal system—through which men ruled, defined rules and judged offenders at the cultural images level—has been extensively weakened. Household headship is no longer the prerogative of men. As Dow and Kidd note

“Motherhood without the benefit or burden of marriage has become the norm in Botswana. More and more women in Botswana are bearing and rearing children outside marriage, establishing their own homes and supporting themselves and their children without the support of the fathers of those children or their own families” (Dow & Kidd, 1994, p. 103).

3.3. *Contemporary Botswana society*

Much as the traditional patriarchal system has literally disappeared with the weakening of chieftainship and the marriage contract, Botswana continues to display all characteristics of a predominantly patriarchal society. Although women account for 52% of the country's population, they are grossly underrepresented in top political, judicial and administrative structures. In 1994, for example, women constituted only 12% of cabinet ministers, 12% of members of parliament and 12% of permanent secretaries; and only 10% of mayors/district council chairpersons, 15% of all elected councillors and 18% of town clerks/district council secretaries (Government of Botswana, 1998, pp. 19–20).

At community level, there are more men in paid employment than women. According to Kayira (1995, p. 280), the proportion of the unemployed labour force (that is, individuals aged 12 years and above who were actively seeking employment) is more widespread among youths and women than among men. In 1981, 25.3% of women were said to be unemployed compared to 7.8% of men. In 1991, 17.3% and 11.3% of women and men, respectively, were categorised as unemployed. Of course, these data disregard and under records the work of housewives, homebuilders, hunters and gatherers who were least engaged in modern sector economic activities. Higher unemployment rates among youths and women have been attributed largely to differences in formal education and acquisition of skills (Kayira, 1995, p. 278; and Jefferis, 1997, p. 489).

The majority of women are ill trained and prepared for integration into the urban job market. Consequently, most women end up working as labourers, cleaners, domestic workers and other jobs that require least formal training and experience or join the informal sector as food vendors, beer brewers or petty traders. Only a few join the service sector as nurses, teachers, sales girls and secretaries. For example, in 1991 the majority of women in cash employment were engaged in

domestic services (25%), wholesale and trade (18%), manufacturing (11%) and education (13%). At the same time, most men were employed in construction (26%), agriculture (14%) and central and local government (14%) (Government of Botswana, 1998).

In summary, although Botswana has changed from a typical patriarchal society in which women are undervalued, excluded and subordinated on the basis of their sex, to one in which men and women are treated equally before the law, women continue to be underrepresented in policy and decision making structures. There has also developed gender inequalities in terms of employment and other characteristics too many to mention in such an essay. The remainder of this paper explores changes in gender contracts in self-help housing arising from socio-economic, political and cultural transformation discussed above.

4. Emerging gender contracts in self-help housing in Lobatse

4.1. Study area: Lobatse

Data presented in this paper is based on a study on changing gender roles and contracts undertaken in Lobatse a few years ago. The town of Lobatse is located about 70 km south of Gaborone, Botswana's capital city. Although Lobatse (with a population of 29,747 residents in 2001) was the second town to be established in Botswana (after Francistown) it is currently the fourth largest town—surpassed by Gaborone, Francistown and Selebi-Phikwe. The town of Lobatse was selected because it is an old and established centre and, therefore, more reflective of everyday urban life than mining towns such as Orapa, Jwaneng, Sowa and Selebi-Phikwe.

4.2. Study methodology

The author collected data during two field surveys: in May–June, 1999 and October 1999. While the May–June field survey collected quantitative data using a questionnaire with both closed and open-ended responses, the October survey used in-depth interviews to collect qualitative data from selected but representative respondents. In the first survey, a total 169 heads or spouses of household heads from two self-help housing areas were interviewed. Only households that built their houses—with or without hired/voluntary labour—were interviewed. Tenants and households that bought their houses were not interviewed. A representative total of 17 households (out of the 169) that acknowledged having physically participated in the construction of their own houses were further subjected to in-depth interviews to collect qualitative data in October 1999. The in-depth interviews were accompanied by critical observations on household structure; size and type of house; available facilities; informal economic activities on the plot, among others.

4.3. Self-help housing in Botswana—policy and contradictions

Self-help housing was adopted as part of Government housing policy in 1975 with the launching of Self-help Housing Agency (SHHA) in four towns—Gaborone, Francistown, Selebi-Phikwe and Lobatse. Self-help housing projects in these towns involved both settlement upgrading and site-and-services schemes for low-income earners and received technical and

financial assistance from the World Bank, donor agencies and the Governments of Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom (Government of Botswana, 1992, p. 17).

The role of the SHHA in each town was to receive and process applications; provide technical assistance to plot developers; disburse building material loans; and to collect service levies (Government of Botswana, 1992 and 1995). Plot owners were responsible for all civil and construction work involved in the erection of house structures as well as provision of on plot services such as toilets, water and electricity.

Plots reserved for self-help housing, as in other schemes, where available were allocated on a first-come-first-served basis although priority was given to landlords and tenants displaced in upgrading areas. To qualify for a self-help housing plot, the applicant had to satisfy the following criteria:

1. Be a citizen of Botswana
2. Be at least 18 years of age
3. Have resided in the township for at least 6 months
4. Not own a plot or house in any township
5. Have an income of P800 and P7000 per annum.

The above plot eligibility criteria were similar to those applied in the Dondora sites-and-service project in Nairobi, Kenya (Nimpuno, n.d., p. 5) except that potential beneficiaries in Nairobi were expected to have been heads of households and to have lived in Nairobi for more than 2 years.

Although it may be claimed that the Botswana plot eligibility criteria were informed by gender neutral state policies on land and housing (Kalabamu 1998, 2001a; Musyoki, 1998), field surveys in Lobatse revealed that, in practice they disadvantaged women. As in Nairobi, the majority of women in Lobatse and other towns in Botswana, were either unemployed or self-employed in the informal sector. In 1991, women constituted only 41% of the economically active population in Lobatse and 69% of the economically inactive population (Government of Botswana, 1994). About 28% of women in Lobatse reported as being economically active were employed as domestic workers. The rest were employed in elementary or low paying jobs such as cleaning, shop assistants and casual labour. Less than 19% of the economically active women in Lobatse were employed as administrators, professionals and technicians (Government of Botswana, 1994, p. 29).

Due to lack of formal employment and regular incomes, some women in Lobatse (as in Nairobi) failed to qualify for allocation of plots as exemplified by the experiences of the following three women:

1. "I applied for the plot but SHHA people allocated it to my husband because when you were applying for the plot they would ask if you are working. If you are not working, they would say that you cannot build the house. They would give it to someone who is working. So because my husband was working, they wrote it in his name."
2. "I was staying at Maipei where I had bought a plot with one traditional house. After buying the plot I built two additional houses—one for sleeping and another one for business. I was brewing traditional beer for sale. While staying at Maipei, I met a man who wanted to marry me. He asked me to join him here in Woodhall. He later dumped me and left. He does not want to come back. The plot belongs to my ex-husband. He is willing to transfer the plot to me or the

children but he keeps disappearing. I intend to get a letter authorising the transfer from the Kgosi (Chief). Maybe, the council will authorise the transfer”.

3. “Before building this house we stayed in a BMC house because my husband was employed by the company. I talked to my husband about building a house of our own. I knew that the BMC house was not ours and we would be forced to move out when my husband stops working for the company. I knew that by the time he is not working, we will suffer. I applied for the plot in my name but later it was changed to the husband’s name because he is the head of the household”.

The above experiences blatantly contradict stated national policies on equality. First, the minimum income criteria automatically excludes all unemployed women who add up to almost half the adult female population in Lobatse. Second, as Nimpuno (n.d., p. 6) observes in the case of Nairobi, the criteria disregards income transfers from relatives, male partners and social networks. Third, although headship was not a plot eligibility criterion in Lobatse, SHHA officers decided to register plots in the names of husbands who were assumed to be heads of households. Married women who had bothered to apply for plots were denied the right to own land. According to SHHA officers, some women preferred to have land registered in the names of their male partners. The tendency to register SHHA plots in the names of male partners may be attributed to the traditional gender contract whereby men held the land rights and women owned the structure thereon. By redefining eligibility criteria, the predominantly male SHHA offices were, on behalf of other men, resisting changes to the traditional gender contract.

Fourth, by excluding the poorest of the poor—the majority of whom were women—self-help housing in Lobatse, and Botswana in general, was not so much a solution to the housing problem, but rather a means of facilitating capital accumulation and Botswana’s integration into the global economy (Kerr & Kwele, 2000, p. 1315). The income criterion assured investors (the World Bank, governments and donor agencies) in self-help housing of repayment of their capital plus interest.

Provision of technical assistance and disbursement of building material loans were also biased against women in contradiction to state policies and principles. Although self-help housing policies did not prohibit erection of traditional houses or require plot-holders to construct modern houses, SHHA officers in Lobatse did not allow people to build traditional houses. This affected women in two ways. First, as reported by Kalabamu (1996, 2001b), Matere-Lieb (1995) and UNCHS (1989), among others, although women in sub-Saharan Africa are able to build traditional houses, they lack skills and technology to build modern houses. By insisting on modern houses only in Lobatse, women (including those who had the desire, energy and time) were effectively excluded from self-built housing processes. Consequently, women in Lobatse were forced to spend their meagre incomes on hiring builders (who were exclusively male).

Second, and related to the above, self-help housing schemes such the one in Lobatse created more and better paying jobs for men and than women. According to Kalabamu (2001b), women’s employment in self-help housing was mostly unpaid for and limited to watering bricks, passing bricks and similar unskilled work. As a result, women headed households reside in less quality housing than men headed households (Kalabamu, 2001a, p. 320).

As reported elsewhere (Government of Botswana, 1992), only a third of self-help plot-holders apply for building material loans disbursed by SHHA offices. This has been attributed to uncertainty on the ability to repay the loans, loans being too small, the high interest rates charged

on the loans, etc. During my interviews in Lobatse, a number of women told me that, due to high interest rates and strict repayment schedules demanded by SHHA, they preferred borrowing money from their employers and hardware shop owners to SHHA. Thus, SHHA building material loans in Lobatse benefited more men than women (Kalabamu, 1998, pp. 68–69).

This section has revealed that although self-help housing policies in Botswana were based on gender-neutral principles, their implementation was biased to benefit men more than women. When an official dilutes or ignores a policy, that official is actually remaking policy because negation of a policy automatically becomes policy intervention, entailing contradiction of earlier policy and the assumption of powers which were not given in the first instance (Longwe, 1997, p. 43). It is within the context of such power struggles that new gender contracts in self-help housing processes in Lobatse must be seen to have been negotiated and defined.

5. Emerging gender contracts

Through analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data collected in Lobatse, it has been possible to identify a couple of emerging or tentative gender contracts. Emerging, in the sense that the identified contracts are still at their formative stages and because more research is required to validate these findings.

While gender contracts in traditional Tswana societies arose out of men's control of resources critical to subsistence livelihood—land and cattle—as well as dominance of, and exclusion of women from, the public sphere, analysis of data in this study shows that negotiation and definition of the emerging gender contracts in self-help housing in Lobatse were based on at least three concrete realities: (i) male dominated state apparatus controlled access to land for self-help housing; (ii) more men than women had better paid, verifiable and regular incomes; (iii) women lacked skills to build houses permitted by the state in self-help housing areas.

Contract 1: House construction is 'masculine work'. A principal gender contract, from which other contracts in self-help housing appear to be derived, is the widespread acceptance that only men could undertake house building and related construction work in Lobatse. Although some women had previously built traditional houses in their home villages and unplanned areas in Lobatse, female respondents said they could not build houses under self-help housing schemes. They had internalised their inability to build modern houses. "Nature has made us [women] believe that housing is a man's job. Women are naturally weak and men are strong," said one woman. Another female respondent said, "This [building houses] is a difficult job specifically for men. Women are not able to do this".

Through the enforcement of urban development standards, building codes and regulations, state apparatus had mystified self-help housing and, therefore, defined what is socially acceptable housing. Only people, mostly men, equipped with modern building skills and abilities to read and interpret maps, engineering drawings and architectural plans could effectively participate in housing construction.

Contract 2: Men are responsible for housing provision. The second contract is a logical follow up to the first one in that respondents expected men, the builders, to provide houses for their families. Most respondents (51%) interviewed in Lobatse said it was the responsibility of men to provide houses (Table 1). Only 15% considered women to be responsible for housing provision. Slightly

Table 1
Perceived responsibilities by gender (in percent)

Question	Male household member(s)	Female household member(s)	Both male and female household members	Various household members and other persons	Total (frequency) percent
Whose responsibility is it to provide a house for your family?	51%	15%	28%	6%	(164) ^a 100%
Whose duty is it to provide furniture and other domestic appliances?	6%	72%	17%	5%	(162) 100%
Whose duty is it to provide transport and/or cattle?	73%	4%	20%	3%	(149) 100%

Source: Author's Field Surveys, May–June 1999.

^aFigures in brackets indicate total frequency.

over a quarter of the respondents (28%) think that both male and female household members are responsible. These findings contradict the traditional gender contract in Botswana where women were responsible for housing provision. Then, men were expected to look after cattle—contract that appears to be binding to date as almost three-quarters of the respondents expect men to provide expensive and socially highly valued items such as cars and cattle.

Asked why men in Lobatse should provide houses for their families, respondents tended to argue that since men 'are household heads and strong and as housing is a big task, they have to be responsible'. Others argued that the 'Father has to provide a house using the mother's idea'.

Contract 3: Women furnish and take care of houses. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (72%) said they expected women to provide furniture and domestic appliances (Table 1). Less than one fifth of the respondents (17%) believe it is the responsibility of both men and women. These expectations are consistent with the traditional gender reproductive contract where women were responsible for the domestic chores. "Women take care of the house. Men use the house and do not take great care about how the house is organised", said one woman. "Although men are heads, women are overseers of all household matters" said another woman emphasising the role of women as house minders.

Contract 4: Men make financial decisions in self-help housing. Both qualitative and quantitative data collected from the field in Lobatse, showed that male household members are expected to make financial decisions in the self-help housing process. Male dominance in decision-making is more pronounced in matters having monetary implications such as making final decision on whether to build own house or not. As shown in Table 2, men made the final decisions to build own houses in 43% of the responses compared to 22% for women. In the majority (64%) of men headed household, final decisions to build own house were made by male partners compared to 24% in female-headed households.

Furthermore, a higher proportion of men (38%) made final decisions in women headed households than women did (12%) in men headed households (column 2, Table 2). Data in Table 2 also shows that the ratio of joint decision-making was higher in female-headed households than in male-headed ones—at 22% and 16%, respectively. Thus, effectively, men in

Table 2
Making final decision to build own house under self-help housing in Lobatse

Household head	Who made the final decision to build own house?						
	Father/male partner	Mother/female partner	Both parents/partners	Children	SHHA	Others	Total
Male partner	64.3%	11.9%	15.5%	3.6%	2.4%	2.4%	(84) ^a 100%
Female partner	23.5%	38.2%	22.1%	5.8%	1.5%	8.8%	(68) 100%
All households ^b	43.2%	21.9%	18.3%	6.6%	3.0%	7.1%	(169) 100%

Source: Field Surveys, 1999.

^aFigures in brackets indicate total frequency (count).

^bIncludes households headed by children.

Lobatse participated more in deciding to build the house than women did. Again these findings are inconsistent with Tswana culture where decisions on when to build new houses were the domain of female spouses.

Contract 5: Women play supportive roles in self-help housing processes. A number of respondents expect women, especially married women, to play supportive roles to husbands in the provision of housing. As one woman put it, “mother is always the one who pushes the husband to do everything” including housing. According to some respondents, “... women can provide housing if men fail” and when “men are not there, women can do the job”. Thus women are expected to be supportive when the male partner is around and active or step in when the male partner is absent or incapable of providing housing for the family.

In their supportive role women may contribute funds for buying building materials and paying builders, supervising builders and cooking food for builders depending on whether the woman is living with her male partner, single, widowed or living separately from her partner. For example, as shown in Table 3, cases where women contributed funds for buying building materials were very negligible (about 1%) in male-headed households compared to almost 18% in female-headed households. It is worth noting that in almost 52% of the cases, funds for buying building materials came from various members in female headed households compared to just over 21% in male-headed households—emphasising the emerging gender contract. That is, where there is a male spouse, it is his responsibility to provide housing for the family.

Furthermore, women (female partners and daughters) are expected to cater for builders. Women alone catered for builders in 71% of the households interviewed. Men alone featured in only 4% (Table 4). None of the male partners catered for builders in households headed by women. This finding is consistent with the traditional gender contract where cooking and other domestic chores are considered to be women’s responsibilities.

Despite the supportive gender contract, women compete with men on decisions regarding house sizes and designs. As shown in Table 5, about 31% of decisions on house sizes in the study area were made by male partners compared to 29% made by female partners. However, the ratio of decisions made by men was almost twice that of women in male-headed households. The opposite was true in female-headed households—again highlighting the emerging gender contract of assigning housing responsibilities to men when there is one.

Table 3
Contribution of funds for purchase of building materials

Household head	Who contributed funds for purchase of building materials?					
	Father/male partner	Mother/female partner	Both parents/partners	Children	Various members and others	Total
Male partner	42.9%	1.2%	31.0%	3.6%	21.4%	(84) ^a 100%
Female partner	8.8%	17.6%	16.2%	5.9%	51.5%	(68) 100%
All households ^b	25.4%	8.3%	23.7%	5.4%	37.3%	(169) 100%

Source: Field Surveys, 1999.

^a Figures in brackets indicate total frequency (count).

^b Includes households headed by children.

Table 4
Catering for builders

Household head	Who catered for builders?						
	Father/male partner	Mother/female partner	Both parents/partners	Sons	Daughters	Various members & others	Total
Male partner	3.6%	56.6%	3.6%		12.0%	24.1%	(83) ^a 100%
Female partner		62.7%		3.0%	13.4%	20.9%	(67) 100%
All households ^b	2.4%	56.3%	2.4%	1.8%	15.1%	22.3%	(166) 100%

Source: Field Surveys, 1999.

^a Figures in brackets indicate total frequency (count).

^b Includes households headed by children.

Table 5
Decision-making on house sizes in the self-help housing process, Lobatse

Household head	Who decided on the size of house?						
	Father/male partner	Mother/female partner	Both parents/partners	Children	SHHA	Others	Total
Male partner	40.5%	23.8%	14.3%	4.8%	13.1%	3.6%	(84) ^a 100%
Female partner	20.6%	39.7%	8.8%	10.3%	11.8%	8.8%	(68) 100%
All households ^b	30.8%	29.0%	11.2%	8.8%	12.4%	7.7%	(169) 100%

Source: Field Surveys, 1999.

^a Figures in brackets indicate total frequency (count).

^b Includes households headed by children.

With regard to house designs, male partners accounted for 30% compared to 27% for female partners (Table 6). The general pattern of decision-making on house designs by male/female heads of households was similar to that observed for decisions on house sizes—i.e. men dominating in male-headed households and women in female-headed households. Probably more surprising was

Table 6
Decision-making on house designs in the self-help housing process, Lobatse

Household head	Who designed/made decisions on house design?						Total
	Father/male partner	Mother/female partner	Both parents/partners	Children	SHHA	Others	
Male partner	39.3%	21.4%	7.1%	4.8%	23.8%	3.6%	(84) ^a 100%
Female partner	19.1%	35.5%	8.8%	8.8%	14.7%	13.2%	(68) 100%
All households ^b	29.6%	26.6%	7.7%	8.2%	20.1%	7.7%	(169) 100%

Source: Field Surveys, 1999.

^a Figures in brackets indicate total frequency (count).

^b Includes households headed by children.

the unexpected SHHA influence. According to data in Table 4, SHHA was responsible for 20% of house designs in our sample. SHHA designed almost a quarter of houses in male-headed households while women heads preferred other designers. About 13% of female heads used other 'designers'.

During in-depth interviews a number of women criticised house plans supplied by SHHA offices for being too small or having too few rooms to adequately accommodate household furniture and domestic activities. "... I bought the house plan from other people and not SHHA. I paid Pula 250 for the plan. I did not like SHHA plans because the measurement for rooms are very small..." said a female respondent. "... I did not like [the SHHA house plan]. I did not like the way the house was designed. There was no front or back. You had to enter the house from the side" said another woman who believes SHHA house plans disregard Tswana culture.

6. Coping and negotiation strategies

Under the traditional patriarchal gender system, women had to negotiate with men for only one major resource—land—during the self-help housing process. Mud, grass, poles and other inputs were readily and freely available within and around the villages. They did not need male labour since women themselves were masters of the building profession. However, as noted above, most building resources in Lobatse are owned/controlled by men in their personal and public capacities. Below are some of the strategies women in Lobatse used to ensure that male partners spend some of their incomes, resources, time, energy and skills on housing or to access resources controlled by men in public sphere.

6.1. Marriage

To access self-help plots, unemployed and self-employed women had to negotiate with the state by showing that they belonged to households with financial means to develop the plots. Unmarried, unemployed and/or self-help employed women including women who earned below the stipulated monthly income had to enter into some form of 'marriage' relationships with male

acquaintances in order to acquire land. While real marriage enhanced women's bargain power by increasing their contribution to household wealth, pretentious marriage had the opposite effect because it increased women's vulnerability. In times of sour relationships, male acquaintances in whose the plots are registered could legally reclaim the plots or otherwise disturb the occupants.

'Marriage' was also used by some single women to access skilled male labour as demonstrated by the experience narrated in Case 1. In this case, the plot belongs to a retired mother who, at the time of survey, was living in a village outside Lobatse. The daughter, who was residing in the house with her own child and school-going young brothers, was unemployed and, therefore, unable to hire a builder.

Case 1: Before coming here we lived at the Brigade where my mother was working as a cleaner. My mother is staying at the village and my elder brother is working in Gaborone. I am staying with my younger brothers who are studying here in Lobatse ... I have no money to complete the house. I cannot build the house myself. It is a hard job. My boyfriend is a builder and I can see from him that it is a hard job. My boyfriend plastered this room and did the floor. We did not pay him. He just helped. I am staying with him and my daughter that is why he is doing the floor in the other room. I would like to look for a job and then hire a builder to finish the two rooms (Author's Field Surveys, 1999).

However, the boyfriend, who was a builder, did some construction work on the house 'free' of charge or return for sexual favours, free accommodation and domestic upkeep. Sexual relationships had been extended into housing relationships. The respondent was, however, desirous to enhance her bargaining power by getting a paid employment (money) and hiring a builder. In other words, a job would decrease her vulnerability and dependence on the boyfriend.

6.2. Avoiding confrontation over money with husbands

Married women employed several strategies based on cooperation rather (than non-cooperation and confrontation) in order to convince their male partners into spending more money on self-help housing. The experience of a woman elaborated in Case 2 summarises these strategies. First, having convinced her husband of the advantages of extending the house to provide adequate accommodation for the family, she undertook to prove to her husband that she is trustworthy and thrifty with money. Second, she obtained his commitment on how to share responsibilities in the housing process. She could fall back on his commitment whenever additional funds were required. Third, instead of often demanding more money from the husband, she stretched whatever she got from him through supplementation with money she obtained through informal businesses. Furthermore, she devised cost-saving mechanisms by working as a labourer—drawing water, mixing concrete and cooking for the builders. These strategies enabled her to bargain for more funds from the husband.

Case 2: I encouraged him to extend the house. Men do not know how to use money wisely. If you see that the man is not using the money properly, then you encourage him by doing other things so that he can think that the wife is really doing well. If he gives you say 200 Pula, you use it carefully so that he thinks that my wife is very clever she knows how to use the money rather than demanding more money.

... I sold *chibuku* and traditional beer in order to get some money and help my husband. I did not want to just sit at home and let him do everything. After selling the beer I hired people to mould bricks.

I also helped by drawing water for the builders and cooking for them. I also gave builders some *chibuku*. Before we started building we agreed that he would buy cement, metal sheets and rafters and pay the builders... During construction, I helped by mixing the concrete for making bricks and mortar. I made bricks. I learnt how to make bricks from my father. I did not lay bricks for our house because I am now old. I have seven children ... As a woman you have to be strong and build a house even if the husband gives you little money when he gets a big salary. You just have to use money wisely (*Source: Author's Field Surveys, October 1999*).

Avoiding confrontation was complemented with seeking consensus—not only on sharing responsibilities but on how to spend money as well. Consensus seeking was particularly vital in households where both couples were formally employed (Case 3). Although the woman in Case 3 took the lead by applying for the plot and having it registered in her name, she endeavoured to carry her partner on board by seeking consensus in decision-making at critical points. While her leadership was characterised by 'I—I applied for, I wanted, I hired, I have put and I intend, consensus was characterised by 'we'—we discussed, we decided, we agreed, and we paid. In practice, the woman undertook all the preliminary work that did not require money (such as applying for the plot and deciding on the house size) then involved and sought agreement with the male partner on issues necessitating the use of money.

Commitment and consensus was obtained through cooperation and pooling monetary resources together. Both partners combined their incomes, made a shopping list and budgeted together.

Case 3: ... I applied for the plot and it was given in my name. Both my husband and myself agreed to the [house] plan and later the SHHA people approved it ... then we started building. The SHHA people showed us where to erect the house on the yard. We built a four-bedroom house because I wanted enough space for the furniture and children.

We were both working. At the end of each month, we would contribute our money together and make a budget—money for buying food, materials and everything we needed we just listed the things and budgeted from that whole amount of money... (*Source: Author's Field Surveys, October 1999*).

6.3. *Male labelling*

Responses from some single and cohabiting women revealed that cooperation with their male partners was less forthcoming. Men who were unable or unwilling to provide funds or labour for housing were labelled as being lazy, stupid or incapable as indicated in the following allegations by some female respondents:

- "I have never seen men doing anything in housing provision. Men are very lazy even when they have money, they can spend it on anything else apart from housing" (single woman).
- "Men never do anything in housing provision" (single woman).

- “Men never do anything. They are useless. They have no brains. They are handicapped. They often prefer to spend their money on other things [rather than housing] such as alcohol and girlfriends” (single woman).

While women may have employed nagging as a strategy to force men into spending more time, energy and money on housing, the complaints indicate that, unlike married spouses, casual male partners are reluctant to spend money on their girlfriends’ properties.

6.4. *Be trustworthy*

Although single women may receive cold shoulders from their male partners, they negotiate with men in the market place as demonstrated by the woman whose experience is narrated in Case 4. She negotiated with two people: the employer and a builder. She obtained a cash loan from the employer and repaid the loan through monthly reductions. She also obtained ‘free managerial labour’ from the builder. The builder bought and assembled building materials on her behalf. Other women interviewed in Lobatse said they had obtained interest-free loans in the form of building material from hardware shop owners or opportunities to pay builders in instalments long after they had completed construction works. Being ‘trustworthy’ was the strongest tool used by women to negotiate with men in the public sphere. She borrowed money from the employer and repaid it. She also trusted the builder with money for buying building materials on her behalf.

Case 4: At the time I started building this house, I was working as a housemaid and running a tuck shop like this one. At that time, the tuck shop was making a lot of money. I combined my salary and money from the tuck shop. My son, who was employed by a co-operative, occasionally gave me some money. I also borrowed some money from my boss. He lent me 1000 Pula that I used to buy rafters. I repaid the loan through monthly deductions.

... I hired people to mould the bricks. I was working late so I had no time to make bricks. Sometimes I watered the bricks. I first saw him around building for other people then I took him to Mochudi to build a house for me there. Then he built this one. I knew the builder. I would give him money which he would use to buy materials and later show me the receipts (*Source:* Author’s Field Surveys, October 1999).

6.5. *Solidarity*

Solidarity, especially among single women, was a widespread strategy employed in negotiating with men and other women in the community. A number of women told the author that they pooled their money in order to raise their working capital. One woman (Case 5) acquired the plot and passed it to her daughter who would have otherwise not been able to obtain a plot from SHHA because she was unemployed.

The daughter tried to raise money on her own soon realised she was not making any headway. Then she decided to collaborate with another woman who was also trying to develop her plot. They raised money together, mixed concrete in one place and assisted each other to transport it to the construction sites. They also purchased bricks together. Using ‘trust’, they obtained the bricks

from a male builder on loan. The woman also obtained other building materials as interest free loan from a shopkeeper.

Case 5: Before building this house I was staying with my grandmother who owned a plot at Maipei. My grandmother gave me the plot. The SHHA people gave her the plot and she decided to give it to me... This house has six rooms. I have 5 children of my own and other 2 from my sister who passed away. I have to take care of them.

First of all, after getting the plot, I was fetching wood and selling it. After raising some money, I approached a friend who also had a plot which she wanted to develop. We combined our money together and started buying *mealie* and making food which we sold to people working on construction projects. So we were raising money like that. My friends and I were helping each other. We made concrete at one place and carried it to plots using a wheelbarrow. We bought bricks from a man who was making them. We would use the bricks and pay him later. We helped each other. For some of the materials, I approached an Indian shopkeeper. The interest on SHHA loan was very high. So I decided not to take any loan from SHHA. The Indian shopkeeper did not charge any interest.

I hired a builder. He was just building around. He was very good. He would build for you then you pay him in instalments later. He was using children—so if the mother was interested, he would use his sons. He would make the children help him and then later he would pay them some small amounts of money. No. He never worked with girls (*Source:* Author's Field Surveys, October 1999).

6.6. *Personal involvement*

Personal involvement is one strategy that cuts across all the case cited above and which came out strongly during the interviews. With the exception of women residing and cohabiting with men, all female respondents (whether married or single parents) expressed great concern and need for own house—especially for the welfare and benefit of their children. Consequently, they worked hard to acquire land and money for building their houses. They spent time and energy to raise money and/or prove to their male partners that housing was more important to their families than leisure and other activities.

However, cohabiting women were less enthusiastic about developing their partners' plots. A case in point is one respondent who was cohabiting with a man employed by a government ministry. The husband was allocated a self-help plot after the area they were living in was acquired by the state for something else. As narrated in Case 6, the woman did not contribute any money to the development of the house because, in her words, she was not working. She neither fetched water for builders nor mixed concrete. She only cooked for builders.

Case 6: We were allocated this plot because the government wanted to use the area for something else. The plot was allocated to my husband.

... I did not contribute money for building the house because at that time I was not working. I started this business (selling beer) after my husband is not working. My husband provided everything. He was employed at Agriculture. I only cooked for the builders. The builders fetched water for themselves. He hired builders. I did not serve bricks to builders. The children

did not help because there were young. I did not worry because my husband was working for me. I now hire builders and pay them (*Source: Author's Field Surveys, October 1999*).

At the time of the interview, the 'husband' had retired and the same woman was busy with builders that were constructing two additional rooms. She was then selling food and traditional beer to raise funds to finance the extensions.

This case further demonstrates that without marriage or long-term commitment to living together, both men and women are reluctant to be deeply involved in the construction of houses on land belonging to their partners. Given the partner's age and retirement, the woman in Case 6 considers herself more secure than before and ready to invest into the plot.

7. Conclusions

Although self-help housing initiatives in Lobatse sought to empower low-income urban residents (the majority of whom are women), they ended up compromising the position of women. The policies and criteria set by the state for accessing and developing land were more favourable to men than women. Would be female beneficiaries were forced to surrender their land rights to their male partners or acquaintances. Because of that, men in Lobatse enjoyed a higher status than women.

Since men held monopoly of skills for erection of houses permitted by the state in the Lobatse self-help housing areas, women plot-holders were further made vulnerable to male power. Women did not have the alternative opportunity of building for themselves. These circumstances led, among other things, to the formation of gender contracts that differed from the traditional ones. Unlike in the past when people expected women to build houses for their families, respondents in Lobatse expected men to build and/or otherwise provide the houses. Nor did respondents expect women to make major decisions in self-help housing as in the past. Contrary to the traditional gender contract, women are no longer expected to take a leading role in self-help housing.

The paper has also revealed that women, who wanted to own a self-help house in Lobatse had to negotiate with men throughout the various stages of the housing process—from acquiring the plot, getting funds and hiring builders. Cooperation rather than confrontation has been the approach adopted by women in negotiating with men at personal, community, market and state levels.

Finally, and probably most important, is the realisation that, although patriarchy in its traditional sense has been weakened, it has been replaced by new forms of female subordination and exclusion which further research needs to unearth.

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