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# Socio-economic development of rural women producers in Chirumanzu-Zivagwe and Shurugwi in Zimbabwe

Stella Chipo Takaza; Claude G. Mararike, Watch Ruparanganda, c/o Community and Social Development Department, University of Zimbabwe; P.O. Box 167 Mount Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe  
www.uz.ac.zw; Email: stellatakaza@gmail.com

## Abstract

The rural women producers have been committed to creating and promoting socio-economic development despite the negative social, economic and cultural forces which militate against them. This study examined the impact of socio-economic development and empowerment programmes of rural women producers in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The three objectives were to: (a) discover the activities used by rural women producers for empowerment and socioeconomic development, (b) examine the effectiveness of gender equality programmes for rural women producers under socio-economic hardships and (3) determine gender equality policies that empower, promote and dignify rural women producers for transformation. Thirty rural women producers were sampled for in-depth interviews. Ten representatives were sampled from government departments, international agencies, traditional leaders, the business community and church leaders were interviewed to represent. Mixed methods were used to collect data which included qualitative and quantitative techniques, questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations. The study established that rural women producers were overlooked in programming for socioeconomic development. This is happening against background of relentless droughts and socioeconomic turmoil impacting on rural women producers. The study concluded there is need for government to launch gender equality and empowerment policies to empower rural women producers in Zimbabwe.

## Key words

empowerment, gender, government, producers, socio-economic, Zimbabwe

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## Introduction

In Zimbabwe, rural women producers (RWPs) are by far involved in small scale farming activities, which afterward contribute to the development of the nation. In Chirumanzu-Zivagwe and Shurugwi in the Midlands Province, rural women still lag behind men in different ways related to their ability to participate in the access of resources, gender equality, institutional, environment, socio-economic, cultural/religion and entrepreneurship opportunities among others. It is rural women who suffer the consequences of unfulfilled quality dimensions, as property rights are insecure for women whose use of land in customary systems typically depends on the relationship with their husband or a male relative. RWPs seemingly become tail end producers than their male-counterparts as some are bound to fall short of family assets, modern agricultural equipment, agricultural inputs, manpower, and financial resources to make anticipated giant strides in the development panacea. Without affording RWPs equal opportunities for empowerment and transformation, the ability to access gender equality, institutions, environment, socio-economic, cultural/religion and entrepreneurship dimensions in the near future, it remains complex and complicated for them to achieve higher levels of socio-economic development. The study analyses the activities of RWPs quality dimensions in the districts under study. Stratified and convenience sampling was used to collect data across the districts using content analysis, themes and sub themes corresponding to the study objectives. Data analysis is organized by means of content analysis that uses themes and sub-themes guided by the research objectives. The findings, discussions, recommendations and conclusions are drawn from the discussion.

## Literature review

Literature reveals that deliberated gendered policy interventions previously planned for rural women producers (RWPs) and their families for socio-economic development present a gap that is substantial in this millennium. These vulnerable groups continue facing discrimination and limited bargaining power despite their roles in household food security (Mataga (2018)). The term socio-economic development is primarily concerned with bringing about improvement and transformation in the system of education, employment opportunities, lifestyles, incomes, skills development and cultural factors. Previous studies establish that schemes have been initiated to bring them at par with the wider community that the importance of achieving gender equality within and outside households has been

reaffirmed in the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their implementation has been daunting. The quality dimensions highlighted by the two world reports are nevertheless not spelled out during designing and implementation of initiatives for the disadvantaged groups in rural areas. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brandt Land Commission, 1987). Many disadvantaged RWPs whose livelihoods are insecure have not been a result of having insufficient food except rates of agricultural production, which has risen faster than population growth (FAO, 2012a; Cochran, 2017). A literature shows that few clues can be found as to how livelihoods expectations and socio-economic opportunities of RWPs differ from those of their urban female and, male counterparts. Many RWPs appear poorer than their urban female or rural male producers (RMPs) as most of the time they are apparently denied access to quality gendered dimensions for socioeconomic development. The major barriers have been lack of access to appropriate technology and agricultural equipment as pathways to socioeconomic development and empowerment. The processes of social and economic transformations are based upon cultural and environmental factors. One major motivation for conducting research, which analyses the socioeconomic development of the marginalized people, is the design and implementation of preventive and mitigatory strategies (Cochran, 2017). In addition, some regions have remained with huge numbers of smallholder farmers, RWPs especially who, through omission or commission, tend to be denied access to sustainable quality dimensions for socioeconomic development. Milazzo and Goldstein, 2017; Cochran, 2017 corroborate that the concept of land ownership is made unclear by the existence of overlapping legal systems, with property rights often vaguely defined and that it is RWPs, and not commercial farming enterprises, who farm more than ninety percent of all cultivated land, more than sixty percent doing so on a piece of land less than one hectare each. The regions, for example, have shown to have lower per capita and the highest number of individuals and households denied access to economic development opportunities. Some of the underlying dimensions have been deeply attributed to the African traditional culture which specifically champions beliefs and indigenous knowledge systems and practices that tend to marginalize and discriminate against women; RWPs in particular. A study by Women Law in Southern Africa (WILSA, 2012) revealed lack of gender equality awareness was more pronounced in the rural areas where huge numbers of poor RWPs resided. Njogu, et al (2001) re-confirms that traditional African women have borne

the brunt of cultural traditions described as oppressive and which limit the advancement RWPs in national socioeconomic development.

Likewise, RWPs seem to experience more problems of being bypassed by modern technologies anticipated to enhance their livelihoods resources. The Vulnerability Assessment Committee (Zimvac, 2017) highlights that in Zimbabwe, a country of about 14.8 million people; ninety-two percent of rural households commonly practice agriculture as their primary source of livelihoods. It would appear that the contribution and capacity of RWPs, particularly and specifically in agricultural production, is not recognized and appreciated to the level and degree they deserve when compared to those of their male counterparts. Over the past decades, persistent economic instability and negative climatic variances experienced in the country contribute negatively to the endeavors made to attain meaningful and sustainable socio-economic development. It has been established that more RWPs are normally by-passed by appropriate technologies, which results in them lagging behind in achieving significant socio-economic development. Most of the time, productivity by RWPs becomes very low because these women lack access to appropriate technology. Moreover, gender differences World Food program (WFP) (2017) determine and influence the capacities and levels of families to produce food at subsistence level. Milazzo and Goldstein, 2017; Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZIMVAC), 2017; United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2019 provide that, owing to their weak property rights, women have limited access to financial products and credit. They further posit that 76 percent of the rural households are considered poor and 23 percent extremely poor, and that, on average, households spend over half of their income on food while 33 percent suffer from food deprivation. Thus, RWPs tend to rely heavily on food handouts from government and international food relief agencies, which in some years are unreliable. As a result, many literally live off food handouts from donors, which, predictably, due to overwhelming demand and limited resources, lack the capacity to support them and their families. This seriously handicaps RWPs from specifically developing sustainable alternative livelihoods mechanisms of their own and generally for their socioeconomic development. Studies by Roncarolo et al. (2016) and Aboderin and Feirrer (2019) together with non-government organisations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN)'s advocacy works, have further seen the urgency of creating awareness on issues which require food security policies by governments. To get by, they have sometimes ended up by exploring and adopting an array of negative livelihoods strategies as well as untenable and unsustainable economic activities.

Apparently, these render RWPs poorer and more vulnerable than their urban female or rural male counterparts. Some alternatively go for short-term interventions and quick fixes, which however later have long-term negative consequences such as like selling household assets meant for better lifestyles of them and their families. Although RWPs assume responsibilities in keeping some livestock such as cattle, goats, chickens, pigs amongst others, some are less likely than others to have access to services such as health, land, shelter, income, education, and agricultural loans. WFP, (2017) and ZIMVAC, (2018) accentuate that a number of these RWPs some of them have no land and property rights for their livelihoods. Thus, disempowered and disenfranchised, they become more susceptible to poverty, which forces them to come up with basic and tough survival and unenjoyable coping strategies. These short term interventions enable them just to get by on a day to day basis, which usually do not enable them to participate effectively in socio-economic development activities. It has been found that Zimbabwe faces notable deterioration in food security with over 4 million people (42 percent of the rural population) reported to be in need of support. RWPs find themselves at the bottom end of the food chain for State and non-State support as gender inequality may overlap with other dimensions of discrimination against them (Milazzo and Goldstein, 2017). RWPs are bound to experience massive gender insensitivity within communities and families. Direct observations reveal that the traditional position of RWPs emerges to be valued as less important. Added evidence is provided by many researches that secure land rights have a more pronounced positive effect on the probability that female-headed households make productive land investments than their male counterparts (Milazzo and Goldstein 2017). Modern appropriate technologies as means of attaining meaningful socioeconomic development transformation have tended to be channeled towards the well to do urban women and men counterparts than RWPs who struggle to access sufficient livelihoods for themselves and their families. Gender equality and equity policy responses have become more complex and less effective such that many RWPs remain under emergency food aid programmes designed for poor rural communities. The socio-economic development of disadvantaged groups is to ensure that they are able to become part of the development process, generate a source of income, recognize the significance of education and render a significant contribution towards the growth and development of the society and the entire nation.

Over the past decades, it has been discovered the levels of discrimination are so substantial, that there is urgent immediate intervention to address these enormous challenges experienced by RWPs before they can contribute meaningfully in socioeconomic

development. If the situation remains unchallenged by current researches, this problem is likely to persist and RWPs will certainly continue to suffer the consequences of gender inequality as rural women producers. Cochrane (2017)'s study propose that there is urgent need to call for promptness and competence in collecting reliable and accurate information that could help reduce the food shortage problem amongst people in affected countries. These findings are confirmed by Kapungu, (2013)'s study in Chirumanzu district which reveal that land for food production was seen as one of the most important tool to recover the food production target. This study therefore seeks to discover the seeming gaps and holes that have remained unchallenged through omission or commission. It goes further to analyse gendered quality dimensions stated earlier that seem to be poorly appreciative across the districts under study.

## Methods

### Data collection methods

The mixed methods were used to collect data from the participants. While questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data, qualitative data was collected by means of in-depth interviews, participative conversations; FGDs and direct observations through transect walks. In-depth interviews were conducted with those RWPs willing to be researched on. Sampling design was based on the geographical location, meaning the participants were representative of the RWPs in the three districts.

### Study population

Data was collected from 90 RWPs identified as economically productive. The sampling technique was used to obtain data using registers provided by the Agricultural Extension Officers (AGRITEX) working with rural communities understood to have sufficient knowledge the different farming methods used in the districts. The totals were 175 study participants.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N=90)

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency (%)
Sex	Female	30 (33.3)
	Male	10 (11.1)
Marital status	Widowed	20 (22.2)
	Divorced	06 (6.7)
	Never Married/Single	04 (4.4)
Educational status	No formal education	01 (1.1)
	Primary education	20 (22.2)
	Secondary education	05 (5.6)
	Tertiary	05 (5.6)
Occupation	Vendor/Trader	10 (11.1)
	Household duties	30 (33.3)
	Subsistent farming	30 (33.3)
	Nutrition garden	25 (27.8)

### Location of the study

The study was conducted in sampled wards of Chirumanzu-Zivagwe and Shurugwi in the Midlands Province where everywhere one goes, many households practice farming. Most people are located into villages headed by traditional chiefs like headmen and kraal heads who monitor progress.

### Ethical considerations

Before data collection, permission was obtained and granted by responsible authorities. Data was collected in consistence with ethical standards best practices applied in social research. All the respondents voluntarily agreed to participate in the study after sufficient information was provided and consent forms were completed as a guarantee. Sufficient information was provided to the respondents informing them that the study was purely for academic purposes. The respondents were promised that all the information collected was would be kept in confidence to protect their identities and the information they shared.

## Results

### Gendered socioeconomic analysis

Analyzing results on gender inequality of vulnerable RWPs is a primary concern of this study. Gender is viewed as socially constructed differences between men and women leading to masculine and feminine roles. Gender is the term for socio-culturally constructed characteristics of masculinity and femininity (Muchenje, 2014). Although gender equity means the just and fair distribution of benefits, rewards and opportunities between women and men, this has not been adequately understood, let alone embraced. WFP, (2017) avers that vulnerability makes RWPs more susceptible to food insecurity. WILSA (2012) conducted a study in Chirumanzu District, which reveals that people were unaware of the meaning of gender equality or gender

equity and regarded the phenomenon as less important and of little relevance to them. Some stakeholders implement livelihoods projects without sufficient agricultural equipment and inputs or means of production for them to reach the level of economic development. In situations where economic activities involved both men and women, only men benefit from the project more than women. Table 3 shows economic activities of RWPs in the districts.

Table 2: Socio-economic activities in all districts

Activities	Value
Community nutrition gardens	Income and nutrition
Small scale farming	Food security, income and power
Brewing traditional beer for sale	Income and wealth
Livestock tending	Income, nutrition, wealth and power
Cottage Industry - pottery, basket crocheting and knitting	Income and wealth
Collecting wild fruits in season and selling	Income, wealth and nutrition
Casual labour - labour exchange for cash and labour for food	Income and wealth
Buying and selling goods, selling agricultural produce	Income and wealth
Agriculture - planting, weeding, crop fertilization, harvesting	Food security, nutrition and income
Food production/processes-threshing, winnowing and packing	Food security and income

Scores of RWPs lack land rights because married women in some traditions and cultures are regarded as strangers and outsiders within the family set up of their husbands. This discrimination is grievously enforced especially after the passing on of their spouses. The roles of RWPs tended to be domesticated and yet most are generally the ones involved in small scale farming activities more than their urban female or rural male counterparts. Many of the RWPs inherited land from their fathers or late husbands. Table 3 shows means by which land for farming was acquired.

Table 3: Means of land acquisition

Land	Frequency and (%)
Inherited from parents/ spouses	15(50)
Allocated by Traditional Chiefs	4(13.3)
Allocated from the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture	5(16.7)
Obtained Land through the Land Reform Program	5(16.7)
Non Land Ownership	1(3.3)

Some RWPs had domestic gardens on which individuals worked more hours than their male counterparts. The produce could only meet needs for family consumption, but were not enough to sustain enterprises, which would lead towards self-sufficiency. Individuals had the privilege of accessing water from nearby water reservoirs constructed during colonial era. These were sufficient because they had not been reclaimed and properly serviced. Therefore, they lacked the capacity to support and enhance anticipated livelihoods of sustainable economic development of RWPs. Unpredictable climatic conditions affected women producer’s efforts whose sources of livelihoods relied almost entirely on rain water which was even scarce. Others decided to stop growing certain traditional crop varieties previously grown, but rather opted for maize production, which they could sell to the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) at a low price, but fetched higher prices during drought. This resulted in the propagation of inequality in food production as RWPs overlooked growing small crop varieties like sorghum, groundnuts, finger millet, and monkey nuts, which can withstand and even thrive in harsh weather conditions. Whilst maize production is predominantly for male farmers, small grain crops are for women as they are specifically for domestic consumption, since RWPs have little or no access to markets.

## Discussion

The RWPs food production in attaining sufficient livelihoods for socioeconomic development remained a challenge. The dimensions proffered by the Brandtland Commission Report, 1987 which guided this study discussed in the following detailed thematic areas.

### Institutional analysis

Institutional dimensions involve access to social services (health care system, banking system, infrastructures, and political stability and education policies) to protect and empower RWPs at local levels. Socio-economic development and empowerment of individuals allows them to make

progress and enjoy wellbeing in all spheres. Many RWPs have difficulties in accessing loans from banking institutions to enhance their agricultural production. Formal legal institutions are often weak and inaccessible to serve the needs of women. However, customary and religious systems have traditionally played a more prominent and accessible role than formal law (Milazzo and Goldstein, 2017). Other respondents were poor and unaware of any gender equality policies that protected them. However, one RWP was aware of the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013, although she did not have sufficient knowledge on sections, which specifically address the challenges faced by RWPs in particular. Sometimes Government Department structures disseminate information to members of the community in general, without targeting RWPs in particular. Women require understandable institutional policies, which target them so that they are directly and specifically empowered with knowledge skills to contribute meaningfully in socioeconomic development. In a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), consensus was reached, which clearly spelt out that corruption, tradition, lack of formal and informal markets, poor infrastructure and financial instability were some of the institutional dimensions impacting negatively on RWPs in attaining economic development. Studies show that it is vital to propagate information that women should be treated equal to men and that they are better predisposed to lead to wellbeing, progress and stability of their families and communities. Access to financial and other institutions empowers RWPs for development and reduces over-dependency on food aid from Government and food agencies.

### **Environmental analysis**

Generally, well thought-out environmental dimensions guarantee meaningful socio-economic development. The National Culture and Policy of Zimbabwe, (2015) defines environment as conditions-natural, physical, economic and otherwise, or types of place in which people and things exist that affect the behavior and growth of individuals, families, communities, and societies. Gendered cultural, political, economic and social conditions create environments that either destroy or undermine women producers' self-worth, growth and development (Milazzo and Goldstein, 2017). Small-scale farming activities for RWPs were affected by both internal and external environmental factors. External environmental factors focused on weather and weather-related conditions while internal factors were related to conflict amongst RWPs themselves. Both internal and external factors affected RWPs in one way or another. Conflicts within the community emanated from unequal distribution of agricultural equipment, inputs and food relief. Ensuring that both women and men had

equal access to training, capacity building and empowerment programmes would have helped in preventing women and men nagging or back-biting each other. In patriarchal societies where male power is culturally rooted, Milazzo and Goldstein, (2017) discovered discriminatory provisions are entrenched in multiple normative systems that guide individual behavior and contribute to the persistence of gender inequalities. Thus, internal and external factors equally tended to derail the disadvantaged group from focusing on meaningful economic development.

The environment was protected under the guardianship of the traditional leadership such as chiefs, and village heads across the districts, The Ministry of Sports, Arts and Culture (MSAC, 2015), conceptualizes traditional leadership as systems and leadership institutions that foster authority at community level and usually archive a community's history, ethics, customs, ideals, values, traditions, including how these can be passed on trans-generationally. Traditional leaders play a fundamental role in educating communities to preserve both the internal and external environments and punish those that violate the rules of the environment. For RWPs, environmental sustainability means preserving the environment and preventing cutting down of trees to minimize soil erosion and creation of gullies, climate change which all lead to limited livelihoods resources for economic development. RWPs revealed that environmental degradation was one of the causes of severe droughts and extreme food shortages as some members of the communities were breaking the traditional rules and norms of the society by destroying the environment through cutting down trees, causing massive veldt fires, cultivating along the river banks, among others. A few people adhered to and practiced diverse methods of farming like organic farming to preserve soil fertility, preventing people causing unnecessary veldt fires which destroyed the ecosystem in general and particularly species that contribute to limited livelihoods resources.

### **Social and economic analysis**

Social and economic quality dimensions significantly enhance livelihoods of RWPs, which accelerate socio-economic development. This implies that social and economic experiences and realities facilitate the molding of the personality, self-worth, attitudes and lifestyles of RWPs, which start and support sustainable livelihoods for economic development. RWPs faced generic challenges, which affected their active involvement in social and economic activities. Women belonging to a minority and disadvantaged group had to look for appropriate agricultural equipment and inputs well before the onset of the rainfall season for them

to plant crops early. Without financial support from children and relatives to boost subsistent farming activities, many RWPs remained stranded in extreme poverty. Several women intimated that they were not getting external support from elsewhere, except from Government and International donors, although the support was unreliable in some years. Again, few reported that they were receiving support from children while others articulated that they were not receiving any support because family breadwinners had been retrenched during and after the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) of 1991/1992. As such, life was extremely difficult for everyone. RWPs were aware that the country was economically stressed, a situation, which certainly contributes to limited livelihoods resources for consumption and even for development. Others had few livestock which some kept as source of wealth and a show of social power and influence, although it was apparent that these sources of wealth were insignificant. Table 5 presents an analysis of livestock ownership of one sampled family.

Table 4: Selected individual livestock ownership

Livestock	Frequency %
Goats	03 (10)
Cattle	05 (5.6)
Sheep	00 (00)
Pigs	00 (00)
Geese	00 (00)
Chickens	30 (33.3)
Dogs	00 (00)
Donkeys	00 (00)

All RWPs were not willing to sell any livestock or to exchange for food as many considered livestock as family wealth or power. A considerable number of RWPs openly declared that livestock belonged to their diseased spouses or parents, therefore they had no right to dispose of them, a fact which further confirms that women have limited to access and control of property and livestock for any meaningful development.

### Religion and culture analysis

Religion/cultural norms are major factors influencing and impacting socio-economic development. Constraints relating to cultural/spiritual beliefs, values, ideals and practices can hinder the effectiveness of women-friendly land

title deed programmes, which would improve and empower women’s access to land (Milazzo and Goldstein, 2017). The National Culture and Policy of Zimbabwe, (2015) defines religion as spiritual beliefs, values, ideals and practices that centre and inform outlook, spirituality, ethics, morality, customs and relationships with others, the natural environment and the cosmic world. Religious/cultural values and beliefs in this study played a significant role, which determined how RWPs obtained livelihoods resources for economic development. Culture and religion is perceived to be a part of ethnicity and food production especially when local communities perform traditions like the rain asking ceremonies. Cochran, (2017) argues that religion and ethnicity overlap, and their impact on personal choices and societal engagement reflect this, thus establishing a religious-linguistic-ethnic nexus. Culturally, the districts were inhabited by people of diverse religious beliefs, which were indicative of diverse and complex pathways in praying to and worshipping God, as well as appeasing ancestral spirits in the event of natural disasters.

A large number of RWPs belonged to particular religions or cultural beliefs, which forbid people to work on a Sunday, which those religions or communities regarded as the day of worship. There are many rituals and other ceremonies still performed by families in Zimbabwe such as harvest feasts, and different petitions, like asking for rain or requests for relief from plagues and sicknesses (Dube, 2012). Traditionally, people were not allowed to work on a particular day of the week, which they called *Chisi* (Shona language) in observance and respect of cultural norms and beliefs. Clearly Africans are afraid of the spirits (Dube, 2012). Those found violating the sacred day laid-down by the traditional leadership and works on the day prohibited were required to pay a fine to the traditional chief for violating cultural norms and values of that particular community. Traditional leadership is a system and leadership institution which fosters authority at community level and usually archives a community’s history, ethics, customs, ideals, values, traditions, including how these can be passed on trans-generationally (Traditional Leaders Act, 1997). Dube, (2012) avers that traditional leadership plays the important role of being custodians and upholders of *Unhu /Ubuntu* within their areas of jurisdiction and influence. This was designed to respect to the Creator and to the ancestors who the real owners of the soil which the chiefs are custodians of. This seemed to have a bearing on the reverence of rural women producers. All these religious and cultural dimensions have an essential role to play in the agricultural farming activities of women producers.

Language also plays a fundamental role in socio-economic development of women producers. The majority of the people in Zimbabwe fall into one or the other of the two largest language groups, which are Shona and Ndebele (Dube, 2012). Language is an important characteristic of identity. Speech is peculiar to an ethnic/cultural group or system of communication with its own set of conventions for a special group, including those who use sign language (The National Culture and Policy of Zimbabwe, 2015). Thus through social interaction, people are able to socially construct the reality of their situations and circumstances even those that pertain to development. For example, when there is a calamity, people conclude, based on their understanding of how their realities are socially constructed, that the spirits must have been offended or angered by some people who break cultural traditions. Thus, failure to observe and show reverence for traditions, anyone is regarded as an affront to the ancestral spirits, who may punish, not just the offender, but also the entire community. Many people believe angered spirits could punish them severely by not interceding to the Creator (*Musiki/Umdali*) for them to get sufficient rainfall which would later contribute to severe droughts and extreme food shortages, thus impacting negatively on their socio-economic development.

## Gender equality policy implication in Zimbabwe

Poignantly, gender policy frameworks in Zimbabwe have failed to give maximum attention to RWPs to generate meaningful activities for socioeconomic development. Traditional knowledge systems and farmers' ability to make effective contribution to economic development have not been adequately tapped into and explored by planners and decision makers. WILSA (2012), for example, conducted a study, which assessed the extent to which the responsible gender equality policies were articulated in the rural areas so far. The study revealed that significant gaps noted were related to the absence of gender and socioeconomic development policies targeting this marginalized and discriminated against group. Gender policy measures rarely target RWPs who should be empowered to ensure sustainable socioeconomic development. To empower and transform the position of RWPs in socio-economic development, RWPs have not been given ample opportunity to directly participate in social research for new ideas for them not to be bypassed by technology and become tail end producers. The experience is that interventions have not been advocated well enough on behalf of RWPs to increase knowledge on modern technologies such as plough, solar energy, and maintenance of hand tools, equipment materials, motor pumps, electrical

appliances and dam building and maintenance for the economic development and empowerment of these RWPs. Laws and policies which discriminate women have not been abolished in too. Whatever artificial changes have been crafted have only served to perpetuate the patriarchal culture which ensures that their male counterparts continue to exclusively to have access to land, water energy, credit schemes, inputs and marketing and training. There have been no changes in socio-economic development policies for women producers in the rural areas, which further perpetuate the culture of discriminating against, marginalizing and disenfranchising women from owning and benefitting from what they are entitled to. The local customs have perpetuated the age-old traditions in respect of rights to inheritance, ownership and control of wealth and property. This study is exploring and investigating what socio-economic development interventions can be brought to bear upon these customs for the benefit and empowerment of women. The study also examines how such interventions would facilitate and promote laws and technologies, which promote linkage between humanitarian food aid and sustainable development amongst women producers. The programmes for RWPs that are already being implemented in the rural areas are good, but what have been lacking are new approaches to social research, which specifically centres on socio-economic development for RWPs. Moreover, new approaches that prioritise fostering socio-economic development for RWPs have been lacking committed personnel to collaborate and work with Government and all stakeholders to find best ways and means to conduct comprehensive social researches on gender equality and equity for rural women producers. Other essential policy dimensions that have not been considered sufficiently relate to the amount of time given to advocating for comprehensive linkage between humanitarian aid and economic development. Development mechanisms during cyclical droughts and extreme food shortages need to be set for both men and women to be economically empowered for meaningful development and transformation so that others do not remain tail end producers by 2030.

## Conclusions

### Gender equality and equity policies

Basically, quality dimensions (gender equality, institution, environment, socioeconomic and cultural/religion) propounded by the Brandtland Commission Report (1987) are means and ways through which social workers play a significant role in re-enforcing gender equality and equity for development in favor of RWPs especially. The role of social work is to advocate and lobby for more core

collaboration which is required primarily focusing upon launching employment and income generation programs such as Irrigation Schemes, Command Agriculture, Command Livestock, Financial Schemes for both women and men producers, to mention but a few. More and more RWPs should be involved in massive planned socio-economic development which, if not effected through social research, Milazzo and Goldstein, (2017) caution could disadvantage rural women producers. Thus, gender equality and equity policies imply that developmental social workers could advocate for best ways to economically transform and empower RWPs for them to access opportunities available for economic development. Social workers can advocate for comprehensive gender equality policies in the provision of relevant information on where to secure agricultural funding for projects that enhance economic development. In addition, socio-economic development and financial institutions such as Agricultural Bank (Agribank), World Bank or other commercial banks could top up on what RWPs already have in order to venture in modern farming technologies for their economic development and empowerment. In Zimbabwe, a practical example, after independence in 1980 was that the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC) promoted the uptake of credit schemes by communal farmers to get finance to procure agricultural inputs to enhance socio-economic development for rural farmers; women especially.

#### **Appropriate technology and indigenous food production**

Comprehensive gendered policies on appropriate technology and promotion of local food production are fundamental in socioeconomic development. Schumacher (1973) describes appropriate technology as irrigation practiced when there is inadequate or no rainfall for the farmers to grow their crops to lessen the burden of work that women producers have to carry in order to stay alive and develop their potential. Pellum, (2008) believes there are more affordable and appropriate technologies that smallholder farmers own and have used for centuries which could be used, but only if their sustainability conditions are improved. The developmental social worker could possibly assist RWPs access infrastructures like banking facilities, roads, markets, production skills and market to sell their produce and generate income for sustainability. By doing so, RWPs will not be bypassed by appropriate technology and remain tail end producers. On the contrary, they would be able to take full control their own circumstances for socioeconomic development. Developmental social workers may need to educate RWPs on the dangers of relying exclusively on food aid, some of which is produced from Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), which are harmful to those who consume

them. Where persistent droughts contribute to poverty and extreme food shortages, the GMOs issue has become debatable over the past few decades. Thus RWPs should have access to viable information as to where they can obtain the best seeds to grow, which are both drought resistant and can withstand extreme weather conditions instead of relying on GMOs seeds, which are unsuitable for Third World climatic phenomena. GMOs are produced for crop production suitable for the West's climatic conditions, and not for the Developing/Third World countries, whose people are the end users of the GMOs, because these countries are persistently affected by droughts and hunger. Pellum (2008) for example is convinced that GMOs primarily profit the organizations that promote them and not the smallholder farmers who consume the food. There is need for social workers to educate RWPs on the new phenomenon and help them to espouse climate change adaptation skills as well as advocating for the intensification maintaining traditional granaries to stock the processed food after harvesting.

#### **Dams and water reservoirs reclamation for irrigation**

The study found out that there were small-scale dams or water reservoirs, which, owing to cyclical droughts have sub-normal water levels. Resultantly, RWPs have been hand tied over the years, with neither financial resources nor donors interested in coming forth to assist with the reclamation and maintenance of dams and water reservoirs to improve food security. Communities have been working on separate nutrition garden projects while drawing water from small wells, which can no longer have the capacity to produce water for both nutrition gardens and human consumption. In order to attain meaningful and sustainable socioeconomic development social workers may need to conscientize communities to engage in water conservation projects, rehabilitate the already existing infrastructures and provide proper agricultural inputs as well as helping them start drip irrigation schemes. Such initiatives can be carried out through community initiatives like the food for work programmes or public works. Social workers can advocate for and conduct community environmental awareness training programmes for empowerment, thus helping such communities to be in control of their own community's circumstances and lives better than before. Today, there is a call for a new model of transformation, which begins with the interface between humans and experience (Dube, 2012). Rural women producers could possibly be made to recognize the significance of education, so that they are able to promote effective growth and development of their children, who because of education would have better options in life than their parents. The training model can go a

long way in assisting RWPs to utilize dam water to irrigate their plots all year round, independent of rainfall patterns during the dry season. Such a development would give the farmers the capacity to control how much water and at what intervals needed to be supplied to the crops. When water is made available, RWPs can work all year round and generate surplus crops and produce for sustenance and thus linking food aid and socioeconomic development. Water can be supplied through canals, sprinklers or drip irrigation, depending on the water and investment availability made through comprehensive sustainable development policies. The engagement of women in agriculture, farming practices, construction work and other minority jobs, do help them to sustain their living. These new innovations could be replicated in other districts and provinces and the world over.

### **Unleashing gender equality participation**

Right policies that unleash gender equality participation are the key to meaningful socioeconomic development. There are many population groups that are being discriminated against both socially and economically and therefore, are unable to participate within the development process and obtain the benefits. Women producer participation is both a means to an end and an end in itself. The main purpose of economical empowerment opportunities of disadvantaged RWPs is to reduce the regional disparities and uplift the status of these communities. Even if women producers face challenges of literacy, unemployment, lack of sustainable livelihoods resources, developmental social workers can advocate for comprehensive policies that uphold RWPs' full participation, not only in food production, but also in gender equality and equity policy matters. Many RWPs reported that if they were given sufficient agricultural inputs and equipment as is done to men, they had the capacity to attain the overall level of socioeconomic development where quality of lives of the individuals, opportunities and rights could be realized. Faced with these findings, practical examples can be drawn from some wards and villages where development agencies are helping rural communities to build small-scale dams for irrigation through community participation; food for work programmes/public works. The once marginalized and discriminated against producer groups have now opened possibilities and opportunities to produce maximum outcomes and work according to plans and budgets, only if the existing infrastructures constructed several decades ago, are reclaimed and maintained. The main purpose of socioeconomic development of disadvantaged groups is to ensure that individuals are able to become part of the development process and trajectory, have a source of generating income,

recognize the significance of education and are able to render a significant contribution towards the growth and development of the society and the entire nation. These endeavors could offer a platform for social workers who are committed to and are passionate about gender participation to advocate for programs, which empower RWPs to have knowledge of both new and traditional technologies to improve the quality of their lives as well as the entire society.

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