

Participation of Women in Developmental Issues in Nkayi District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the participation of women in development issues in Nkayi district, located in Matabeleland North of Zimbabwe. This study was carried out because of several questions on the role women played in development issues. The study mainly focused on three key objectives; to analyse women's participation in community development, to explore effects of women participation in economic development and to trace development in the community through women participation in policy dialogue and decision making processes. To answer the research question, the study used a qualitative research paradigm because it is culturally specific and contextually rich in the data that it produces. A sample of twenty-four (24) women participants and four (4) key participants were identified using the convenience and purposive sampling techniques respectively. Research instruments that were used in data collection were Focus Group Discussions, In-depth interviews and observations. Research findings reflected that agricultural projects are at the centre of community development and women are involved in poultry farming, animal husbandry and vegetable production in Nkayi. This has resulted in poverty alleviation, making it easier for the community to address its social needs. The community has been able to develop infrastructure, for example, construction of schools that are in a bad state in the district. The study also discovered that some women were not enjoying the benefits of their agricultural projects because of gender based violence, a factor attributed to less participation in policy dialogue and decision making processes. Basing on these findings, the study recommends the Zimbabwean government to prioritise women's involvement in the implementation of development programmes that support farmers, for example the recently introduced Command Agriculture which supports farmers with inputs. The programme supports women who are involved in agricultural productivity by boosting their income. Women should also participate in policy dialogue and decision making processes that affect them negatively.

Keywords: Community Development, Economic Development, Policy Dialogue and Decision making.

1.0 Introduction

Numerous questions have been raised on the role of women in development issues. Consequently, this study has been conducted to analyse the participation of women in development issues in Nkayi District, located in Matabeleland North in Zimbabwe. The majority of women as alluded to by IFAD (2012), are involved in agricultural productivity. In the recent past, the government of Zimbabwe embarked on the land fast track reform programme and has maintained that women were equal beneficiaries in that programme. Mutanana and Bukaliya (2015) aver that women constitute the majority of the poor in Zimbabwe, an observation supported by Khan and Noreen (2012), who posit that about 70% of the women in the world are poor. Studies have also shown that women are discriminated upon in various spheres of life. They lack the voice in decision making because of the patriarchal system that is still in existence. To help them, they must be encouraged to participate in development initiatives, economic, social and political spheres.

2.0 Background to the Study

Ashley & Roe (1998), WTO (2003) and Mutanana & Gasva (2015) agree that participation of women in development issues is a panacea to poverty reduction. Ashley & Roe (1998) note that women and development issues have been under scrutiny since time immemorial and have attracted interest among scholars, economists, donors as well as governments in developing countries, such as Zimbabwe. To this end, the WTO (2003) discovered that development institutions and policy makers now view active participation of women in community transformation activities as a potential development tool which can be used in eradication of poverty and transforming positive livelihoods of people in the rural communities, a similar finding, made by Mutanana & Gasva (2015) in their study on the impact of women empowerment to rural women and the community. The study therefore sought to carry out an analysis of participation of women in development issues.

Several researchers, among them Duflo (2012), Reeves and Baden (2000), Ushewokunze (2012), Mutanana & Bukaliya (2015) and Mutanana & Gasva (2015) strongly support the idea of women participation in policy making issues as a way of enhancing development. Evidence shows that in developed countries, participation of women in social development issues and policy making has generated benefits that affect women and their communities (Duflo, 2012 and Mutanana & Gasva, 2015). This shows that the society as a whole is bound to benefit from women's participation in development issues.

In developing countries such as Zimbabwe, questions have been raised over the relationship between participation of women in policy making and development issues. Mokate (2004) strongly believes that women should participate in decision making processes. Mutanana and Gasva (2015) agree with this perception and argue that participation of women in development issues is not only an issue of human rights or social justice, but a crucial contribution in solving pressing needs and often-excluded segments of community. Evidence shows that solution to women's strategic and basic needs are part of the development process (Mutanana & Gasva, 2015; Mokate, 2004; Ashley & Roe, 1998, and WTO, 2003). Some researchers have suggested that effective and sustainable solutions in the community require women's participation in development issues. For instance, in their findings, Mutanana and Gasva (2015) observed that as a result of participation in development issues, a group of women were now empowered thereby being able to make their own decisions.

Similarly, it was necessary in this study to explore the effects of women participation in decision making processes towards development issues in Zimbabwe. Despite the participation of women in development issues, Mokate (2004) strongly believes that there are many obstacles and barriers that continue to complicate their participation. Mutanana and Bukalia (2015) identify these as lack of representation of women in decision making processes, gender based violence and unfair cultural practices. Women in Nkayi District are not an exception to these obstacles and barriers. Nonetheless, the study sought to answer various questions in relation to development activities and these included participation of women in community and economic development, effects of public policy dialogue and decision making processes.

3.0 Objectives and area of the study

The study focused on women participation in development activities using Nkayi District as a case study. The focus was on three specific contexts; participation of women in community development, the effects of women in economic development and in public policy dialogue and decision making. The following were the objectives of the study;

- To analyse women's participation in community development.
- To explore effects of women's participation in economic development initiatives.
- To trace development in community through participation of women in public policy dialogue and decision-making processes.

4.0 Review of Related Literature

4.1.1 Sustainable Livelihoods

Chambers and Conway (1992) posit that sustainable livelihoods is a way of understanding the people's way of life. This approach is suitable and it places women at the centre of development agenda. It draws its influence from Chambers and Conway (1992), who argue that livelihoods comprise of capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. The researcher believed that livelihoods is sustainable if it can make people cope with and recover from stress and shock. A livelihoods provides sustainable livelihoods for the next generation. As a people centred approach, the sustainable livelihoods approach is holistic and dynamic in nature. Thus, the theory has been adopted for this study as a framework for analysing women participation in community development and its effects on economic development to enhance sustainable livelihoods for the community in question. This theory blends well with Cornwall, Musyoki and Pratt (2001: 6), who argue that 'the participatory approach is always "collective in nature" and the process requires groups of people to engage collectively in a particular social problem'. The most important step in this context is 'the collective identification of the problem; collective analysis of the problem and finally collective action or solution to the problem'. Women's participation in this context is viewed as a collective enterprise which emphasizes on changing the roles of the community from the passive recipient of information to generators of ideas and catalyst of the process (Tandon, 2005). This is a significant distinction from an individual effort to a community centred approach, hence women's participation in such issues cannot be over emphasised. Their participation in the development agenda becomes an asset to construct their wellbeing and living.

4.1.2 Participatory Theory

This theory provided a framework for tracing development through women's participation in public policy dialogue and decision making. Arnstein (1999) depicted the participation of people through a ladder with 8 levels, which was grouped into 3 categories depending on people's access to power in decision making and resources. In this ladder, non-participation denoted the lowest level whilst citizen's power was reflected on the highest level. What it shows is that lack of participation in decision making affect women's life and can result in poverty hence White (2011) stresses that the form and function of participation can become a focus for a struggle.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

The study looks at the following concepts; women participation in community development, effects of this

participation on economic development and participation of women in public policy dialogues and decision making.

4.2.1 Women Participation in Community Development

Van (2006), IFAD (2012) & Oakley (1995) posit that participation of women in development activities emerged in the 1970s through the Women in Development (WID) approach which was calling for special treatment of issues of women in development. This was an integration of women into the global economies by improving their status as well as assisting women in total development (Van, 2006; Mutanana & Bukaliya, 2015 and Mutanana & Gasva, 2015). However, the Gender and Development approach was later introduced and proposed more emphasis on gender relations than seeing women's issues in isolation (Van, 2006 and Mutanana & Bukaliya, 2015). Reeves & Baden (2000) believe the WID approach called for attention towards women in policy and practice of development. The approach also integrated women in the development process. Women were thus regarded as a very important component of the community in bringing about development. As such, the concept of participation of women in development is viewed from the wider meaning of community development.

In community development, people's efforts are merged with those of the government and the non-governmental organisations in order to raise economic, socio-cultural, and environmental standards and to fully assist in national development. This assertion is supported by the World Bank (1995) when it defines community development as a process in which poverty in the rural community is alleviated through a sustained increase in productivity as well as incomes of low rural workers and households. For Ifeanyichukwu (1997), community development implies socio-economic changes that involve transformation of the agrarian society so that it can reach a common set of goals in development which are based on the needs and capabilities of people. Njoku (1995) contends that community development as a process in which political, cultural, and educational motivation of the rural community enables them to exploit and harness resources in their environment for the socio and economic well-being of the community. However, Batten (1997) stresses that community development is only possible when the community thoroughly discuss their wants and plan to satisfy them. As highlighted by IFAD (2012), women in the rural communities rely on agricultural productivity, and this becomes their main line of community development. Women should receive the much needed support from the government, and non-governmental organisations to enhance agricultural productivity.

4.2.2 Effects of Women Participation in Economic Development

Duflo (2012) observes that there is a strong correlation between economic development and women's legal rights. Duflo (ibid) identifies diverse areas such as violence against women, access to bank loans, property rights, access to land, and abortion as some of the legal rights that affect women in development. IFAD (2012) and Mutanana & Bukaliya (2015) also demonstrate that in economies where there is gender equality in terms of opportunities and benefits, there is a higher economic growth and a better quality of life. Programmes informed by the WID approach address women's practical needs by creating employment and income generating opportunities (Reeves & Baden, 2000). Duflo (2012) is of the opinion that woman's empowerment leads to a greater improvement in children's welfare, for instance health and nutrition. Empowering women is vital in order to meet the challenges of improving food and nutrition security (IFAD, 2012). This enables the poor rural people to overcome poverty (Mutanana & Gasva). The United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) (2011) discovered that empowering women in rural areas is essential in solving some of today's most serious challenges. UNESCO (ibid) identifies these challenges as food security, sustainable development and poverty reduction. For IFAD (2012), agricultural growth has been enhanced in a situation where women and men are enabled to participate fully. Mutanana & Bukaliya (2015) highlight that economic empowerment has been the government's thrust to enable empowerment of women. Therefore this implies that participation of women in developmental issues has got a direct effect on economic development.

4.2.3 Participation of Women in Public Policy Dialogue and Decision Making

Empowerment is only visible when women participate in public policy dialogue and decision making. For Narayan (2000), empowerment basically means expansion of assets and the capability of a poor person to participate, negotiate, influence, control, and hold accountable a position and institution that affect his/her life. Ostergaard (1992) believes empowerment is a policy to women in development which does not only redefine power relations between women and men, but help in increasing control of women over their choices in life. Magadza (2006) describes women empowerment as an instrument that seeks to increase their self-confidence and self-reliance which consequently result in them being more active players in the community. As such, participating in public policy dialogue and decision making is an indication that women have been empowered. In a study on gender and development issues, Mutanana and Bukaliya (2015) claim that the Zimbabwean government has enacted legal frameworks and policies that ensure women participate in decision making and these include the National Legislative Framework that have made significant strides in amending and enacting legislations that advance gender equality and equity objective. Ushewokunze (2012) supports the government's policy towards women empowerment and development. She believes that like any other policy, it is there to act

as a principle that guide decisions on women participation in development issues. The objective is to achieve rational outcomes which are in line with the international human rights framework.

Duflo (2012) supports women's participation in economic development, and strongly believes that in order to bring equity between men and women, it is necessary to take policy actions that favour women at the expense of men for a long time. Participation by women in decision making influence the direction of public policy dialogue and, ultimately policy decisions (Mokate, 2004). Women's networks help in strengthening initiatives to consolidate a policy agenda (Ushewekunze, 2012 and Mutanana & Bukaliya, 2015). This is sensitive to women's concerns and ensures women development issues are advocated for effectively in favour of their agenda. As such, women networks are perceived to be more forceful and legitimate actors in the policy making process. Sarah C White (1996) emphasises that participation can become a form and function as a focus for struggle.

Mokate (2004) argues that in order to promote greater participation in development issues, it is necessary to promote female leadership in diverse dimensions of public life. These include politics, economic activity, labour or trade unions, and professional organizations at the community and national levels. In a similar study, Mutanana and Bukaliya (2015) discovered that the government of Zimbabwe recognises fully the participation of women in development processes at all levels. They further noted that this ensures sustainable development as well as attainment of equality between men and women.

Duflo (2012) posits that economic development alone is not sufficient in ensuring a significant progress in important dimensions of women's empowerment. Her argument is directed at significant progress in decision-making ability of women in the face of pervasive stereotypes against their ability. IFAD (2012) argues that development programmes are relevant and sustainable where women and men participate in rural institutions; express their needs, and priorities in decision-making forums. Mokate (2004) opines that organized women ensure an attention to the apparent questionable gender neutrality of governance structures and public policy decisions. Consequently, they help to identify and call public attention to constraints against gender equality as well as greater participation of women in development issues. Women can also challenge wrong assumptions as well as concepts that can influence public policy decision-making. Eventually, this encourages more inclusive, encompassing and equitable public policy.

5.0 Methodology

This study was premised on data that was collected at Nkayi district, situated in the province of Matabeleland North in Zimbabwe. The study used the qualitative research method for various reasons. Mack et al (2005) believe that the qualitative research method is not only culturally specific, but contextually rich in terms of the data produced. The method enabled the researcher to understand the problem from the perceptions of the local population. Mutanana and Gasva (2015) agree that qualitative research is effective in obtaining information specifically about culture, opinions, values, and behaviours of particular populations. Consistent with the assertion of Cohen et al (2006), the method enabled the researcher to generate themes, raise issues, describe, demonstrate and contextually explore the research problem. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions and field observations. Questions on the data collection instruments were shaped through the literature reviewed. Participants for data collection were drawn from Chief Nkalakatha, Fanisoni, Komayanga, Tohwe, Skopo, Sivomo, and Dakamela areas. A sample of three (3) Focus Group Discussions, each comprising eight (8) women participants was identified using convenience sampling technique. The researcher also identified four (4) key informants (2 Headmen and 2 Councillors) using purposive sampling, consistent with Mack et al (2005)'s affirmation and data collection was made through in-depth interviews. The researcher also carried out some field observations to get first-hand information of what was happening on the ground.

6.0 Study Limitations

The study area is widely dispersed throughout the rural heartland of Nkayi district and it has an average catchment area radius of about 80 kilometres from Nkayi business centre. Mobilising women participants was a challenge; hence the researcher had to adopt the convenience sampling technique in identifying participants for the study. The other limitation was that the study was based on in-depth interviews carried out with eight (8) participants and three (3) groups of Focus Group Discussions, which is however, not unusual in qualitative research studies. The study nonetheless, brings out issues about women's participation in development programmes at Nkayi District specifically, and Zimbabwe in general.

7.0 Data Analysis

The researcher recorded in-depth interviews, translated them into English and had them typed in Microsoft Word. The researcher then analysed these interviews using content analysis. The in-depth interviews were read several times and recurring themes were identified. Data analysis was done by the researcher.

8.0 Discussion of Findings

8.1 Women Participation in Community Development

The World Bank (1995) defines community development as a process in which poverty in the rural community is alleviated through a sustained increase in productivity as well as incomes of rural workers and households. The study sought to find out the activities that women in the area under study were involved in to ensure sustained livelihoods. The researcher started by interviewing the Headmen and Councillors. The four key informants agreed that some women in the community had benefited during the fast track land reform programme which was initiated by the government of Zimbabwe in early 2000. Key informants were quizzed on whether women had equally benefited from the programme, but they indicated that the majority of women in the area under study were married, as such they had benefited through their husbands. One key informant added; technically women possessed the land, because they are the ones who make use of the land as their husbands live in urban areas at their places of employment, thus no time for them to cultivate the land. The researcher started by probing this assertion and observed that 67% of women participants' husbands were employed elsewhere; with 20% indicating that they were staying with their husbands, helping them to sustain their income through agricultural productivity. The remaining 13% were widows. This is consistent with IFAD's (2012) finding that women are at the centre of community development through agricultural productivity in rural areas. The researcher also found out activities which these participants were involved in. Participants indicated that they were involved in various activities ranging from chicken farming, animal husbandry and vegetable production. One participant was quoted saying;

I am rearing broiler chickens and I have managed to do so after getting a loan from a local politician. I sell these broilers to local teachers and nurses and also supply some to local business people. Apart from that, I grow green vegetables and tomatoes. This has assisted me to supplement my husband's salary and we have managed to educate our children up to university level.

Research findings showed that the majority of these women were rearing chicken broilers were involved in vegetable production as well. Further, the researcher established there is a local politician who is helping women with loans for chicken farming. Key informants agreed with this finding and it would appear they strongly believe, he is doing so in bona fide. Participants also seemed to be benefiting from animal husbandry. The researcher visited ten homesteads and observed that some participants were rearing pigs; some were rearing cattle with some running goat projects. However, the researcher observed that in areas such as Fanisoni, Skopo, and Sivomo vegetable production was dominating.

What it shows is that agricultural productivity is at the heart of community development in Nkayi district. This finding is consistent with the finding by Ifeanyichukwu (2011) and IFAD (2012) on the relevance of agricultural projects in community development. Both argue that community development implies socio-economic changes that involve transformation of the agrarian society so that it can reach a common set of goals in development which are based on the needs and capabilities of people. The researcher also observed that participants were benefiting from financial loans to kick start some of their programmes, a finding consistent with Duflo's (2012) where she stated that there is a strong link between financial support and women empowerment. Consistent with Chambers and Conway's (1992) argument, women in the community are assured of a sustainable livelihood, they have the capacity, assets and activities required for a means of living. Mutanana & Bukaliya (2015) and Mutanana & Gasva (2015) also state that agricultural projects are at the heart of community development in rural communities and have helped to ensure sustainable livelihoods in rural communities. Now, the researcher wanted to find out; what are the effects of participation of women in community development on economic development?

8.2 Effects of Women Participation on Economic Development

Gulet (1971) measured the success of community development through the following indicators:

- i. A better standard of living in the form of income and consumption levels. Families should also have access to medical services and education through a relevant economic growth process.
- ii. A conducive environment which enables people's self-esteem, for instance by establishing social institutions which promote respect and human dignity
- iii. An increase of freedom in the community by enlarging a range of choices, for example by increasing a variety of consumer services and goods

The researcher started by probing the standard of living among the Nkayi participants. For some participants, farming has improved their income and they are also able to access medical services at the local hospital. Key informants indicated that the community had managed to contribute towards the development of infrastructure. The researcher also observed that there was a variety of consumer goods; for instance, broiler chickens, vegetables and tomatoes. Butcheries are supplied with cattle, goats and pigs which they slaughter for meat.

What it shows is that women have contributed to the economic development in the communities where they lived. This finding corresponds with some researchers such as Ashley & Roe (1998), WTO (2003) and Mutanana & Gasva (2015) who agree that participation of women in development issues is a panacea to poverty reduction, a true finding in Nkayi District. IFAD (2012) and Mutanana & Bukaliya (2015) have also argued that in economies where there is gender equality in terms of opportunities and benefits, there is a higher economic growth and a better quality of life. Women in Nkayi have been offered these opportunities and benefits, and the result has been that they are contribution towards the development of the area. Programmes informed by the WID approach address women's practical needs by creating employment and income generating opportunities (Reeves & Baden, 2000). Similarly, women in Nkayi are generating incomes for their families. Consistent with Duflo's (2012) argument, women empowerment has led to a greater improvement in children's welfare, for instance health and nutrition in Nkayi district.

However, some women are not enjoying their benefits. Their husbands take all the proceeds gained from farming. One participant had this to say to the researcher;

My son and I work day and night. My husband is a drunkard. He takes all the money with himself. If I try to challenge him, he assaults me. What should I do?

It appears there is challenge in that some women are not enjoying the benefits of their input. Duflo (2012) has argued that economic development alone is not sufficient in ensuring a significant progress in important dimensions of women's empowerment. What it shows is that, gender equality programmes are not initiated so that women have a chance to participate in dialogue and decision making process thus eliminating gender inequality.

8.3 Participation of Women in Policy Dialogue and Decision Making

Duflo (2012) supports women's participation in economic development, but she strongly believes that in order to bring equity between men and women, it is necessary to adopt policy actions that favour women. Participation by women in decision making influences the direction of public policy dialogue and, ultimately policy decisions (Mokate, 2004). This study, inter alia sought to trace development in the community through participation by women in policy dialogue and decision making.

The researcher observed that the majority of leaders in the community were men. Key informants, all male, were quizzed on this issue. Informants agreed that naturally, women were afraid to take up positions of higher authority. Women participants were interviewed on this subject matter and they disagreed. Some argued, it is not because they were afraid, but they respect men as a cultural norm. This has affected women in decision making. Policy dialogue is carried out by men. However, the Zimbabwean Ministry of Woman Affairs, Gender and Community Development is trying to mobilise women to participate in policy dialogue. The biggest challenge with this dialogue is that it is mainly centred on gender based violence, and has nothing to do with economic development.

Therefore, the indication is that development in the community is not coming through participation in policy dialogue and decision making by women. This is contrary with the perceptions of fellow researchers, like Narayan (2000) who have argued that empowerment basically means expansion of assets and the capability of a poor person to participate, negotiate, influence, control, and hold accountable a position and institution that affect his/her life. Ostergaard (1992) also believes empowerment is a policy to women in development which does not only redefine power relations between women and men, but helps in increasing control of women over their choices in life, and this is not consistent with these findings. Magadza (2006) also describes women empowerment as an instrument that seeks to increase their self-confidence and self-reliance which consequently result in them being more active players in the community. Women in Nkayi need to be afforded that opportunity to be active players in issues affecting them and decision making. As shown by Duflo (2012), economic development alone is not sufficient in ensuring a significant progress in important dimensions of women's empowerment.

9.0 Conclusions

Based on these findings, the researcher concluded that through the agrarian land reform, agricultural productivity is at the centre of community development. Women are participating in community development through chicken farming, animal husbandry and vegetable production. This has assisted in poverty alleviation as the majority are now able to meet educational and medical costs of their families. Of late, the community has managed to take care of its social development needs like road and school development. However, there are some isolated cases of women who are not enjoying the benefits of their contribution because of gender based violence. This has been attributed to the fact that women are not participating in policy dialogue and decision making processes, they have never been excluded from participation but are negatively affected by it.

10. Recommendations

Premised on these conclusions, the researcher recommends the Zimbabwean government to ensure women are assisted with agricultural inputs and financial support to boost their income. The government of Zimbabwe recently launched Command Agriculture, a programme which aims to boost agricultural productivity. Therefore, the government should come up with various programmes specifically targeting women to boost their participation in such programmes. By so doing, this would reduce male dominance through which existing power relations are entrenched and reproduced. Women's voices would be heard through active involvement on issues negatively affecting them. Such programmes would involve women in policy dialogue and decision making processes. The Zimbabwean economy is based on agriculture, therefore, supporting rural women especially with policies favourable to them will help boost the economy and community development agenda.

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