

Rawlsian Land Reform with Human Capital

An empirical investigation taking into account the gender

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Abstract – It is argued that land reform, consisting on the transformation of *latifundia* to *mesofundia* or *microfundia*, can be welfare improving, from a Rawlsian point of view, as it generates a superior situation, in terms of equity. Having this in mind, this (short) paper intends to be an empirical investigation of the possession rights and, in particular the agricultural holdings, of the land, differentiated by gender. This unveils that, even if land reform is put in practice, it generally remains a problem of inequality, in terms of land rights (ownership and/or holding), by gender.

Keywords - Land reform, Human capital, Rawlsian welfare, Gender inequality.

1. Introduction

Since a few years ago that land reform has received some attention in the literature. Some classic references are Cheng (1961), Cline (1970), Dorner (1972), Lambton (1969), Neale (1962), Tai (1974), and Warriner (1957,1969). Even the simple inspection of the title of these references shows that, in practical terms, agrarian reforms have been implemented in several countries. In fact, it is a practice with about 3500 years after, apparently, the first having taken place in Egypt, about 1500 years BC. Since then it has been a recurrent practice, being sure that not always having taken the same nature and the same objectives.¹ From these practical experiences of land reform, let us highlight those with alleged social (justice) objectives.² In Africa, the case of Ethiopia (1975 --), in Asia, the case of Philippines (1946 --), and the case of Egypt (1952 --) in the Middle East, indicate these being regions of world where land reforms of the kind were less

frequent. In Europe, the cases of Albania (1946 --), Portugal (1974 --) and Scotland (2003 --) are to be considered as examples.³ Plainly, South America is the region of the world where, more recently, more land reforms pursuing social justice has taken place. The most prominent examples are the cases of Bolivia (1953 --), Brasil (1988 --), Chile (1962 --), Guatemala (1953 --), Mexico (1910 --) and Venezuela (2001 --).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 offers an empirical investigation of the possession rights and, in particular the agricultural holdings, of the land, differentiated by gender. Section 3 concludes.

2. An empirical investigation

Apparently, the land reforms that aim to contribute to greater social justice, as the ones above presented, fall into what one might associate with the Rawlsian view. As a matter of fact, it is argued that land reform, consisting on the transformation of *latifundia* to *mesofundia* or *microfundia*, can be welfare improving, from a Rawlsian point of view, as it generates a superior situation, in terms of equity (Rocha de Sousa, 2016). However, this does not guarantee (or imply) a smaller degree of inequality, especially when the numbers of land owners and/or holders are differentiated by gender.

Let us then consider the Gender and Land Rights database of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.⁴ Figure 1 plots the data for the distribution of agricultural holders⁵ (% of females *vis-à-vis* % of males), for 104 countries around the world.⁶

¹ For an easily accessible reference see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_reforms_by_country, Last access (01-09-2016).

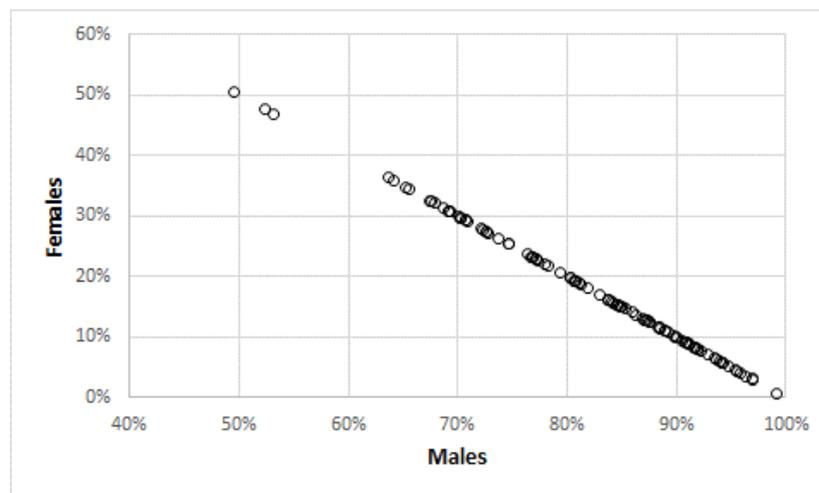
² As a matter of fact, this classification is somewhat controversial. Given our objectives, we will consider the examples as being acceptable.

³ Still in the European continent, the case of Ireland (1870 --), and in the Oceania, the case of Australia (1976 --), may be considered as land reforms that intended to restore historic justice towards the natives of those countries.

⁴ This database is available at <http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/en/>, Last access (13-09-2016).

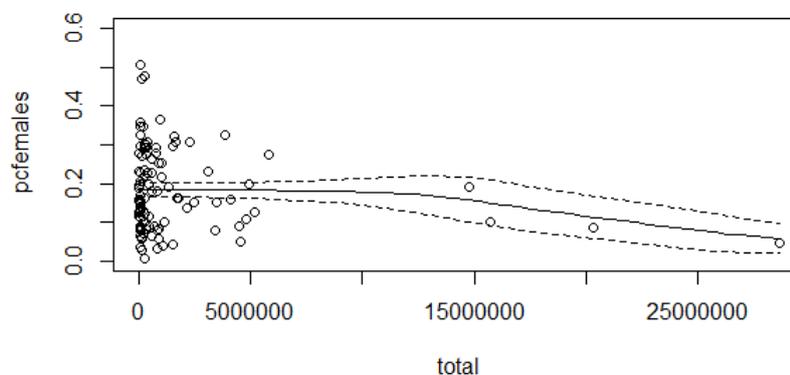
⁵ “The agricultural holder is the civil or juridical person who makes the major decisions regarding resource use and exercises management control over the agricultural holding.”, in <http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/data-map/statistics/en/>, Last access (13-09-2016).

⁶ The data correspond to the last available year for each country.

Figure 1. The distribution of agricultural holders

Inequality in regard to agricultural holding by gender is evident in Figure 1. In fact, only in Cape Verde women represented (slightly) more than 50% (of total holders), to a minimum of 0.8% in Saudi Arabia. On average, the percentage of female holders was 18.2%.

In order to verify the actual magnitude of inequality behind evidenced, consider the results of a kernel regression relating the percentage of female holders to the total.⁷ Figure 2 shows the results.⁸

Figure 2. The kernel regression results

With proper care, Figure 2 appears to point out that the greater the number of holders, fewer women are relatively represented, which confirms the existence of inequality, by gender, with regard to the distribution of agricultural holdings.

3. Concluding Remarks

From this paper, one may conclude that even if land reform fulfilling the Rawlsian principle of social justice has been implemented, it may remain a problem of inequality, by gender, in terms of land rights (ownership and/or holding). In a sense, this empirical fact, is in agreement

with a possible co-existence of equity and inequality (Caleiro, 2016).

As a direction for future improvements we would like to explore, in a more robust way, the evolution of land rights, by gender, in order to shed some (more) light on the dynamics of inequality on these matters. To make it possible, more and better data are needed.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all those that behave as Rawlsians, in particular those that (also) take into account the inequality in gender.

⁷ India was excluded due to the magnitude of the data for the total number of agricultural holders corresponding to this country.

⁸ The kernel regression was made by using the np package for R (Hayfield & Racine, 2008).

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