

Mitigating multiple vulnerabilities in Zimbabwean rural schools: An asset-based approach

Nowell Chidakwa

School of Education, Educational Psychology, Student of Master of Education in Educational Psychology – Great Zimbabwe University

Abstract: This baseline paper draws on the asset-based approach (ABA), as to explore multiple vulnerabilities in Zimbabwean rural learning ecologies as well as how they may be mitigated. In this paper, we began by discussing the brief overview of the approach, exploring literature that supports the need for the ABA to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities for sustainable learning in rural ecologies. Purposive sampling technique was used to select a heterogeneous group of 20 participants who included 13 learners facing multiple vulnerabilities; and 2 teachers, 2 former school learners, 1 faith-based representative, 1 social worker and 1 local community business representative as identified assets from the community. Qualitative research methods were utilised to investigate possibilities for the ABA to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities for sustainable learning in rural learning ecologies. The paper was able to capture the reality of the participants' experiences using the Participatory Action Research design through the use of interviews and focus group discussions. Data generated were critically analysed and discussed using the Critical Discourse Analysis. Findings from the study revealed that multiple vulnerabilities greatly affect learners in their learning process. The results suggest that if the available assets are utilised to some degree, it is possible for rural learners to achieve quality education regardless of the vulnerabilities they face. The researchers conclude that the ABA has great potential as a way of alleviating multiple vulnerabilities.

Keywords: asset-based approach, multiple vulnerabilities, rural learning ecologies, mitigating, learner, Zimbabwe

I. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe rural learning ecologies has been hit by high failure rate, early marriages and high school dropouts, just to mention a few, as a result of learners facing multiple vulnerabilities in rural ecologies (United Nations, 2019). The rural atmospheres themselves in rural learning ecologies (rural schools) are faced with multiple vulnerabilities due to socio-economic, geographical location and political situations (GoZ, 2018; Vulnerability Report, 2018; ZimVac, 2019), henceforth the rural learner is not left out to the same situation faced by the community he or she lives in. In this paper, we view multiple vulnerabilities causing learners in rural learning ecologies to suffer and cause them to drop out of school, developing behavioural problems that expose them to other vulnerabilities. The greater the number of risks experienced by the learner (multiple vulnerabilities), the greater/complex the problems that the learner will face during the life course (Chinyoka, 2013; Katunga & Lombard, 2016). If the learners' needs are not fully met, rural learners suffer social ills such as

diseases, poverty, low levels of education, low learner achievement, low self-esteem among those who live there, unfavourable policy environment and limited facilities (Hlalele, 2012). This paper proposes ways we can use to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities in rural ecologies for learners to achieve quality education. Several studies addressed that schools located in rural areas face multiple vulnerabilities that serve as causal factors for low performance, high dropouts, early marriages, among others, in comparison with the urban schools (Chinyoka, 2013; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Hlalele, 2012; Hlalele, 2014; Myende, 2014). These studies were unable to create an opportunity for learners to attain quality education like their urban counterparts but discussed only the effects of vulnerabilities. Zimbabwean rural learners are not exceptional in facing the above multiple vulnerabilities (GoZ, 2018; ZimVac, 2019). Proposing for the ABA in the Zimbabwean situation would be a starting point to mitigate the multiple vulnerabilities in rural ecologies. The approach explains the importance of assets from the local community in assisting learners facing multiple vulnerabilities to attain knowledge that is meaningful (Myende & Hlalele, 2018). Manjengwa, Kasirye, and Matema (2015) and Chinyoka (2013) say that to achieve quality education for all in Zimbabwe, poverty must first be addressed. Poverty resulted in the shortage of teaching and learning resources in the school and at home and exposes learners to many vulnerabilities (GoZ, 2018) and need to be addressed. It was our opinion that failure to address the underlying poverty (vulnerabilities) issues appear to be the main hindrance in achieving global education levels of equitable and quality education. We observed that despite the Zimbabwean government's increasing investment in education, achieving the goal of quality of education particularly in rural learning ecologies has been a challenge. Still, rural learners face a great challenge of multiple vulnerabilities of which schools alone have failed to address (Hlalele, 2012). The application of the ABA in assisting the learners facing multiple vulnerabilities was seen as a conceptual model for emancipating, empowering and transforming the learners in rural learning ecologies, a best-fit approach representation.

Although multiple vulnerabilities can take a wide range, currently, Zimbabwe has some programs in place for working with learners facing multiple vulnerabilities which are not holistic in nature. The government interventions (Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), Zimbabwe

Accelerated Learning Program (ZALP), Zimbabwe Adult Basic Education Course (ZABEC), creating Child Friendly Schools (CFSs), Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED)), and providing feeding programs in helping learners encountering multiple vulnerabilities in Zimbabwe were put in place (Manjengwa et al., 2015; GoZ, 2018). Programs like ZALP and ZABEC allowed dropout learners to advance their education during the afternoon, each learner is placed in his or her level of understanding. Programs were accelerating progress toward achieving Zimbabwe Millennium Development Goals (ZMDG) goals number 1 and 2. More to the above was the introduction of the updated/competence-based curriculum also known as new curriculum in 2014, which is a task-based and practical in nature and prepares learners in the following skills; critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, leadership skills, team building and technological skills (GoZ, 2018; ZIMASSET, 2013). However, due to political and socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe, there has been little deliberate effort by service providers to ensure that learners facing multiple vulnerabilities receive a set of minimum basic services that they need to develop optimally (Chinyoka, 2013; Magampa, 2014). Basing on this, we view efforts by the GoZ failed to address the root cause of multiple vulnerabilities. We propose for the ABA that suggest that individuals, and groups in the community, regardless of their context, have capacities and strengths to address societal challenges (Myende & Hlalele, 2018). Thus, we say, learners facing multiple vulnerabilities possess the capability to actively construct their own meanings. If rural communities facing multiple vulnerabilities are given the opportunities to mitigate their problems, they would be left empowered and transformed for life. In arguing for an ABA, we try to answer the following research question.

How can we mitigate multiple vulnerabilities in Zimbabwean rural learning ecologies through the asset-based approach?

II. ABA AS A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

ABA is a theory that challenged the conventional way of addressing rural problems (which is to rely on expert service providers and funding from agencies) and observed that assets within the community can be utilised as building blocks (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The aim is to ensure that individuals and communities are no longer clients, but they are guided to become independent and to gain control over their lives (Khanare, 2009). For rural communities facing multiple vulnerabilities, the proponents of the ABA concur that it creates sustainable initiatives that empower communities and creates sustainable livelihoods (Chikoko & Khanare, 2012; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Myende, 2014). People who live in them, should build their own sense of common identity, through acts of caring, cooperation, connection, association and shared problem-solving with other with who they share a space (Rout & Gupta, 2017). Applied to this study, a participatory approach is used based on principles of empowerment and ownership of the development process. In this study, participants identify the assets to mitigate

multiple vulnerabilities that create sustainable livelihood and empowers them. We argue ABA reduces community 'dependency' on external organisations and their financial support and capabilities and transforms and empowers the community members through skill development. Ferreira and Ebersöhn (2011) view that the ABA is for people in poor and marginalised communities to restore their physical well-being and happiness and to rebuild their social and political structures through active participation. The effective application of ABA in rural ecologies will guarantee wind-swept dependence syndrome to learners facing multiple vulnerabilities.

Additionally, people really value being involved in a process where they feel they can shape something and it leads to improvement (McLean, McNeice & Mitchell, 2017). We do not dispute that when citizens from rural learning ecologies contribute gifts, skills, passions, or knowledge, or a blend of all four, they are at the centre of co-producing the outcomes. According to Rout and Gupta (2017), a "citizen-centred" programme is one where local people control the programme and set the programme's agenda. If people are at the centre of co-producing outcomes of the programme (Rippon & Hopkin, 2015) they often grow in self-confidence and begin to contribute to broader civic activities, which shapes well-being and resilience. Myende and Hlalele (2018) support that for citizens to be at centre of co-producing results, communities should not be viewed as multifaceted masses of needs and problems, but are rather viewed as miscellaneous and powerful bases of useful gifts, skills, passions, or knowledge. We argue that when proposing for assets to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities, asset mapping must start from existing community capacity and assets, building on what we already have. Applied to rural ecologies, residents have the gifts, skills and passions and knowledge of residents, which can contribute towards mitigation of multiple vulnerabilities. Gifts are innate, people are born with them; skills are what people practice, learn and can teach or share with others and passions are what people care about enough to act on (McLean et al., 2017; Rout & Gupta, 2017). These give rural learning ecologies citizens to be at the centre of proposing and co-producing assets to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities they face. Linked to this, citizen at the centre of co-producing is connectedness, collective assets, and collective knowledge, empowerment, transformation and social capital to rural learning ecologies citizens. We argue the application of ABA in this study has results that can be appreciated by the citizens of the rural learning ecologies.

Above all, educational leaders should be better placed to ensure that local strengths, capacities and skills are assembled for improved rural education by building a strong relationship between the school and the communities (Chowdry & Oppenheim, 2015; Jopling & Vincent, 2016; Myende & Hlalele, 2018). The significance and benefits of building sustainable relationships and partnerships are key elements of the ABA. Strong, positive relationships were important at both an individual level with people supported by services and

at the organisational/service level, where there was a focus on utilising and enhancing the skills and connections of other services and sectors (McLean et al., 2017). By applying the ABA building on existing local ecologies assets, the return on investment is local, therefore, there is the use of local personnel to build the local ecologies. We argue that it is important to mobilise and build relationships for a purpose empowering the rural communities by changing the relationships between users and providers and across providers. It is crucial to value relationship building between the school and the assets to create the positive capacity, skills and knowledge and connections from the community.

In arguing for the ABA, it is important to understand what assets are possessed by local communities in general and rural learning ecologies in particular. Chikoko and Khanare (2012) say that community assets consist of non-material (intangible) and material (tangible) possessions rural communities have. The tangible assets include vacant land, buildings, and properties at disposal and intangible assets include skills of people, network that people in the community have, and other forms of capitals at disposal (Green & Haines, 2012). Myende (2014, p.14) argues capacities, skills, talents and gifts of people, if considered, would contribute positively to the development of the community by the members themselves. It was our assumption that within the multiple vulnerability ecologies, there are skills, talents and gifted people who may assist to meet the needs of others. We feel this is only achievable by creating community awareness of the available assets they have.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The researchers employed a purposive sampling technique to identify the actual school to be involved in the research. We also purposively selected participants on the basis of their knowledge, relationships and expertise regarding research objective. The secondary school is found in Masvingo Province, under Chiredzi Rural District Council on the far north of Zimbabwe, bordered by Mozambique and South Africa. The research participants consisted of twenty participants who included thirteen learners facing multiple vulnerabilities, and two teachers, two former school learners, the faith-based representative, a social worker and a local community business representative as identified assets from the community. For gender balance, of the two school teachers, one was female; two former learners, one was female and of the thirteen, seven were females. To generate data needed in this study, the researchers made use of focus group discussion to try and propose solutions to problems faced by learners in multiple vulnerabilities ecologies and how these problems can be mitigated using the ABA. These data generating methods were preferably linked very well to the research paradigm (critical emancipatory research), research design (participatory action research), and the theoretical frameworks (ABA) in trying to answer the research question of the study. Issues of trustworthiness of the data generated were ensured through triangulation of data

generating sources above, generating methods above and data analysis methods (critical discourse analysis).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, consistent with the research question, we firstly present and discuss data regarding the situational analysis with a view to understanding current multiple vulnerabilities rural learning ecologies. Secondly, we then move on to the participants' responses to the identification of assets that may be used to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities. Thirdly, drawing from the responses and discussion about the first two sections we discuss how we can apply the ABA to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities. In presenting and discussing the generated data, themes that rose from both the data analysis and the research question are incorporated.

4.1 Real-life situations in rural learning ecologies

With regard to the responses by the participants, the submission was that multiple vulnerabilities exists and facing a single vulnerability leads to facing multiple vulnerabilities and this is because of the absence of learner needs in their education life. It was also evident from FGD that they viewed multiple vulnerabilities as multiple entities and not a single entity as highlighted by their utterances "...complex situations and or many problems learners face". The participants identified the common vulnerabilities faced and we presented them as 'one collective voice' from all the FGD groups as follows:

[*Ku hluphekangopfu* (poverty), *kupfumalavuleterinavulayievuton'wini* (lacking guidance and counselling in life), *kugaratirivanategategavaberekevakarambana kana kuendajoni* (staying alone as children - child-headed family due to parents/guardians on separation or migration to South Africa), *kupfumalawakutirhisaxikolweni* (lack of stationery/fees to use at school), *kuyaxikolwenivangadyangi* (coming to school of empty bellies), *kufambampfhukawolehakusuka kaya* (walking long distance from home), *kutsandzekaexikolweni* (to perform poorly at school), *kukondleteriwaleswakuvacineriwavonavangaswilavi* (culturally forced to go through initiation programs), *kutirhisiwakavana* (child labour), *nakuhlundzukisiwaswin'wenavanhu lava tsamakanavona* (emotional and psychological abuse by other peers, teachers, parents and other relatives)]

The submission resonates with Hlalele (2012) that vulnerabilities exist and create social inequalities, specifically those social factors that persuade the defencelessness of various groups to harm and manage their ability to respond to their needs. This is also supported by UNESCO (2018) and ZimVac (2019) that some of the learners aged 13-17 were out of school due to lack of fees sixty-three percent (63%), pregnancy or marriage eight percent (8%), lack of interest eight percent (8%), work for food or money three percent (3%), illness two percent (2%), and disability two percent (2%). Although the government has made a pronouncement

that no child should be turned away from school, it was interesting that ZimVac revealed that the proportion of learners being turned away for non-payment of tuition fees remains high at sixty-one percent (61%). This is very common in the rural learning ecologies where life is complex, things not adding up as per expectation. Research done by Pillay (2018) supports the above submissions that many vulnerabilities have come to play a prominent role in academic, and everyday accounts of the human condition resulting in facing many accounts of vulnerabilities. We argue that the presence of multiple vulnerabilities in learners' lives requires the immediate application of the ABA as a matter of urgency in the interest of survival of the learner within the complex environment. In this case, the learners in rural learning ecologies need to find solutions to the problems from assets within the community to utilise in mitigating multiple vulnerabilities. These assets would ease the negative impacts of the multiple vulnerabilities as they create space for skill and knowledge development, relationships and cooperation, which emancipate, empowers and transform individuals in life (Myende & Hlalele, 2018). The essential argument is that the application of the ABA would make the internal atmosphere (the brain) adjust and develop in order to survive in those changing atmospheres. The ABA would leave the learner empowered and changed, thus able to survive in harsh multiple vulnerabilities ecologies.

4.2 Available assets to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities

Numerous assets that were critical to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities were identified. These were notably from the school boundaries (mainly the people), beyond the school boundaries (local community members, institutions and built capital) and those beyond the school and its community (Myende, 2014). These were technically identified as primary tier, secondary tier and the tertiary tier by participants. Under each tier are specific assets that can be utilised to mitigate the identified multiple vulnerabilities. From the community, a number of assets were commonly identified by participants from all the FGD groups. Within the *primary tier assets*, the participants jointly identified the *teachers and the headmaster, and school projects* at school as assets they feel can be utilised to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities they face.

In this current study, it emerged that the *teachers and headmasters* at school possessed important ideas, capacities, and knowledge on how to guide and counsel learners in their traumatic situation. Their role is working to improve the educational outcomes of vulnerable learners and build relationships that help them feel safe, that they are able to adjust their reactions appropriately through guidance and counselling. From FGD, learner participant 5 reiterated, "*Ke ma tichara, hakumavuleterinavulayinkarhiwakuhlupekaka hi hleketatihlupho to tala hi nganatona (from teachers, we get guidance and counselling every time we face multiple vulnerabilities)*". On the other hand, adult participant 4 resonated, "*Ma teacher ndivovaberekivevanavedu kana varikuchikoro*" (*teachers are loco-parentis for our children at*

school). The society views them as loco-parents (parents for their children during school hours) and they expected them to have control over their children. Teachers themselves who were present confirmed that indeed they are trained and were ready to help these learners in every problem they face using the technique they learned from colleges and universities. One lady teacher from adult participant FGD group said, "*we are also a bridge between the learner-teacher-parents on all educational needs.*" The findings resonate with studies done by Chikoko and Khanare (2012) and Myende (2014) in South Africa that primary tiers are immediately available in making sure that the needs of learners at school are met. They collectively serve as motivators, guiders and counsellors during hard times for learners facing multiple vulnerabilities because they possess capacities, knowledge and skills. Notably, teachers and headmasters build relationships with learners, communities and the government in mitigation of multiple vulnerabilities present in rural ecologies. Additionally, Keiti (2017) found out that teachers and headmaster collectively create relationships between the school and other stakeholders for the benefit of learners from being assisted in the mitigation of multiple vulnerabilities. In particular, the headmaster act as an instructional leader, effectively and persistently communicate the model mission of the school to staff, parents, learners and the government and other stakeholders in the community. Certainly, this build working relationship, as a key aspect to a collective approach (Myende, 2017) and also strengthen the social capital (Hlalele, 2012). Essentially, we argue that teachers and headmasters are the most important human resource and remain the backbone of any educational system in determining the extent to which mitigation of multiple vulnerabilities can be achieved.

Important to note were the *school projects* (farming, gardening, poultry keeping, and piggery) named by the participants as assets that can be used to empower the learner through skill development. According to participants from FGD, school projects prepare learners for the workforce tomorrow, produce products for feeding programmes and develop problem-solving skills in learners. They improve organisational skills, collaborative skills, problem-solving skills, self-direction and constant state of learning.

The adult participant 4voiced, "*...the schools should capitalise on the projects they do at school, to equip with future life skills to learners facing multiple vulnerabilities...*". To demonstrate this, learner participant 13 argued, "*...hi lava kudyondzisiwa ma practical lawangofpu, swa hi pfunakarihanyorahina (...we want to learn practical subjects as we can utilise the skills in life)*". The above submissions are clear that the participants feel that the school should offer skills to learners through undertaking these projects. The use of built capital (school projects, garden and vacant rooms at school) results in learner gaining business skills manual work-life skills which they can utilise later in life (Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development, 2007). By commissioning these projects, we argue that learners would be

equipped with some living skills (organisational skills, collaborative skills, problem-solving skills, self-direction and constant state of learning) on how to do *farming, gardening, and poultry* in real-life situations. Equally important, these skills help learners to develop analytic and problem-solving skills in dealing with multiple vulnerabilities in future. Likewise, through the school projects, both learner and adult participants collectively argued, “*Chikorochinowanazvakarechikafuchoita feeding programme vanavachidyapachikoro*” (With the produce from projects the school can get run a feeding program at school). Regarding the above matter, the understanding is that schools can produce food to feed the learners through the practice of agricultural activities. In as much as learner participants appreciated the skills they get, they would get the food to feed them during school hours (Waithera, 2013). It was evident that school projects had an advantage in the process of mitigating multiple vulnerabilities. Bhebe and Nxumalo (2018) in Swaziland found that practical subjects are vital in the development of a learner’s brain, mind, and soul, and therefore should be made compulsory for learners. We argue for utilisation of fixed assets the school have, for example, poultry projects, piggery projects and gardening, as aspects of built capital. Drawing from Emery and Flora (2006) argument, the existence of these services would facilitate skill development, through promoting the whole school approach system and schools produce food for those learners who come to school on empty bellies. It appears that the whole school approach is crucial if the school has to develop skills, change and empower, and assist learners facing multiple vulnerabilities causing them to be an active member of the society in order to survive in the complex environment. If learners develop those skills, they will be able to solve their financial and social vulnerabilities because they will never remain the same with those skills in life.

In the same way, the importance of *secondary tiers* (former learners/old students, social workers and educational psychologists, and local organisations) as assets from the community were raised by the participants. Firstly, the participants identified several employed and unemployed *former learners/old students* as experienced people to back towards mitigation of multiple vulnerabilities in rural schools. They argued that the former learners support with human, material or other resources that may be directed to learners facing multiple vulnerabilities within the school. The adult participant 4 who happened to be a parent and old student residing in the community acknowledged that he was alumni of the school and in that case could be involved in the mitigation process. This participant had this to say, “As *‘former students’, takazvipirachaikokubatsira... (we are committed to plough back) ..., we are willing to take an extra mile tichakubatsiraimukubatsira (...we will assist you). A lot is waiting for you guys if we cooperate*”. Textually, the former learners/old students were ready to assist learners facing multiple vulnerabilities financially and materially. To assist/support, we argue, it means adding something to what is

already or not there such as provision of extra money, extra equipment or additional staff to improve teaching and learning of learners facing multiple vulnerabilities. To clarify this, Myende (2014) revealed that although the learners facing multiple vulnerabilities complained of being exploited by these former learners, their impossibilities go beyond resource provision, and further motivate learners to be career-oriented. Thus, Chikoko and Khanare (2012) argue that human capitals within the community form a cluster of skilled craftspeople which can be utilised to solve community problems. Emery and Flora (2006) concur that there is a need for identification of those human capital and effectively utilise them. It was important to note that former learners/old students as human capitals were ready to take the challenge from the texts (*ti*) meaning (*we*), as the participant represented all old students in his opinion that if they could be involved they would be in a better position to influence their employers to invest (materially and financially) in the school. Specifically, the words, uttered by the adult participant 4, “*tichakubetserei*” (*we will help you*), are pregnant with meaning, and we will unpack it using social discourse analysis. The word (*ticha*) (*we will*) means old student is speaking on behalf of others, and speaking from collectiveness. We should understand the togetherness in Zimbabwean rural areas is a way to assist each other. In this context, the old student used the word (*we*) and not the word (*I*), meaning him and other old student were assets they can use in the mitigation of multiple vulnerabilities. Findings by Rippon and South (2017) show that school genuine community engagement and working together encourages the expansion of relationships. We argue, when provided with chances to contribute to and engage with society, rural ecologies people are able to feel more self-confident of their capability to find solutions to their problems, thus empowerment and transformation. As explained, the involvement of old students as a critical asset to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities was validated by the study team.

Furthermore, the participants from all FGD appreciated that *social workers and psychologists* can help mobilise learners, family, school and community resources to enable the learner to learn as effectively as possible. Through cooperative working, they help reduce difficulties to social and academic success and give learners the skills they need to excel in school through proactive than reactive activities. To clarify this, learner participant 11 expressed thankfully, “*...makatibatsirapanguvayekushungurudzikatichidzidzapamus ropematambudzikoatosangananawo.*” (...you helped us to get through our emotions). The participant appreciated the presence of the social worker when he counselled them during the study process. In the same manner, adult participant 3 commented, “*...vanavotalavatsikiswaxikolovtirhelamakaya... community ilavakupfuniwa*” (there is rampant child labour in this community and we need your assistance). As we deliberated on the matter, the social worker could not resist the call and had to say, “*As social workers and educational psychologists,*

we are ready and we are committed to assist everyone as long as the community is cooperative. From the utterance by the social worker, it was clear that (they) are willing to work with the community if the community is cooperative. They are ready to help clear impediments to social and academic success and give learners the skills they need to excel in school and in society. The verbatim (we), we understand it as togetherness and with that, he included the educational psychologist. To demonstrate this, Alvarez, Bryant, Bye and Mumm (2013) found that there was correlation between the number of school social workers in a district and student outcomes data from a national data set, indicating that the higher the number of school social workers in a district, the higher the completion rate in United States Department of Education. The results showed a statistically significant reduction in the rates of truancy, fighting, bullying, hard drug use, and child abuses; the results also showed a significant improvement in multiple vulnerabilities faced by learners. As explained above, the involvement of social workers and educational psychologists as critical assets to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities helps to develop positive behavioural intervention strategies, conflict resolution and anger management and to identify and report cases of child abuse and neglect within community (Crane, 2016; Cunningham, 2016). Basically, we argue that social workers and educational psychologists are the most important human resources in determining the extent to which learners may in behaviour and reduction of abuses.

Equally important, some *local organisations* (Chilojo club, CAMPFIRE, Red Cross and Centre for Cultural Development Initiatives-Gaza Trust) were identified by participants from all FGD groups as important assets to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities. Participants, especially learners commented that these local organisations provide sponsorship opportunities to develop business and management skills to learners facing multiple vulnerabilities. To explain this, learner participant 8 said, “*Chilojo club, CAMPFIRE na Centre for Cultural Development Initiatives-Gaza Trust yahinyiketa ma scholarship*” (the named local organisations give us some sponsorship). In support of good job done by these organizations, adult participant 3 highlighted “...it is good to create a good relationship with local organisations..., take for example Red Cross with its piggery and hen projects in schools..., we should work together with them”. Firstly, it is important to note that local organisations can be critical assets in giving financial assistance in the form of scholarships to learners facing multiple vulnerabilities in rural ecologies. Secondly, it is clear that there is a need for good relations between the school and the community that such projects may be used as an opportunity to develop business and management skills from learners. An environment which is welcoming connects people within communities and provide a source of resilience, access to support, and opportunities for participation and added control over their lives (Rippon & Hopkins, 2015; Spencer & Williams, 2017). Under those circumstances, learners are more likely to have opportunities

to be assisted emotionally, psychologically, financially and materially and as a result, more positive outcome than they would otherwise (Myende, 2014). Thus, we argue that social capital is a cornerstone of sustainable community engagement, for example, collective, community, or social assets such as connectedness, social networks, and reciprocity are seen as necessary to mitigating multiple vulnerabilities as well as producing meaningful outcomes for rural ecologies.

Lastly in the *tertiary tier*, notably, the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) were identified assets from the outside tier. Only the adult participants identified NGOs, specifically PLAN International. In arguing that the NGOs are a critical asset, the participants were concerned that PLAN International should avail the funds and projects at school to empower learners facing multiple vulnerabilities with business and life skills. To demonstrate this, adult participant 4 expressed that NGOs should conduct workshops for learners facing multiple vulnerabilities to equip them with survival skills. learner participant 3 was further quoted saying, “...kana zvaiita, vaidanavePLANkuzotidzidzisa (if possible PLAN should be invited to teach us surviving skills) ma surviving skills, through workshops.” From the above sentiments, it is clear that learners solely see the NGO as an opportunity to get financial assistance as well as surviving skills. Mugwenhi and Mafini (2014) found that to promote the rights of children in Zimbabwe, the selected NGO embarked on sustained education initiatives through a program known as the Basic Education and Gender Equality (BEGE) program. Notably, the progress made in the promotion of children’s rights was made possible through NGO groups. Thus, we argue that from the current study, rural people are ready to engage other stakeholders and work together to mitigate these multiple vulnerabilities in rural learning ecologies leaving them empowered and transformed.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study presented proof to answer the question of how can we mitigate multiple vulnerabilities in Zimbabwean rural learning ecologies through the ABA. In accordance with the ABA, this study acknowledges that teachers and the headmaster, school projects former learners/old students, social workers and educational psychologists, local organisations, and NGO are critical assets that can be utilised to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities in Zimbabwean rural learning ecologies. By understanding ABA at work, we did not only dwell much at the challenges that can hinder the ABA to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities but also looked at how best we can utilise the assets identified to lessen those multiple vulnerabilities in Zimbabwean rural learning ecologies. The government of Zimbabwe has been and is playing a pivotal role to mitigate these multiple vulnerabilities, although it is being affected by socio-economic challenges at stake.

The recommendations are made in order to address the multiple vulnerabilities in Zimbabwean rural learning ecologies. Based on the research findings and conclusions

presented above, the researchers recommend need to educate and motivate the rural communities about the assets they can utilise to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities. From the findings of this study, it is further recommended that there has to be collaborative work among all stakeholders (government, rural schools, the community, and the learners) on how to mitigate multiple vulnerabilities through the ABA.

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