

**CHALLENGING THE CHALLENGE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE INITIATIVES
TAKEN BY WOMEN IN MUSHANDIKE RESETTLEMENT SCHEME TO
PARTICIPATE IN DEVELOPMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Despite numerous initiatives being taken by governments, non-governmental and quasi-governmental organisations and even the private sector to try and mainstream women in development, there is still a lot to be done in terms of increasing the number of women participating in development. Some scholars have blamed women themselves for not taking initiatives to participate in development. Some are putting the blame on the methodological problems associated with the interventions and some are saying the substantive issues of the initiatives do not have women issues of development. The study sought to find out how women are taking advantage of these initiatives to participate in development. The study utilised both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, where in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the main qualitative instruments and questionnaire was the main quantitative method of collecting data. The study identified some initiatives being taken by women to try and participate in development and most notable improvement was seen in economic integration. There was also some progress in improving their educational qualifications, but very minimal improvement in political participation. There is need however to come up with interventions that support these initiatives so that women's livelihoods are supported and sustainable development is enhanced. There is also need to come up with a holistic approach where these initiative start at grassroots trying to start with programmes that benefit the girl-child so that they develop this entrepreneurship culture which can help them participate in development. Special programmes need to be tailored so that they benefit rural women.

Keywords: Women empowerment, rural development, sustainable development

Background of the Study

Marginalisation of women in development has been a major characteristic feature of development in most developing countries and this situation is obtaining despite many initiatives being undertaken to try and mainstream women in development. Women are always found at the tail end of development and their uptake of development initiatives is very minimal and rarely matches the efforts that are being taken to improve their condition. There is need to identify women's initiatives and try to support them for sustainable development. If these initiatives are known they can be the stepping-stones to building the capacity of women to participate in development. This study seeks to investigate these responses and see how stakeholders can develop these initiatives in an attempt to strengthen initiatives to mainstream women in development.

Aim

The study seeks to assess the initiatives taken by women in trying to participate in development.

Objectives

- i) To investigate challenges faced by women in Mushandike resettlement scheme in their attempt to be mainstreamed in development initiatives.
- ii) To analyse initiatives being taken by these women to fight these challenges.
- iii) To explore how these initiatives have helped improve women's socio-economic and political status.

Significance of the Study

The study is of importance to stakeholders in gender and development and these include government, non-governmental organisations, quasi-governmental organisations, and even the private sector. This information will help in their initiatives to try and mainstream women in development. The information will create stepping-stones that will be used to develop strategies that will see women participating in development.

The Conceptual Framework

Marginalisation of women in all development spheres has been a major feature of the development through out the world. This features is more conspicuous in the developing world where the majority of women are seen lagging too far behind in development. Marginalisation of women starts at household level where there is preferential treatment for

boys than girls. Boys are valued more and are given treatment that is far above than that given to their sisters. In some societies social structures oppress women forming patriarchal social organisations and making gender the main axis of differentiation, (Gaidzanwa, 1985). In this case girls are always playing second fiddle to boys. The family as an institution of socialisation has been responsible for creation of gender differentiation. In most family set up women are involved in mostly unpaid labour such as child care and husbands have also compounded women's woes by prohibiting their wives to participate in paid labour and in some cases they have been disinherited from their property after the death of their husbands usually by greedy relatives (Jackson, 1992). Women are also accused of always thinking along the traditional normative patterns of expecting security from men. This effectively perpetuates prevailing gender inequalities and this also creates a greater likelihood of disappointments by men's contribution to the women's livelihoods (Ankomah, 1996).

In most traditional societies land is the property of the head of household who are usually men. In this set up women only have usufruct rights, control and ownership is vested in the husband. They have the right to determine what to produce, how to produce and sometimes when to produce (Chiche, 1997). They fail to participate meaningfully in development activities and are mainly confined to informal sector and this is more prevalent in poor households than non-poor ones (Sethuraman, 1998). All these have effectively kept most women out of the development process as they were either decapitalised or robbed of the essential assets that could allow them to participate meaningfully in development.

In Chile, women tend to occupy feminine positions, which take advantage of their socialised and economically under-valued abilities (Smiaroski, 1996). Although their job opportunities had generally increased, the nature of their employment is precarious. They are mostly involved through sub-contracting, piece-works, domestic workshops and seasonal jobs. They are also involved in the use of skills, which are considered natural attributes and are basically regarded as unskilled. This gives them little opportunity to upgrade their skills or acquire new skills, which could create alternative employment. Female workers are usually associated with competition among themselves, demoralisation and low self esteem and this had serious consequences which include formation of gangs that generate a spiral of physical and verbal violence against each other and this makes it difficult to organise them for effective integration in development (Ankomah, 1996).

Women in most developing and traditional societies are poorly endowed not only in terms of having no assets but having no control of their assets and this control is usually always located in their male counter-part who is either their husbands or parents (Baden, 1992). They control mainly productive resources and most importantly monopolises the decision making process. Also associated with this is the fact that women are facing some gender specific problems in accessing financial services mainly caused by lack of collateral security that is usually a pre-requisite in accessing financial facilities. It is estimated that they receive less than 10% of all credit going to small farmers and 1% of total credit in the agriculture sector (UNDP, 1995). They are also associated with a host of constraints which include; low levels of literacy, less time and cash to undertake journeys to credit institutions. They are also associated with low levels of literacy, less time and cash to undertake journeys to credit institutions (Cagatay, 1998). Most credit schemes have no clear commitment and strategy for women empowerment. Most of them do not have control and decision making powers over the mechanism (Alana, 1996). This therefore calls for interventions that build their capacity to manage and control decision making thus becoming their own active agents for development. This have inevitably socialised them into accepting these low societal status and marginalising them in development.

Educationally, women are characterised by having low education and seen as people who rarely scale the whole educational ladder, which is characteristically a men's achievement. They dominate on top levels of education (Sachs, 1992). At all educational levels there are gaps between men and women and this gap widens at higher levels of education. These gaps are also reflected in all professional skills where women are glaringly missing. This lack of education and skills has been pointed as the major factors that have led to high incidence of poverty among women (SARDC, 2000). This has also been a major handicap to women in adopting new innovations as they lack awareness, confidence and information. In situations where they are involved in various entrepreneurship activities they are found hardly with sufficient capacity and organisational capacity to engage in large scale trading. This had combined to keep them on the sidelines of development (Sibunga, 1997; Prickering et al., 1996). Family poverty in most rural communities is probably the most important factor that is holding girls from progressing with their education and this has ripple effects through out

their lives as it will create a host of other socio-economic problems, which include early pregnancy (Saith and Harris-White, 1998).

Another factor that has disadvantaged most rural women and kept them out of the development process is their lack of access to land resources. In most cases women do not have real rights over land they are using. The only defined right they have is normally mediated access, which are created either by marriage as a spouse or by birth as a daughter (Kabeer, 1997). The lack of independent rights by women to own land, manage property, conduct business, and even to travel without husband's consent had kept women out of development process (World Bank, 2001). These secondary rights to land severely curtail them as they do not give them real rights over that land, which can be used as collateral to financial institutions and is the crucial determinant factor in women's marginalisation (Lind, 1997; Goetz and Jenkins, 1998). Women are also associated with limited ability to generate income, unequal rights, limited chances to influence decision making and poor socio-economic status, which combine to severely limit their participation in development activities (World Bank, 2001). According to Yngstrong (2002), the evolutionary theories of landholding links males as the household head and the primary decision maker on issues of land, land use and land transfer. Women's decisions and actions are secondary and sometimes unimportant.

This situation is obtaining despite the fact that women heavily depend on land as the primary means of livelihood and more than 70% smallholder farmers are women (Chinyemba, 1997;). They further argued that women and children in Sub-Saharan Africa are responsible for production of about 80% of the staple food. However, their pre-eminence in cultivation and harvesting is not complimented by ownership of resources and control over resources and by decision making capabilities all of which is firmly within the male sphere (Ellis, 2000). Women's role has been neglected for a long time despite efforts these women take to till the land. They have not been given the necessary support they need so that they increase their ability (Mbata and Mosiuoa, 1997). This is mainly due to the fact that most traditional societies have customs, which put women under the control of their husbands and therefore are not able to make decisions that best suit them. In most cases men make decisions and women are only left to implement them. Usually decisions on what is to be done on land are usually the preserve of men. However this is rather unfortunate and misplaced as men are

allowed to make decisions on issues that they are not involved in since most of the time they are engaged as migrant labourers. Women farmers' effective participation in farming is severely affected by; land acquisition, inadequate credit for various farming operations and high cost of farming inputs (Mbata and Mosiuoa 1997). They also receive less extension services as more of it targeted to men than women (Chiche, 1997)

Most rural women under traditional rights do not usually inherit their family land; they are usually allocated usufruct rights as wives in their husband's clan. Women therefore rarely command the same kind of control over productive resources as their male counterparts hence they are faced with extreme difficulties in their attempt to build up sustainable enterprises. Some cultural practises are playing a significant role in the marginalisation of women as far as land is concerned. In most of these societies, men have control over income and benefits from farming. These effectively keep women on the sidelines of development or are only involved as passive participants who do not have much say in the process.

In the field of politics, there is gross under representation of women. There are large disparities in the participation of men and women at both the local and national level of politics (World Bank, 2001). Parliamentary representation in developed countries was in 2000 just under 10% and the situation was much worse in developing countries where the figures were just under 8% (UNDP, 1995, 1997). The same scenario was also reflected in the senior civil service where women only constituted 30%.

The Research Methodology

The research utilised both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In the qualitative methodologies, in-depth interviews were held with various stakeholders in development, which included non-governmental organisations, government official and parastatals and female household heads. This was complimented by focus group discussions, which were also held with women groups in the four villages in Mushandike resettlement scheme and these were used as ground truthing exercise for data obtained from interviews. Questionnaires were used to collect data and were administered to 70 randomly selected women. They collected data on initiatives taken by women to participate in development. The collected data was analysed using excel to produce graphs, pie charts, and frequency tables.

Research Findings

Demographic Profile of Women in Mushandike Resettlement Scheme

Age

The women were of varying ages, which ranged from 15 years to slightly above 60 years. The majority of these women were in the 25-35 years age group and they constituted 40%. Those in the 15-25 years age-group constituted 21% and very few (6%) were in the 60 years and above age group showing that the demographic profile was of women of prime ages and were able to participate in the development process. Table 1 below shows the demographic profile of women in the sample.

Table 1: Ages of Respondents in Mushandike Resettlement Scheme

Ages Group	Percentages
15-25	21
26-35	40
36-45	11
46-55	22
60 and above	6
Total	100

Source: Survey 2008

Family Sizes

The respondents showed that they had families of varied sizes and they ranged from small ones, which were made up of only two members and some big ones that had as many as 9 members. The majority (56%) of these respondents had family sizes of between 3 and 4 members and those of between 5 and 6 members were 29%. Very few (only 10%) had family sizes of more than seven members and of this, 3% had more than nine members showing that even rural women are taking the advice of reproductive health advisors to maintain manageable family sizes and devote most of their time to work and production. Table 2 below shows the family sizes of respondents in Mushandike resettlement scheme.

Table 2: Family Sizes of Respondents in Mushandike Resettlement Scheme

Family Size	Percentage
1-2 members	19
3-4 members	56
5-6 members	15
7 and above members	10

Source: Survey 2008

Educational qualification

Women who were involved in this research were drawn from wide range of academic backgrounds, which ranged from illiterate to holders of tertiary education. The majority (74%) of them had not gone beyond ordinary level and of this 50% had only managed to acquire a Zimbabwe Junior certificate and 13% had no education. Very few women had managed to penetrate into the tertiary education, as there were only 19% who were holders of diplomas, certificates and even university degrees. Table 3 below shows the educational qualifications of women who were part of this study.

Table 3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational qualification	Percentages
No education	13
Primary education	10
Zimbabwe Junior certificate	27
Ordinary Level	24
Advanced level	7
College certificate	10
College diploma	3
University degree	6
Total	100

Source: Survey 2008

Challenges Faced by Women in Mushandike Resettlement Scheme

Women in this area were facing challenges, which can be broadly categorised as social, political and economic. Socially women in this area are exposed to discrimination especially in positions of responsibility. Compared to their male counterparts, women are regarded as second-class citizens, a social group with no capacity to hold any position of responsibility and it seems most women had been socialised to accept such societal positions. They do not believe that they have better leadership qualities that are as good as those possessed by their male counter-parts hence they deliberately surrender such positions to their husbands. There was no woman elected in key positions of the committees running these villages. In situation where they are co-opted in these committees they were holding positions such as committee member. In the Village Development Committee, a committee running development affairs of the four villages, there was no woman elected in it. One woman after being asked why she does not want to be a village chair person she had this to say ‘... I am just a woman how can I lead this village?’

A new form of discrimination that is deeply rooted in the rural communities is that of women whose husbands are suspected to have died of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Although the general people do not expressly show the discrimination, there is a general reluctance by the public to actively interact with women whose husbands are suspected to have died of this deadly disease for fear of contracting the deadly virus. These women are silently excluded in all development activities and in situations where they are part of the beneficiaries they are deliberately left out when nominating prospective members of committees that run these development activities mainly under the guise of empathising with them but actually these people do not feel free to work with them. These women do not feel totally integrated in these development programmes to the extent that they wish there are programmes specifically for those affected by HIV and AIDS. There is general phobia that the members of the community associates with people suspected to be carriers of HIV virus mainly generated by the ignorance of how this disease is transmitted from one person to another.

The educational qualification of most women exposes them to social, economic and even political challenges and had been a major factor of women’s disempowerment. They are mostly found in the lower parts of the academic ladder with most of them holding modest

education and some no educated at all. When it comes to matters that involve writing and talking to development officers, most women find it difficult to accept such responsibilities leaving their male counter-parts who hold better qualifications to carry such duties. This situation is compounded by the subservient role that the society gives to women, which combine to restrict women from participating in development issues.

Another social challenge that women were facing was in the field of health. The advent of HIV and AIDS has created a huge burden on most rural women. They are left with a huge caring responsibility over their ailing family member and themselves. The harsh economic environment that is currently being experienced in the country, where major health centres are going without adequate medical personnel and run-down facilities, worsens the situation. Most women who usually shoulder care responsibilities are made to suffer long periods of agony seeing their family members ailing without receiving any treatment from the hospitals. Most of the women whose husbands are suspected to have died of the AIDS pandemic are usually of frail health conditions often suffer intermittent illness but are failing to receive treatment and are failing to even enrol in internationally funded health programmes such as free anti-retroviral drugs that are funded by the World Health Organisation. Such programmes rarely reach the rural people and they are only heard of in the media but local health institutions have never been able to offer such services. Such programmes are only found at major referral and selected mission hospitals. The private hospitals normally offer such facilities but rural people cannot afford to access them mainly because of the prohibitive cost.

Women in most parts of this rural area are facing economic alienation, where participation in the economic activities is seen as a preserve of men. Women in Mushandike resettlement areas are finding it difficult to participate in the mainstream economic activities that are available in the areas mainly because of the historical and cultural barriers that continue to sideline them in development. Historically women have been people known to be of modest educational qualification and without resources that could allow them to participate in development activities. These women do not have assets such as drought power, farming implements and in some cases do not have the required finances to participate effectively in development activities that are available in the areas. The major economic activity in this area is farming and most women do not have the financial capital to fully participate in this venture. Most of the farmers are into semi-commercial farming and they need a lot of

farming inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, pesticides and even finances to hire casual labour. The major crop grown in this area was wheat and it requires a lot of capital for irrigation infrastructure, harvesting and even ferrying to ports that are dotted around in the province.

Most of the financial assistance is available from financial institutions, which require collateral security for one to access but most of the women do not have such security mainly because the pieces of land they are holding were registered in their late husband's names. The other hindering factor is the ever-skyrocketing interest rates that scare women away. Most banks are charging inflation related interest rates of above 1000% and no rural woman is into business that can afford to pay such rates. Even subsidised government sponsored financial assistant require some form of collateral in form of either farming implements such as scotch carts, ploughs or harrows but most women do not have such assets either mainly because they have lost them to other relatives or they do not have authority over them.

There was a generally a feeling among these rural women that politics is the men's domain. They argued that that at times the political game can hot up to level that can not be accommodative to them. It can be very rough and very risky and therefore very few were taking part in it. They are mostly seen participating only as voter but some said they are forced to do so and given the chance they will opt for non-participation. There was no woman elected as a councillor or contested in the process and only 23% participated in the previous council elections. Most of the women feel that politics is not a safe field especially for women as they had witnessed some nasty incidents, which sometimes involved mysterious disappearance of contesting members and harassment which sometimes include loss of assets such as burn down of homesteads and kidnapping of family members hence. Some argued that the household chores do not allow time to participate in the process.

Women's Response to Some of the Challenges

Faced with a host of all these obstacles, women are innovating ways of overcoming them so that they can be seen as equal participants in development as their male counterparts. However these interventions are scattered, uncoordinated and there is no support of stakeholder. This vital support, which is terribly missed, should be the major entry point of these stakeholders and could be used as the building blocks that are needed to fully empower women and capacitate them so that they can be seen as player in development.

Most of the notable initiatives are in economic empowerment where women are coming up with various economic activities that are aimed at trying to empower themselves and make them recognised players in this field. Rather than pursuing economic activities in which they have been facing various obstacles they are coming up with new activities that are fast becoming major sources of their livelihoods. One of these activities was the engagement in cross border trading where women are crossing borders to neighbouring South Africa, Botswana or Mozambique trading in various items that are on demand in those countries and bringing home goods such as cooking oils, soap, and clothes to sale. Such activities have been so rewarding to many households that they are now doing very little of farming and their main source of livelihood is now cross border trading. Some were into localised trading where they were trading various products that are found in and around Mushandike. Most of them are into selling of horticulture products such as tomatoes, and vegetables. All these products do have a ready market in the nearby Masvingo town and along the Masvingo-Beitbridge highway.

Some women who had passed their prime age are into government-sponsored activities such as food for work where they carry out maintenance projects in exchange with food handouts. Some are into vending where they are involved in selling assortment of things which range from hand craft, vegetables and some groceries. Very few are into formal employment and another insignificantly small number are into risky activities such as prostitution. Table 4 below shows the various economic activities that were adopted by female-headed households in Mushandike resettlement scheme.

Table 4: The Economic Activities Adopted by Female Headed Households in Mushandike

Activities	Percentages
Cross border Trading	47
Formal employment	8
Food for work	3
Agriculture	13
Vending	25
Prostitution	4
Total	100

Source: Survey 2008

These economic activities had allowed women to generate incomes that ranged from slightly below Z\$5 Billion to above Z\$41 Billion per month, where majority of them, (23%) were in the Z\$11-15 billion bracket. There were other women who were managing to earn as much as more than Z\$41 billion per month. This allowed them to acquire assets such as livestock (cattle, goats, chicken), farming implements (ploughs, hoes, harrow, wheel barrows seeds and pesticides), kitchen utensils (pots, plates, spoons cups) and some have managed to improve their homesteads by putting up houses of brick under asbestos and erecting a fence around them. It is evident that these women are coming up with livelihoods that are more viable to their social group as compared to the prescribed (farming) livelihood.

In an attempt to socially integrate themselves into the social fabric of the community, women are involved in various activities that are aimed at improving their social status. They are taking adult education programmes that are aimed at improving their educational qualifications. These programmes are primarily run by the government and are riddled by numerous problems, which include poor funding as their teachers go for months without payment and management as some centres are going without adequate facilities such as books. Women are keen to enrol in such programmes to the extent that some are engaging private tutors to try and complement government efforts and some have managed to attain secondary education.

With regards to HIV and AIDS, some women are involved in the community awareness programmes sponsored by various non-governmental organisations and the government. These programmes are mainly focusing on sensitisation of the community on the need for the community to support these members as there is no danger in interacting with people with HIV and AIDS. They are also involved in community based care giving programmes where they take care of people with chronic diseases which are HIV and AIDS related. These programmes were basically funded by non-governmental organisation. They receive protective clothes and some basic medical drugs. These community based care giving efforts are very important mainly to those with chronic diseases as they provide social-psychological support. In some cases where the ailing members are no longer able to help themselves these groups come in to provide such services as laundry, feeding and bathing them.

The participation of women in politics had registered very little progress in terms of women empowerment. There are very few women that are into active politics. Their participation is very minimal. The majority of women only participate in the voting process but most of them are forced to participate. They perceive it as potentially dangerous business where most people went missing, some maimed and some even killed in day light. They argued that the political climate in Zimbabwe some times can boil to unacceptable temperatures and this inhibits most women from being politically active. Also associated with the aforementioned hindrance are some prohibitive institutional arrangements, which normally include a requirement for certain deposit for one to register as a local government candidate, house of assembly or senatorial candidate and in most cases these deposits were not tenable for most rural women. In some cases they are required to be owners of immovable property within the areas they wish to contest and most of the women do not have such asset, thus disqualified from contesting the elections because of their failure to meet electoral act requirements.

Some women argued that the nature of political decadence at some times makes it difficult for women to take part in politics. In most cases there is a lot of vote buying by participants and this gives well-established businesspersons, who are predominantly men, an unfair advantage. They usually use their business proceeds to buy votes mainly by donating generously towards the community during the campaign periods and in some worst instances hire thugs to harass their opponents out of the competition. The amount of investment that is needed for one to effectively participate in politics is very high and most of the women cannot afford such kind of investment. They are required to be financially sound so that they can fully finance their campaign programmes and this requires one to have a good campaign team, which is fully equipped in terms of their food requirements, transport and payment for their services and campaign material. The kind of investment required to finance such campaigns has proven to be a stumbling block for most aspiring female candidates. In this case politics has remained andocentric.

However, there are some initiatives taken by both government and non-governmental organisations to try and encourage participation of women in politics and some of the initiatives include adoption of a quota system by political parties where certain parliamentary seats are reserved for women to compete on their own. Non-governmental organisation are also working with all political parties to try and encourage women to participate in politics by

giving the aspiring women candidates' material support for their campaign programmes. However, these programmes are mainly concentrated in urban areas and very few of these programmes trickle to the rural areas. In most cases it is the urban women who will come into the rural areas and take up these posts and usually cohesive force is used on rural women to support them. In most cases, these women do not get the much needed support; hence, will fail to garner the people's mandate to represent them in either the parliament or the senate. There is need to identify women from rural areas who are known by these rural electorate and are known to have the interest of rural people. These people stand a chance to win an election.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by women to participate in development still remain largely unresolved and efforts that are being taken are not making any meaningful impact especially on rural women. There have been some notable improvements that were registered in the economic sphere, where women are involved in various economic activities that are aimed at mainstreaming them in development. The major problem is the uncoordinated nature of approaches that are adopted, which reflected non-sustainability. There are so many livelihoods that are engaged by women but none of these have been realised by development agencies be they government or non-governmental as fundable activities. However, these activities are the major sources of livelihoods to these households. There is therefore need for a shift to the approach in which development agencies support these projects for sustainable rural development. Major priority should be focused on the people's livelihoods and try to support them so that these development agencies can make use of the available resources especially the usually wasted rural labour and the skills that are in rural women. There is need to involve women in identifying these livelihood strategies that they are involved in and try to support them for sustainable development.

Politics remains the domain of men where women are just participating to legitimise them. This situation is obtaining due to a web of factors that continue to bar women from active participation. The nature of the political field in the country does not allow women to participate in development. There is need to level the political field which is heavily tilted against women so as to allow more women to participate. There are numerous intervention that are undertaken in the upliftment of women participation in politics but they are hardly

finding their way into the rural areas, which therefore calls for special projects for these disadvantaged groups especially the rural women. Some of the activities that are undertaken to mainstream them in development need to be recognised by these international development agencies. For example the adult education programmes that are taken by women to further their education need to get some recognition or try to formalise these educational institution so that their products are recognised at least at national level, otherwise there will be no need to do such programmes. While there are so many activities that are done by women themselves in order to improve their conditions and get mainstreamed in development there is need to dovetail these initiatives in the national programmes so that they can get the much needed funding and support. Unless this is achieved and collective effort are made, mainstreaming women in development will remain a pipe dream and above all rural women require special programmes that are specifically aimed at them and there is need for active involvement of these women in all efforts so that development priorities are correctly captured that reflect the capabilities and abilities of women.

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