

The Necessity of Vocational Training as a Tool for Empowering Rural Women in Ward Five, Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The study evaluated the necessity of vocational training as a tool for rural women empowerment. Specifically, the study targeted women in Ward 5 of rural areas in Mashonaland East. The research adopted an interpretivist research philosophy and a qualitative research approach with which case study research design was used. Data was generated through face-to-face interviews and questionnaire using convenience sampling. The targeted population were the women in one of Mashonaland East's rural constituencies. The study found that rural women remain side lined from participating in vocational training due to distance barriers, socio-economic status, education, beliefs systems and socialisation systems. Results also show that vocational training was of much significance in their empowerment as rural women. Acquiring skills like gardening skills had helped women to start their own livelihood projects to the benefit of the country. One of the main recommendations of the study was that there was need to move away from the donor syndrome to a more sustainable paradigm which has long lasting benefits.

Key Words: vocational training, tool, rural women empowerment

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Economic development has been and is still a global challenge which seeks to be addressed globally. Responding to these challenges UNDP Global Conference on Women Empowerment (2016) suggested vocational training as a weapon to achieve economic empowerment, since most of the rural women are illiterate. Rural women make significant contributions to the rural economy leading to transformational sustainable economic development in all regions of the world (FAO, 2014). As such rural women education and training are regarded as powerful tools for rural women's empowerment, (ILO, 2009). In addition, rural women participation and empowerment are fundamental rural women's rights which enable them to have control over their lives and become influential in the society (Pillary, 2005). However, FAO (2014) indicated that globally, rural women often face exclusion from attaining vocational training because of factors such as background, cultural and religious beliefs whilst they constitute over two-third of the world's illiterate people.

After realising challenges being encountered by rural women, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) came up with a strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

2016-2021. The approach supports measures that enhance rural women's access to relevant vocational training programmes which aim at reducing gender disparities on issues to do with vocational education and training. Global Campaign for Education (2018) indicated that the strategy is expected to yield more results in developing countries especially in sub-Saharan Africa and some Arab States whose rates of rural women illiteracy is high.

In Asia, it is reported that there is limited mobility and lack of exposure of information by women as compared to men (ILO, 2009). This has resulted in rural women failing to acquire economic empowerment skills, through vocational training even though they are interested. According to a study carried out by Akoojee *et al.* (2007) indicated that there was a sharp decline in international support in vocational training in Africa after the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) of 1990. The donors changed their focus from vocational training to basic education and this was reinforced by the Millennium Developmental Goal (MDG) number two in 2000, which supported the achievement of Universal Primary Education. This has caused a delay in the decentralization of vocational training centres to rural areas affecting the already disadvantaged rural women in attaining vocational training (Akoojee & McGrath, 2007).

Rural women vocational training is regarded as the most influential initiative meant to develop entrepreneurial skills to improve rural women employability in both formal and informal sectors (IFAD, 2010). The prevailing conditions on vocational training programme accords a second chance to most illiterate rural women to be self-employed or be employable. For example, a study carried out in Burkina Faso indicated that about 78% rural women cannot read and write, and they benefited from vocational training project offered by Food Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2014).

In Egypt, most of rural adults are women and about 30% of rural households are headed by women, yet they endure worst living conditions due to lack of economic empowerment (Sacko, 2018). In a bid to achieve a comprehensive development, community based rural women vocational training programmes were introduced in the country by Neqdar Nesharek organisation which provided poor rural women with hands on skills for them to be self-employed. This has been supported by Sacko (2018) that the initiative

has managed to change the economic status of most rural women in the country and further reduced the rate of domestic violence cases.

In Zimbabwe, the situation presents a different scenario. Vocational training was introduced soon after independence as a way of rehabilitating ex-combatants and youths who had been deprived of their right to education during the colonial era. This initiative was not only meant to develop an entrepreneurial culture among the youths and war veterans but to improve their employability. Having realised that vocational training was bearing fruits, the government introduced more training centres to increase the number of participants regardless of social class (Mutambanengwe, 2014). Such an expansion was meant to ensure that poverty and marginalization are eradicated by making all individuals economically productive. Therefore, vocational training doors were opened to everyone interested. To date, there are 43 vocational training centres across the country (McGrawth, 2004). However, many as they are, these vocational training centres have failed and are still failing to cater for empowerment needs of rural women contrary to their stated mandate of ensuring empowerment for all marginalized groups. This has been attributed to issues of their location, cultural and religious beliefs, among others. In other countries like Egypt, vocational training has achieved positive results in as far as the empowerment of rural women is concerned. In the period 2014 to 2015, the percentage of rural women who have attained vocational education rose from 39% to 56%.

Even though Zimbabwe is a signatory of several international instruments such as the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, rural women have not benefited a lot from these empowerment policies. From a Zimbabwean perspective, the necessity of vocational training on rural women empowerment has not been given the much-needed attention by both academicians and development practitioners (Muchena, 2006). As such, there is a dearth of both local empirical and theoretical studies on the subject. Therefore, this study sought to make up for this geographical gap institutions.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With most Third World countries struggling for economic development and most of these countries having a women population exceeding that of men, this might be an indication that there is need to involve the women in the economic development of these countries. One way to achieve that is to provide some form of education to the women folk. This study, therefore, aimed at shedding light to governments on the necessity to economically empower the women through the provision of vocational training.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 *The relationship between vocational training and rural women empowerment*

The vocational training programme for rural women aims to develop entrepreneurial skills among rural women. Ahamad (2016) states that skill development gained through vocational training is an agent of change in promoting rural women employment. Rural women have been seen in the context of adult women who at most, are female married or not married but having to fend for themselves or their families and residing out of urban centres (William, 2005). As such these need to be empowered. This implies providing the women with survival skills so that they are economically prepared for the role they play in the sustenance of their families and eventually translating to community advancement. William (2005) posits that when women have access to entrepreneurial development training opportunities, they become confident and can speak up against every abuse and violence and they become voices of positive change and advocacy for equality, justice, and progress. This has been also supported by UNICEF (2007) which states that educating rural women develops self-confidence, protection from sexual exploitation, improved health care and poverty reduction for future generations.

Becker (1993) conducted a study in India for fifteen rural women on handicrafts, embroidery had a positive impact on the employment skill and income generation gain by rural women and proposed that such training programs should be done in all rural areas so that the rural women can increase their socio-economic status. This was supported by Haruna (2015) that providing vocational training to rural women, makes them self-reliant. This, however, has support in institutes of higher learning in Zimbabwe Education 5.0 model, where innovativeness and industrialisation has taken a lead.

The introduction of rural women vocational training is supported by the human capital theory of Becker (1993) which argues that an educated population is a productive population. As such the provision of education through vocational training to rural women is seen as an investment in human capital, which Becker (1993) considered as equal as or even more worthwhile than that of physical capital. Those who received both training and inputs had a bumper harvest, they got sixty-seven bags whilst their counterparts got forty-two bags (FAO, 2014). The benefits which come through human capital development has motivated the researcher to carry out this research of developing the human capital in rural areas, specifically women.

According to a study carried out by Chenoy (2011) in Asia-Pacific region, highlighted that there is clear and tangible evidence that vocational education for women plays an essential role in promoting sustainable economic growth of a nation, with benefits for individuals, their families, local communities, and the society in general. The concept is said to have improved the income of poverty-stricken citizens. This has empowered individuals who were marginalised like rural women. Therefore, vocational training has played a

major role in achieving inclusive and sustainable growth in Asia-Pacific region.

3.2 Barriers faced by rural women in attaining vocational training

There are barriers faced by rural women in attaining vocational training. Among these are cultural, societal, economic, and educational qualifications. These barriers have inhibited women development globally leaving more space for men development (Nguni & Muthima, 2017).

3.3 Failure of existing vocational training centres to cater for women's needs

In Zimbabwe, the minimum entry requirements for enterprise programs offering certificates and diplomas are at least an ordinary level certificate or the ability to read, write and understand English. At the end of the course, they have to sit for an examination with Higher Education Examinations Council (HEXCO). These have become some of the obstacles for most rural women since most of them were not accorded the opportunity to finish either primary or secondary education and in some cases, they did not even go to school.

(www.danhikoproject.org.zw/voc)

The enterprise programme duration is at least one year in most of the vocational training centres in Zimbabwe. Most of these training centres are in towns and peri-urban areas. This has made rural women unable to leave their families for so long to attend the courses, (Mandinyenya & Nyandoro, 2017). This has been also supported by a study which was done in Hurungwe District which revealed that offices of programme coordinators are in Karoi and Magunje, away from the rural community where the beneficiaries stay. This has resulted in poor coordination of training programmes (Mutanana et al., 2015). As alluded by Mandinyenya (2017), most of these vocational centres in Zimbabwe are in a dilapidated state due to government poor funding which then hinders the women habitation. The fee structure for most vocational training centres includes boarding fees to cater for those coming from distant places and local could commute to the training centres. The fee structure differs depending on the duration and demands of the course and content covered (www.kaguvivtc.gov.zw). This has been a great challenge for rural women to raise the fees needed.

3.4 Interventions to support rural women vocational training

There are many strategies put in place at global, regional, and national level to support rural women training. After realising the high rate of discrimination against women, in 1979 the United Nations General Assembly adopted an international treaty called the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Since its adoption, more attention has been given to the situation of rural women. Muchena (2006) highlighted that in Zimbabwe an initial report was submitted to the board showing programmes that have been put in place aimed at domesticating the provisions of CEDAW in 1995. This

included the development of the gender policy to guide various sectors in mainstreaming gender in all programmes. This has assisted rural women's recognition in programmes like vocational training. However, despite all this effort by the government of Zimbabwe rural women uptake to vocational training remained very low.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Conference) held in 1995, the international community acknowledged the concept of gender mainstreaming as a method of incorporating women into the development cycles. The goal was to achieve gender equality in all fields of society. As such this approach assisted rural women especially in developed nations where patriarchal systems have since been diluted in achieving vocational training (Malhotra, Schuller & Boender, 2002).

In 2012, the United Nations came up with a strategy of introducing training that offers hands on skills through vocational training to rural women. It launched the Accelerating Progress towards the Empowerment of Rural Women (RWEE) offering vocational training in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgystan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger, and Rwanda (UN, 2015). This initiative managed to empower rural women with vegetable drying and gardening skills to such an extent that they managed to start their own livelihood projects.

In addition, the United Nations launched an International Day for Rural Women, commemorated on the 15th of October every year. This was put in place as an opportunity to join hands at global level in supporting all rural women to claim their rights through education and training (UN, 2015). This has promoted rural women vocational training, since it exerted pressure to member states to assist rural women so that during the commemoration day there will be something meaningful to share (UN, 2015).

ILO (2012a) highlighted that to achieve an all-inclusive development approach, he providers of vocational education in Asia made a concerted effort to reach out to rural women with all resources needed and impart them with hands on skills such as sewing and baking. This has been put in place to fight against the barrier of travelling long distances to training centres and lack of appropriate resources (Adelakun, Oviawe & Barfa, 2015). Furthermore, ILO (2012) indicated that there is also Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) a community-based training programme implemented in Asia, which promotes income generation and employment opportunities for disadvantaged women mainly in rural communities. The strategy involves planning with local partner institutions, careful identification of economic opportunities and training needs assessment in the community, designing and delivering relevant skills training and post-training support to facilitate trainees' access to wage or self-employment. In Bangladesh, the methodology has been used to harness the power of solar energy through training solar home system servicing personnel and this has seen rural women being trained as skilled servicing solar energy personnel to earn a living (ILO, 2012).

According to a research carried out in Egypt, Elsayed and Roushdy (2017) alluded that the engagement of local community leadership is an indispensable factor in creating enabling environments for rural women's empowerment. The involvement of community leaders in the rural villages in rural women's livelihood programmes results in rural women gaining the community's support in implementing sustainable vocational training programmes. For example, vocational training promoters in Egypt rural areas made home visits to husbands with the company of traditional leaders when beneficiaries failed to attend or when they faced family constraints. This has managed to raise the attendance levels of rural women to vocational training programmes (Elsayed and Roushdy, 2017). A study done in low-income countries Malawi and Sri Lanka indicated that there are organizations supporting women to reduce gender gap. For example, the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women Organization (GEOWO). It supports projects that address barriers to women's economic empowerment and gender gaps in earnings and productivity (Schuller, 2012). This has acted as proof that there is a problem of gender inequality highly affecting especially rural women.

FAO (2017) indicated that Zimbabwe as a nation has signed many conventions and protocols concerning gender issues. These include the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, a signal for the country's commitment on women empowerment. However, a study carried out in Hurungwe district by UNICEF indicated that government policies on women empowerment are just policies on paper, as most women in rural areas are lagging behind in terms of economic empowerment. This has also derailed the implementation and support of vocational training for rural women, (UNICEF Strategy Paper, 2008-2011).

As indicated by Padare/Enkundleni (2018) in Zimbabwe there are many organizations representing women rights in trying to come up with solutions to women empowerment. These include the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) which focuses on rural areas of Africa where poverty is widespread, and girls and young women face massive exclusion from education and the opportunities that are afforded by education. The organization works to build around girls a supportive environment in which they can attend primary and secondary school, which are basic requirements for one to attain vocational education in training centres dotted around the country. Furthermore, there is Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) which is a network of women rights activists and women's organizations with national structures.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was aimed at addressing the following research questions:

1. What is the significance of rural women vocational training to rural women empowerment?
2. What are the barriers faced by rural women in attaining vocational training?
3. How effective are the available vocational training centres in imparting vocational training to rural women?
4. What interventions put in place to support rural women vocational training?

V. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The research study population was that of all women in participants from Ward 5 in Mashonaland East rural. These were targeted because of convenience and that they could be able to provide the much-needed data to answer the research problem at hand. whose educational credentials were different. The researcher selected 10 participants from where data was collected. In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling to select the ten research participants. This afforded the researcher to find a credible and rich information (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the interpretivist philosophy and the qualitative approach. The case study design was used, and data was collected using questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The participants were asked to provide information on the necessity of rural women vocational training as a tool empowering rural woman. Wahyuni (2012) notes that the case study method has strength in investigating the present status of a phenomena. Questionnaires were self-administered and distributed. Data was also generated from the various face to face interviews conducted. Tables were used to present the responses from the research participants in a manner that was easy to interpret.

VII. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The researcher explained the importance of carrying out the research study since the onset of the research study. This was done to guard against the ethical considerations which are key in research. Appointments were done through the headman and the purposively selected participants were always kept abreast with the research progress.

VIII. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

After data was collected from the participants, it was presented and analysed. Tables and figures were used to present and interpret data that was gathered from respondents using the interview guides. Detailed analysis of some of respondents' opinions on questions posed to them during the interviews conducted is also given. The study evaluated the necessity of vocational training as a tool for rural women empowerment. Specifically, it targeted 10 women in Ward 5

in Mashonaland East rural constituency. Data was generated through face-to-face interviews using convenience sampling and research questions generated provide the following subtopics presented as follows.

8.1 Demographic distribution of participants

Table I: Distribution of participants by gender (N=10)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Females	10	100
Males	0	00
Total	10	100

Table 1 shows that all, 10 (100%) participants are females.

Table 2: Distribution of participants by age (N=10)

Age range	Frequency	Percentage
19-30	2	20
31-40	4	40
41 and above	4	40
Total	10	100

From Table 2, it is noted that the age range 31-40 and 41 and above had most participants. These age ranges had 4 (40%) each while the 19-30 age range had 2 (20%). Most of the participants were mature to provide data for the study.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by marital status (N=10)

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	2	20
Single	5	50
Divorced	2	20
Widowed	1	10
Total	10	100

The distribution of respondents by their marital status as shown in Table 3 above, shows that the study was dominated by single women (50%) and the least percentage was made up of widowed with a paltry 10%. This shows that most of the women were self-sustaining as they were not married and thus could grasp any available opportunity for better livelihoods.

Table 4: Distribution by educational level (N=10)

Highest qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
Grade 7	2	20
ZJC	2	20
Ordinary Level	6	60
Total	10	100

Out of the 6 (60%) who have reached Ordinary level, only two had 5 Ordinary level passes. This meant that as per vocational training requirements, not all were eligible for entry into the vocational training centres.

8.2 The significance of vocational training to rural women empowerment

From the findings it was noted that vocational training gave women skills to be able to navigate the turbulent male dominated work and business environment. Most (80%) participants concurred that vocational training was of much significance in their empowerment as rural women. Some said that acquiring skills like gardening skills had helped them to such an extent that they managed to start their own livelihood projects.

8.3 Barriers faced by rural women in attaining vocational training

The results also showed that 80% of the participants indicated that there were many barriers encountered by rural women in attaining vocational training. These inhibit their opportunities for empowerment. Among the barriers are cultural, societal, and economic as well as academic qualifying criteria. These barriers have inhibited women development globally leaving more space for men development. Poorly resourced vocational training centres have below standards facilities for women habitation especially those from distant communities. Some lamented lack of financial resources to get enrolled for vocational training with majority complained of the duration which they said without government support they could not attend because of other pressing household commitments. There was also evidence that several factors affected their participation in vocational training. There were socially inclined barriers as expressed by all the 10 (100%) participants. Other barriers linked to economic factors were also mentioned by 6 out of 10 (60%). The level of education was also stated as another barrier by 7 (70%) participants.

8.4 The effectiveness of the available vocational training centres in imparting vocational training to rural women

Table 5 shows how the participants perceived the vocational centres in terms how effective they were in imparting vocational training skills to rural women.

Table 5: The effectiveness of available vocational training centres in imparting vocational training to rural women

(N=10)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Effective	9	90
Not effective	1	10
Total	10	100

It was noted that 9 (90%) participants did acknowledge the effectiveness of vocational training. This, therefore, could have detrimental effects on the developing of the country.

8.5 Interventions put in place to support rural women vocational training

Some 75% of the participants indicated that most interventions seemed to have yielded no positive outcomes. Responses from participants indicated that government policies on women empowerment were just policies on paper, as most women in rural areas were lagging in terms of economic empowerment. This had derailed the implementation and support of vocational training for rural women. These views were echoed by UNICEF (2011) which indicated that government policies on women empowerment were just there on paper, since most women in rural areas were not economic empowered (UNICEF Strategy Paper, 2008-2011).

There are several interventions in Zimbabwe. FAO (2017) indicated that Zimbabwe as a nation has signed many conventions and protocols concerning gender issues. These include the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, a signal for the country's commitment on women empowerment. Furthermore, there is Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) which is a network of women rights activists and women's organizations with national structures. Despite the presence of CEDAW, CAMFED, WCoZ as well the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, there seems to be little in terms of visible women empowerment results.

IX. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on the evaluation of the necessity of vocational training as a tool for rural women empowerment. Specifically, the study targeted women in Ward 5 of rural areas in Mashonaland East. The motive behind the carrying out of the study was embedded in the belief that vocational training is an empowerment tool. Hypothetically, one was persuaded to think that vocational training for rural women would automatically bring desired results. However, the research study showed mixed feelings about vocational training as can be noted from the following:

- Vocational training is of much significance in the empowerment of rural women.
- Acquiring skills like gardening skills had helped the rural women to such an extent that they can start their own livelihood projects.
- Literature reflects that many organizations were working tirelessly to build around girls and women, a supportive environment in which they can attend primary and secondary school, which are basic requirements for one to attain vocational education in training centres dotted around the country. This alone

has been seen not as the panacea to gender socioeconomic imbalance.

- The study found out that rural women remain side-lined from participating in vocational training due to distance barriers, socio-economic, education, beliefs systems and socialisation systems.
- This study helps in influencing policy change and shifts focus from the perspective of women and the general populace. The study was important as it touched on pertinent issues normally reserved for or side-lined due to socio/political reasons. Most studies focus on provision of material things to communities. It is recommended in study that there is need to move away from the donor syndrome to a more sustainable paradigm which has long lasting benefits.
- Future studies should be carried and include a GDI dimension which has diversity, gender and inclusion for various stakeholders as well as covering a wider research area.

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