

Female Migration for Marriage: Implications from the Land Reform in Rural Tanzania

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Summary. — Using the longitudinal household panel data drawn from rural Tanzania (1991–2004), this study investigates impacts of the land reform on women's marriage-motivated relocation. During the period under study, several villages that initially banned a widow's land inheritance abolished this discrimination. Taking a differences-in-differences approach, this study finds that the probability of males marrying in a village increased by altering its customary land inheritance rule in favor of widows. In the light of the traditional system favoring exogamous and patrilineal marriage, this finding indicates that females relocate at marriage in response to the favorable land tenure system at the destination.

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1. INTRODUCTION

While the data on marriage-driven relocation is highly limited, in the developing world, it is common for women to leave their place of origin upon marriage. For example, based on the Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey 2004–05, approximately 73% of the surveyed females aged 15 to 49 years that resided in a place other than their place of birth were married, in contrast to 56% of those remaining in their place of birth.^{1,2} This mobility seems to have remarkable temporal and spatial welfare impacts on the overall economy, because women work very hard. As this is particularly true for rural societies in the developing world, the movement implies a spatial allocation of productive labor-power, as well as a formation of new production units (Fafchamps & Quisumbing, 2008, Chap. 51).³

Despite the apparent significance of female migration and its determinants, this issue remains insufficiently explored. This lack of interest is reflected in the fact that the gender dimension is typically not a central subject of migration research, with the exception of a few conceptual or qualitative case studies (e.g., Chant, 1992; Pedraza, 1991; Pittin, 1984). In addition, family-related female migration tends to be viewed as merely one of the life-cycle events, rather than understood as relocation motivated by the need to enter labor force (e.g., Mulder & Wagner, 1993; Speare & Goldscheider, 1987). Consequently, female mobility is typically treated as a secondary issue. Finally, even within the marriage-related or gender-related migration research, most extant work focuses on international relocation (e.g., Houstoun, Kramer, & Barrett, 1984; Lievens, 1999; Ortiz, 1996). While interest in women-centered migration research has recently increased, it appears that the primary focus is still job-seeking relocation taking place between countries, leaving an issue of domestic marriage-related migration insufficiently explored (e.g., Martin, 2004; Piper, 2005).

This tendency appears to be much more evident in the field of economics. While several novel contributions have recently been made to the knowledge and understanding of the impacts of female job-seeking immigration on welfare of children left behind (Cortes, 2015) as well as on native women's time-use decision (Cortes & Pan, 2013; Cortes & Tessada, 2011), the attention to the internal marriage-motivated relocation has

still been limited, with only a few exceptions (e.g., Rosenzweig & Stark, 1989; Thadani & Todaro, 1984).

As indicated in Watts (1983–1984), female domestic marriage migration might have been neglected in the scholarly research because such relocation is perceived as a form of movement that has historically existed and is therefore not affected by economic development.⁴ However, a few available studies in this field have indicated that the decision-making pertaining to women's marriage-motivated relocation is indeed responsive to long-term economic mobility (e.g., Li & Lavelly, 1995). In fact, this responsiveness appears to be more clearly visible when economies undergo marked political as well as institutional changes (Fan & Li, 2002). This is true because such structural changes are likely to yield great spatial heterogeneity, making some areas more attractive to single females. However, the extensive literature review revealed scarcity of rigorous empirical research explicitly demonstrating that female marriage-motivated migration is sensitive to such spatial heterogeneity resulting from the development process. By exploiting a unique setting of the legal reform implemented in rural Tanzania in the 1990s, the current study attempts to fill this knowledge gap.

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The decision to select Tanzania for the research stems from two reasons. Firstly, in the region under study, marriage has traditionally been characterized by patrilocal residence and clan exogamy. In this system, when a rural woman marries, she typically leaves her kin to reside with her husband, which often requires relocation outside her natal village. Therefore, it appears that economic conditions at the destination have historically been embedded in the women's decision-making pertaining to marriage-related relocation. Secondly, the data utilized in this study help make some causal inferences that are of interest in understanding the motivation behind female migration in this region. The current research uses data drawn from a six-wave long-term household panel survey conducted in the rural region in northwest Tanzania, Kagera (Kagera Health and Development Survey, KHDS). The first four waves were carried out six to seven months apart during the period between 1991 and 1994, whereas the remaining two waves took place in 2004 and 2010, respectively.⁵ This study primarily relies on the data drawn from the first five waves for an empirical analysis, as the community survey was not implemented in wave 6. Historically, in rural Tanzania, whether a widow can inherit her late husband's land has depended upon a customary rule imposed by each village, generating some variation in inheritance patterns. As the data suggest, in 1991 (wave 1) some villages customarily prohibited widows from inheriting land. However, by 2004 (wave 5), the discrimination was removed in some areas, following the surge of national excitement about women's land rights that took place in the 1990s.

Given the traditional marital system and the importance of land as a livelihood-producing asset, it is expected that single females in agrarian societies would attempt to marry into a village practicing a favorable land tenure system. Since females relocating into the village have to compete with their local counterparts when seeking their marriage companion, this competition may reduce the cost of getting married for males living in such a progressive village (e.g., search cost, or bride wealth payments from a man to a woman's family, which is another prevailing tradition in this region). As a result, in this study, it is hypothesized that the probability of males marrying is higher in a progressive village. Accordingly, as this paper will show, removing discrimination against widows regarding land inheritance in a village increases the marital probability of local males.

The analysis presented here is based on the data pertaining to the male respondents aged 19–30 years in wave 1 and those in the age cohort in wave 5. By showing that the marital probability of males in the age cohort was higher in villages that allowed widows to inherit land compared to those residing in villages that did not, we may be able to provide support for the hypothesis guiding this study. However, this is only true if the inheritance rule was randomly distributed across villages, i.e., not attributed to other socio-economic factors. However, it is certainly possible that the legal system was correlated with unobserved village characteristics, resulting in a biased estimate of interest in the simple cross-sectional comparison. To address this endogeneity, this research takes a differences-in-differences (DID) approach that compares the marital probability of males in the age cohort before (wave 1) and after the legal reform (wave 5) between villages that altered the rule of land inheritance in favor of widows during the period (treatment villages) and all remaining villages (control villages).

By accomplishing the aforementioned aims, this paper contributes to three strands of the extant literature.⁶ Firstly, as already noted, within the field of economics, there is a marked

paucity of studies that have empirically explored women's migration in relation to marriage. For instance, [Rosenzweig and Stark \(1989\)](#) showed that women's marriage-motivated migration, which accounted for a significant proportion of migration in rural India, could be seen as an inter-household contractual arrangement, aimed at mitigating income risks, as well as facilitating consumption smoothing. Similar to their study that emphasized the role of risk, by focusing on the land tenure system in rural Tanzania, the current research will highlight the importance of spatial heterogeneity of local attributes as a motivator behind female marriage-driven relocation. Secondly, this study reveals a parallel to the literature sources reporting the link between socio-economic shocks and adjustments in a marriage market (e.g., [Gruber, 2004](#); [Peters, 2011](#); [Ueyama & Yamauchi, 2009](#)). This view is taken, as the current study will show that providing widows with a right to inherit land can affect a marital relocation of single females of the current generation. However, this similarity primarily exists in terms of the quantity of matching (i.e., probability), rather than the quality (e.g., hypergamy) due to the limitations imposed by the data analyzed in this study ([Abramitzky, Delavande, & Vasconcelos, 2011](#)). Finally, the interest in the manner in which traditional institutions can shape socio-economic outcomes in the modern world has been growing since [Munshi and Rosenzweig \(2006\)](#) conducted their study.⁷ The current study follows this line of research by investigating how reforming the land tenure system influences the pattern of forming marital unions in agrarian societies, where traditions of clan exogamy and patrilocality still prevail.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides institutional background on marital practices and land ownership in Tanzania. An empirical strategy is discussed in Section 3, followed by data overview given in Section 4. The key findings are presented in Section 5. Section 6 discusses the interpretation of the findings, with the conclusions summarized in Section 7.

2. INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

Largely based on the work of [Gopal and Salim \(1998\)](#), [Killian \(2011\)](#) and [Rwebangira et al. \(1996\)](#), this section briefly explains institutional background on marriage, land, rules of land inheritance, and women's land rights movement in the 1990s.

(a) *Marriage and land*

In Tanzania, marriage tends to be patrilocal, whereby, upon marriage a woman moves into her husband's family home. In addition, exogamous marriage, prevalent in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, prevents a man from marrying a woman from his own clan. This combination of patrilocal residence and exogamous marriage often forces a rural wife to move some distance away from her natal village to her husband's home, whereby a customary payment of bride wealth is given to her parents.

Marriage can be seen as a formation of new production unit and rural women, who are responsible for almost all housework (e.g., preparing for food, gathering firewood and carrying water, weeding, sowing and harvesting crops, grinding, pounding and milling grains, and caring for children and ill household members), devote most of their productive time to the unit. Despite women's significant contribution to the family livelihood, historically, males were the sole custodians of matrimonial properties and children, whereby women

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