

# Participation as Transformation: Exploring the Dimensions of Women's Empowerment in Developmental Projects in Kadoma, Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** Women empowerment in developmental projects is gaining traction in recent times. The study sought to explore the dimensions of women's empowerment in developmental projects in the city of Kadoma. To achieve this purpose, the study employed a qualitative methodological approach with use of primary and secondary data collection tools such as interviews, observations, focus group discussions and document review. Findings from the study reveal that for sustainable development to be achieved, women need to be empowered. However, the research unpacked challenges that women are facing, hindering them to full participation in community development projects, which is contributing to the further underdevelopment of Kadoma. Women have limited access to resources yet they have a load of domestic responsibilities and there is less will to uplift them and hand them primary roles in development activities. The paper concludes that involving women in developmental projects and handing them power to control resources has proved to be the best way to empower them. As such, stakeholders such as the Ministry of Women Affairs, civil society, and women empowerment interest groups must take the lead in pushing the women agenda in developments through policy frameworks and lobbying. Women's perspectives must also be brought in the political access and the cultural systems and communities need to be trained before any development initiative is introduced.

**Keywords:** Community development, Developmental project, participation, women's empowerment, Kadoma

## I. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is one of the topical agendas across the world, as gender inequality is widespread in societies. Women and development issues have been on the world agenda since the United Nations organized the first women's conference in Mexico, 1975 (Mbongori 2014). Since then, governments of different countries have and are still upholding the plague of empowering women so that they have equal access to opportunities enjoyed by their male counterparts. Development practitioners hold the view that women's empowerment is a key element in poverty reduction across the globe (World Bank, 2012). The process ensures that women are given the chance to reach to their full potential, at the same time, enhancing them to reach their own capabilities. Consequently, women empowerment has significant

implications for the rest of the household and evidence clearly shows that empowered women appear to have higher child survival rates, healthier and better fed children (Aboukhsaiwan 2014).

The World Bank views women empowerment as a means of promoting growth and good governance, and as a primary development assistance goal (Nhuta and Mukumba 2017). The International Conference on Population and Development identified women's empowerment as a critical factor that promotes sustainable development. Therefore, women empowerment is a precondition for, and an indicator of sustainable development. Low empowerment of women and higher gender gap still impede the development process of a country (Bayeh 2016). Nhuta and Mukumba (2017: 375) argued that the promotion of women's empowerment as a development goal is based on a dual argument that social justice is an important aspect of human welfare and is intrinsically worth pursuing and that women's empowerment is a means to other ends. However, many projects and programmes which espouse the empowerment of women show little if any evidence of attempts even to define what empowerment means in their own context let alone to assess whether and to what extent they have succeeded (Mosedale, 2003: 3).

Developmental projects such as women housing development seek to empower women by increasing their access to credit, education and contraceptives. Microfinance in the name of micro-credit has attempted to address the issue of empowering women and has grown widely in developing countries such as Zimbabwe and Malawi. But the question that can be asked is whether microfinance empowers and alleviates poverty. Conversely, studies carried by the World Bank in 2012 disagree with the perception that microfinance empowers and reduces poverty of poor people. Microfinance especially in form of small loans do not fully empower women or alleviate poverty, but worsens the situation as poor households are forced to pay interest rates that are high (Mashizha and Mashizha 2017). However, by targeting women, microfinance has the ability to address poverty and to achieve this; supporting networks and empowerment strategies needs a

bottom-up approach. It is difficult to capture women's empowerment within a generation because it is driven by not only informational efficiency, but the range of choices that a woman has. There are a lot more initiatives that need to be taken to ensure that women are placed in their rightful position, and strategies that need to be formulated to ensure that women are able to contribute fully to the development process (World Bank 2009).

The plight of women in Zimbabwe since 1980 is well documented (Chigwenya and Ndhlovu 2016; Zikhali 2017; Gaidzanwa 1985; Essof 2005; Kazembe 1986). Women have been on the fringes of all aspects of development (Chigwenya and Ndhlovu 2016). In Zimbabwe, a number of legislative reforms and policy frameworks have been introduced as part of the national drive towards women empowerment and gender equality (Nhuta and Mukumba, 2017: 378). Although the current Constitution of Zimbabwe, among other legal instruments, supports women empowerment, it is ostensible that developmental projects and activities are still a gendered issue in the country. Although Zimbabwe has put in place the Constitution and other legislations such as the Labour Act to ensure women's empowerment and equality, there is persistence of deep-seated gender disparities embedded in the religious practices, traditional, patriarchal societal nature and policies. This is espousing and perpetuating the subordination of women in public and private as well as local and national developments. Women especially the poor, are disproportionately affected by this. There are many cases of violence against women. In most cases, women have no autonomy and independence in financial decisions and they are burdened with a number of time-consuming domestic chores. This emanates from lack of advancement of veritable women empowerment in policy, programs and development projects.

Despite women representing 52% of the population in Zimbabwe (Nhuta and Mukumba 2017; Chigwenya and Ndhlovu 2016), their participation in development is still weak, and not much commensurate with the dire needs of their required role in developing their deteriorating communities. Areas such as Chegutu, Kadoma, Zvishavane are in need of developments, and thus women's involvement in this field is important. It is against this background that this study seeks to explore and examine the extents of women empowerment in selected developmental projects. Based on an empirical study from Kadoma City in Mashonaland West region, various trends, challenges and opportunities springing up from women empowerment issues in development projects are at the attention of this paper. This study, thus builds frameworks which seek to create an enabling environment for women to participate to their fullest potential in socio-economic developments in Zimbabwe. The deteriorating state of economy in Kadoma and the entire Zimbabwe requires that women's exclusive involvement is taken seriously in community development projects.

### *Development, Participation and Empowerment: Overview of the Nexus*

Community development, participation, and empowerment are intrinsically entwined. Duflo (2012:78) explicates "women empowerment and economic development are closely related, in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving equality between men and women, in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development". To do justice to the research questions in this study, it is imperative to unravel the link across and between these concepts. Community development, according to the United Nations, is a process whereby community residents come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems within the community. Even though community development seeks to empower all community members, the prevalence of gender disparity still exists in some communities, making the processes and outcomes of community development to be futile as some women are still under patriarchal societies (Zanza, 2015). Women are key stakeholders for sustainable participatory development but their role is often and somehow overlooked. The need to rope in and recognize women in communities' development has been the agenda of many organisations in recent times. Global development has intensified women empowerment, increasingly targeting women for sustainable development, management of services and resources and successful community development.

Studies that have been conducted before (in Kenya, Bangladesh, Zambia) on problems women faces when engaging in community development projects reflect the same picture. The predicament is that women lack access to financial services, they have limited access and control over land and inputs and have limited powers over decision making (Mutanana and Bukaliya, 2015). Even in African countries where land was redistributed to black majority, women still cannot have access to land. In developing countries, women usually undertake low paying jobs, care for the family, women empowerment should not be ignored in community development. Women in developing nations lack skills to participate in any development initiative as they are positioned at the periphery or corner of society due to social, cultural and political structures (Mehra's, 1993). But if we take a closer look we can also take into consideration that women lack the essential skills that enable them to fully participate in community projects.

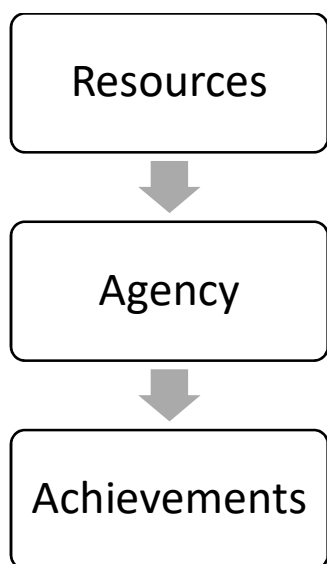
In Zimbabwe it is quite impressive that some women are willing to participate in community development projects and they have the support of men who understand the need of empowering women. As such, a remarkable shift is seen and the character that prevails should be encouraged. Women play a fundamental role in economic development and to live them out of the equation is a fatal strike that hinders economic growth. In this regards, micro-enterprise projects should be

encouraged and policies should be designed to empower women to work in groups and tap investment opportunities. Involvement of women in development may reduce poverty and promote sustainability in households and community since women work directly with communities and can identify needs and solutions to community problems.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Controversy has never spared the subject of defining empowerment. Empowerment is a process that helps people to have a sense of ownership over a project being implemented in their area (Livingstone 2007; Narayan 2002, World Bank 2007). The process expands the capabilities of poor people to participate and undertake self-help programs supported by community participation. It is worth noting that empowerment is a multifarious concept with three domains namely economic, social and political. This paper refers economic empowerment to market domain, in which an individual is an economic actor. Political empowerment refers to the state domain in which an individual is a civic actor. Furthermore, the World Bank (2014) clarified that political empowerment is about participation and decision making in formal institutions, including local government, interest groups, civil society and women's ability to set and influence the political discourse. Social empowerment refers to society domain, in which an individual is a social actor. This paper is grounded on Naila Kabeer's theoretical framework of women empowerment which embodies definitional elements from all these definitions. Kabeer's theory has a perfect relevance to a wide range of development contexts. According to Kabeer (1999: 437), empowerment entails a process of change where those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. Of importance are three sequential and connected dimensions of Kabeer's women empowerment theoretical framework.

Fig 1 Illustrates Naila Kabeer (1999) Theory of Women Empowerment



Resources are the imperative prerequisites for women to be able to exercise choice. Resources entail not only conventional economic resources, such as land, equipment, finance, working capital, *inter alia*, but also to social and human resources which serve to enhance the ability for women to exercise choice. Social resources/capital refer to the claims, and obligations intrinsic to social networks and relationships which enable women to enhance women's life chances, status and situations. This may not be possible with individual women's individual efforts. On the other hand, human resources are embodied in women's skills, knowledge, innovation, and creativity. Women must have access and future claims to material, human and social resources (Nhuta and Mukumba 2017: 380) and there must be investment in women's economic resources to help the poor to step out of poverty. However, women empowerment cannot be attained only through resources.

Agency elates to women's inner ability to define their goals and act upon them. It includes the process of decision-making, including negotiation, deception and manipulation that permits women to define their goals and act upon them. According to Sen, the combination of resources and agency comprises of what he dubbed "capabilities", the potential that people have for living the lives they want (Kabeer 2005, Kabeer 2001). This is consistent with the World Bank's view that empowerment includes the process of increasing the assets and capabilities of groups or persons so as to bring choices and transform such choices into desirable outcomes. On achievements, Kabeer denotes to the outcomes for women in development discourses given access to resources and agency. There is need for sustainable development from the development projects such as women entrepreneurship, and housing development projects in Kadoma.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study is guided by the qualitative study and is informed by an exploratory case study design, that is qualitative in nature, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were drawn from community residents (both female and males), officials, and community leaders using a combination of interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, conducted from four wards of Kadoma. Key informant interviews were purposively conducted with 15 respondents which are 5 development projects coordinators (females), 2 female community services officers, 7 officials from Kadoma city council (5 females and 2 males), and 3 community ward councillors (males) 4 church leaders (3 males and 1 male). All key informant interviews except 2 church leaders hold university degrees. These key informant interviews sought to obtain data from pertaining to development projects and the participation of women in such projects. Projects coordinators provided information on projects/programmes they implement as a way of empowering women; challenges women are facing to participate in community projects and solutions they have come up with to address some of the challenge's women face when

participating in developmental projects. Moreover, semi-structured personal interviews were purposively conducted with female and male residents from three wards of Kadoma. Convenience sampling was used to residents who were found walking in ward 2. The majority of these respondents interviewed, their age ranges between 25-40 (35%) years old and from 40-52 which then constitutes some 15%. These age groups were considered critically important to the study because they make up the majority of working-class individuals who usually take part in development projects as employment means to make a living for their families. However, the study has given to female respondents so as to obtain concrete views and evidence of their empowerment challenges in various community development projects. In addition, a focus group discussion in data collection was employed by randomly gathering small groups of participants for discussion. Focus group discussion gives insight into diverse views and not just what participants think because it involves real people who are directly affected (Bogere and Gesa, 2015). Desk study of published and grey literature was also reviewed to identify the demographic profiles, prevailing socio-economic conditions, and development projects in the city.

#### *Description of the Study Area*

Kadoma is situated at the southern end of Mashonaland West Province. It lies 166 kilometres South West of Harare along the main Harare-Bulawayo highway on UTM zone 6 of Zimbabwe. It lies on the main A-5 highway road between Harare and Bulawayo, 305 south west of Kadoma. It was developed around 1901 from a small rail station and business centre then into a town in 1907 and a municipality later on and in 2000 it gained city status. The city is at the centre of mining area, which provides gold, and has a total of 17 wards. During the peak years of its development as a centre of light industries (Sheunesu, 2007), Kadoma used to provide employment from mining operations and from the small rail station. By then, the workforce bracket comprised of young and unskilled men and women were largely excluded. Due to economic meltdown experienced in Zimbabwe, Kadoma became one of the cities that is suffering from poor developments ranging from, inter alia, dilapidated housing, waning water and sanitation facilities, and impassable roads. Companies like David Whitehead textile manufacturing company, Glass Company, and Associated Textiles which used to employ the majority of Kadoma residents closed its operational doors. Thus, it posed unemployment challenge in the city. Fig 1 shows the map of Kadoma city.

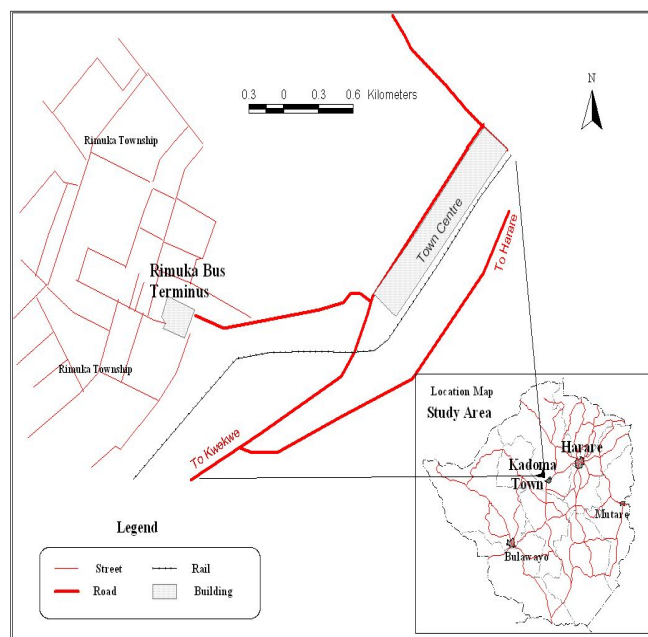


Figure 1: Map of the Study Area. Source (Mashizha and Mashizha 2017)

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings for this paper are sectioned according to the empowerment dimensions that have emerged from the study of development projects in Kadoma. There are projects such as housing, urban farming (crops and poultry), micro-finance and women community savings, women entrepreneurship,

##### *Women in Sustainable Development*

Women empowerment is critical for achieving sustainable development (Huis, 2017) and this can be attained through women participation in social infrastructure and housing projects. For Zimbabwe the ones that mainly support urban population need to be empowered for active participation in development programmes. The definition of sustainable development entails that it is “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs and possibilities of future generation”. In that regard, the concept of sustainable development cannot be complete if women are not fully engaged or given the platform to participate in any development. As this paper argues, women have always been involved in activities for the improvement of the quality of life in their families and communities, hence they should play a leading role on initiating development programmes and they should be innovative. But why should we involve women?

The ability of women in Kadoma to make decisions has been strengthened, and they act for themselves, maximising their efforts and the majority do not fully depend on men. It is worth noting that women in Kadoma City are targeted for management of services and resources in communities and for a successful community development. The integration of women in development is facilitating a sustainable community



development. To support this, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development in Kadoma argues that involving women in community development improves the welfare of communities, families and livelihoods of the poor and reduces poverty, an assertion supported by the Zimbabwe Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development (MWAGCD 2013).

#### *Capacity building, women participation and community development projects*

It emerged that Community Capacity Building Initiative for Africa (CCBICA) is a local NGO that is providing capacity building to women's projects in Kadoma Urban. The tools of its trade range from providing capacity building trainings on improved livelihood, income generating projects and nutrition. Women respondents from wards Waverly and Rimuka- ward 2, stated that the organization is a crucial provider of capacity building programmes that has benefited a majority of poor women. According to the interviewed councillors, Community Based Organizations (CBO's) have also entered in the mainstream of providing capacity building and they possess expert understanding of local needs, what they lack and are best placed to create a sense of ownership and mechanisms so important to women empowerment and development projects. This resonates with literature findings that if women are supported with resources they are able to participate in community development projects (Mutanana and Bukaliya, 2015 & Mutanana and Gasva, 2015). Clearly, capacity building is a catalyst, an essential lubricant of development more important even than finance, and is relevant to the highest level of government and communities (Mutanana and Gasva, 2015). Similar capacity trainings have been extended to local government, which is a notorious bureaucratic and underperforming.

#### *Education, Women Participation and Empowerment*

The empirical results from the study show that, in terms of women education levels, participation in development projects is not solely confined to the schooled or educated women. However, the majority of people think that education levels disempowers women in the community-based projects. As the findings reveal, education gives women an upper hand to lessen the burden of doing some projects in a simple way. Similarly, Shunmuga, Sekar and Subburaj (2014) have emphasised that education is the key factor for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Findings revealed that there are departments or units in projects like community women micro-finance where a bit of mathematical and accounting calculations is involved. Women from Ngezi Old section revealed that in spite of having dropped out of school at primary level, they are apt in monetary mathematics. Projects coordinators indicate that women require training on matters of knowing the laws that protect them in doing their development projects. This is because often times women suffer harassment from Kadoma City police, Zimbabwe Republic Police officers, and even from their husbands at

home. This tends to affect their esteem for doing the projects. Only 12.2% of key informant respondents who have at least degrees and diplomas interview indicated that education is important. In 2019 the Women's University in Africa established its first satellite campus in Kadoma and it is conducting some lessons in Rimuka Township at Sarudzayi Community Service Centre. This is crucial particularly when considering that the University focuses on addressing gender disparities.

#### *Women, Income and Empowerment*

As stated in this paper, Kadoma has high unemployment rate. Therefore, the majority of women have no formal income sources, and they live from "hand to mouth". This is aggravated by the current hyperinflation in Zimbabwe which is devaluing the Zimbabwean dollar. Quite a number of families interviewed are women-headed as result of divorce, and death, and other fathers have left for greener pastures in other urban areas and outside the country. This scenario much alone, gives women the appetite to participate in development projects. In a similar study, Mutanana and Bukaliya (2015) also observed that women are appetized to participate in community projects because of various factors that include poor resources to take care of their families. Findings revealed that women as result of precarious income bases are at the mercy of conceding to other's ideas and decisions. For example, in the matters of budget formulation, poor women tend to be powerless. This affects their propensity to participate and own the projects. However, officials from the municipality of Kadoma were on payroll or formal employment.

#### *Challenges Women Face in Community Participation*

Findings from this study suggest that the constraints to economic, political and social empowerment that places women at a disadvantage are relevant for developmental projects aiming to empower women in communities. Kadoma's economic activities are hinged on mining and farming (Sheunesu 2007). However, women are less involved in the mining sector. During a focus group discussion, it came out that in wards Rimuka- ward 2w, Rimuka- ward 6, and Ngezi Old Section, women have limited access to resources such as land and money yet they have a load of domestic responsibilities. As a result, their economic potential through starting and participating in projects is not yet fully realised; perhaps this is attributed to the dying Zimbabwe's economy. A key informant highlighted that the will to uplift women has been lacking as evidenced by policies and laws, hand then primary roles in development activities. This implies that, women are still excluded from economic activities.

Arguably, women need to be increasingly involved in community projects so that they can have some source of income and change of management (Mutanana and Gasva, 2015). Therefore, there is need to further train them on financial management to ensure that savings can be made and used for future emergencies. Illiteracy, as regarded as the

ability to read and write, although in few cases, was revealed by female community projects coordinators as an obstacle for some women as affecting their participation in some selected development projects. However, there are a number of projects which women can embark on without factoring in literacy. Findings, however, show a number of projects in areas of housing (housing cooperatives) that have failed to perform well yet they were occupied by educated/literate people.

Women respondents from all the targeted wards revealed that patriarchal attitudes and social norms are limiting the ability of women's participation in developmental projects. They stated that their mobility is restricted, and their husbands and family members expect them to stay at home. This concurs with the research by Kambarami, (2006) that other family members expect women to be quiet (not to talk) in public meetings and agree with decisions forwarded by men. Hence, these attitudes by husbands are problematic to community development projects.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that community leaders such as councillors and Members of Parliaments are advocating for the promotion of women's participation in community projects. The norm that girls are seen as the weaker sex, who should obey and submit to the leadership of men is losing its grip though much still needs to be done. Women are regarded as the custodians of cultural values but culture is not only defined by men, it is also imposed by them.

Although women in Kadoma are not empowered enough to participate in community development projects, it is noteworthy that the current projects in which to participate are limited. This creates cut-throat pressure to the limited projects that most women will end up side-lined by their male counterparts and few powerful women whose husbands have tight grips to projects at hand.

Women are also affected by insufficient social capital which allows them to build an independent economic status, hence have limited development projects for themselves. They face restrictions in decision making and they have less skills and experience than men do. One of the most prevalent obstacles to women's participation in developmental projects is based on social issues that arise from the social structure of the society.

Lack of experience among women is preventing them in engaging with high level political processes. Interestingly, key informants indicated that poor infrastructure is having an impact in their participation to developmental projects. The government together with the local authority needs to invest in infrastructure to improve women's physical access to resources and markets. Livelihood support is vital as it increases women's income generating activities and access to credit (Mutanana and Bukaliya, 2015). The position and empowerment of women in Kadoma is hindered by negative attitudes perpetuating inequality affecting all aspects of their lives. Although women's political representation has

improved over the years, in Zimbabwe, negative social perceptions about the leadership ability of women, their low socio-economic status, low educational and skills levels all contribute to women low participation in community projects. The burden of household chores and inequitable access to higher education also limit women's ability to enjoy the opportunities of development projects.

Community service development officers revealed that community projects that exclude women often do not succeed. They are like elephants' projects that do not see the fructification of desired goals in the long term. The Executive Director of Environment Management,

*"Most women are being left out in the mainstream projects which then do not succeed."*

To improve the economic conditions of the whole community and restructure the socio-economic relations, women must be integrated.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The study has clearly indicated that women empowerment is a multi-dimensional process that involves transforming ideas, norms and relationships. The empowering process in Kadoma has given women a voice, local and national governments, and organizations needs to take them seriously. Involving local people, particularly women in developmental projects and handing them power to control resources has proved to be the best way to empower people. Given the deteriorating state of cities like Kadoma, it is important to rope in women in the development lexicon to revamp and put the district on map. Projects by women are an ingredient and an important factor to improve skills and fulfilling needs through collective action. Communities need to empower women for leadership as this gives them the courage and the zeal for participating in community programmes. As noted by the study, it is necessary to let women participate in community projects since they will be exercising their voice and choices.

Vocational training centres Kadoma for women must be established to inculcate required knowhow for women to operate some projects. In this regard, the municipality of Kadoma must allocate space for the institutions. These training centre must charge affordable fees and have some mechanisms to assist those that are no capable of raising fees. In this realm, it is difficult for women empowering approaches to be under taken by communities if it is controlled by external entities. As noted by the study, long term projects are noble as they are sustainable compared to short term ones. In that regards, empowering projects implemented in any particular area must be long term. The process of empowerment, as shown in this study, occurs in concrete social, economic and political setups, where women face resistance, and the exercise of other forms of discriminatory power. Community members are the ones that drive and sustain change to the social norms that hinders women empowerment, and they need support of ideas and

assistances from the government and international community. Hence, the authors of this paper argue that political backing is important, and the state needs to invest in developmental projects. Although it is the duty of national government to provide for its people, caution needs to be observed and the government must not take control of projects as it can lead to negative outcomes. Paramount here is to understand how institutional biases prevent women from participating in developmental projects. Women's perspectives must be brought in the political access and the cultural systems. Drawing on this, the community needs to be trained before any development initiative is introduced in an area. Skills should be enhanced for further projects that have less involvement of external agencies. Leadership and capacity building trainings are needed to enhance women empowerment and participation in development projects. Training is argued to be a way of achieving sustainable development. Trainings provide education, transparency, democracy, good governance and equal participation of women in any initiative; hence success will be ensured. But most importantly, we have to recognize that capacity building among community members should be aimed at giving women a chance to voice their concerns. Women play a very major role in the realm of development, and, for any development to succeed, they should not be ignored. Many women in Zimbabwe do not actively participate in community development projects due to gender, personal and social issues (ZIMVAC 2014).

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