
Women Empowerment and Gender Related Programmes Implementation in Hurungwe District, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the researchers carried out an analysis on women empowerment and implementation of gender related programs in Hurungwe District, a rural community located in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. A sample of 9 key informants and 12 group participants were selected using the convenience sampling technique. The researchers used the qualitative research design. Interviews and focus group discussions were used as a research instruments in the study. Findings revealed the community is facing a number of gender issues which include unfair distribution of agricultural inputs, lack of representation of women in decision making at local level, gender based violence and unfair cultural practices. To this end, the government departments in the district, led by the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development have come with programmes to deal with these issues. These are carrying out awareness campaigns and empowerment programmes for women. To ensure the successful implementation of these programmes, women and men have been involved in these gender related programmes and a strategy to ensure that they participate has been crafted. The programmes also endeavour to ensure the equal access and control over resources. The researchers recommended that the programmes be fully sponsored, and a monitoring and evaluation mechanism must be put in place to ensure the success of the implementation of these gender related programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment and development issues form the basis to achievement of sustainable development, peace and progress in both developed and developing countries. As such, there is need to channel more development aid towards women empowerment programmes. The Zimbabwean government has signed and ratified several international conventions and instruments that confirm its compliance with the international human rights framework, and has gone further to come up with a National Gender Policy Framework. But it would seem there is so much activity in the civil society as compared to the government itself when it comes to the implementation of gender empowerment programmes, particularly in rural communities. Unfortunately, the majority of the non-governmental organisations are located in bigger towns. For instance, the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association and the Musasa Project, organisations popularly known for fighting the rights of women are all located in bigger cities like Harare, Gweru and Bulawayo. This also applies to the non-governmental organisations popularly known for fighting the rights of the children, for instance Save the Children Trust, Justice for Children Trust, Child line and the Girl Child Network. This exposes women and children in rural community set-ups, and their only hope is in the government, in particular the Victim Friendly Unit, a section that was formed in the Zimbabwe Republic Police to assist victims of gender based violence, Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, and the Department of Social Services in the district. For these government departments to deliver, they must be capacitated with the resources to discharge their duties. Gender mainstreaming must also be at the centre of gender empowerment programs as women must participate in decision making at local level.

BACKGROUND

Several studies have shown that the women constitute the majority of the poor. For instance, Khan and Noreen (2012) state that about 70% of women in the world's population are poor. Women constitute almost half of the world's population but are discriminated in various spheres of life. IFAD

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(2011) recognises that some groups are often disproportionately hindered in their attempts to move out of poverty by disadvantages and exclusion rooted in the power inequality associated with gender, age and ethnicity identity. Rural women are also subjected to problems in many aspects because of the gendered social structure. To this end, rural women need to be empowered to claim their rights. Rural women are also better equipped to bring about change in their communities if they are empowered, justifying the importance of gender empowerment programs. However, Kato and Kratzer (2013) claim that empowerment of women is a global challenge since traditionally women have been marginalised and subjected under control of men.

Studies have shown that rural women generally have more limited access than men to inputs, services, rural organisations, productive infrastructure and technologies (IFAD, 2012). Rural women also lack the voice in decision making because of the patriarchal system still in existence in the African community. Zimbizi (2007) claims that women empowerment in patriarchal societies has achieved less progress than expected due to a deeply entrenched patriarchal system which is slow in transforming itself and a decline in the socio-economic and political system of the country. On the other hand, Visvanathan *et al* (2011) observes that patriarchy and liberal discourses at both national and international level have left unchallenged the question of gender relations in society and often made this attendant upon a sexual division of labour and individual negotiations within the family. The patriarchy system is worse in rural communities. IFAD (2012) has indicated that globally, and with a few exceptions rural women are far worse than rural men, and urban women and men, against every MDG indicator for which data is available. It is against this background that governments, and the Zimbabwean government included must seriously consider rural women in planning for gender empowerment programmes.

Addressing gender issues enhances the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of programmes and projects and benefits the entire household (IFAD, 2012). The empowerment of rural women have been supported by several organisations at global, regional and national level. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (2011) observed that empowering rural women is an essential part of the solution to some of today’s most serious challenges which range from food security, poverty reduction, to sustainable development. The Zimbabwean government has come with several policies and programmes aimed at addressing gender related issues.

Soon after the 1995 Beijing Conference, the government of Zimbabwe drew its own National Plan of Action for gender empowerment. This signified the government’s total commitment for ensuring the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of life. The National Plan of action followed the Gender and Development approach that seeks to mainstream gender into all spheres of life and development, unlike the women in development approach. The National Plan of Action was developed by and for all stakeholders involved in the advancement of women including government ministries. Critical areas of concern include women in politics and decision making, education and training of women, institutionalisation mechanisms for the advancement of women and the economy. The government of Zimbabwe recognises the need for full participation of men and women in development processes at all levels in order to ensure sustainable development and attainment for equality between both sexes. The government of Zimbabwe has enacted legal frameworks, policies and strategies in education, women in decision-making, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, gender equality and equity, children and youth, including women rights in order to achieve social development. Economic empowerment has also been the government’s thrust to enable the empowerment of women.

The country has ratified most of the fundamental conventions designed to achieve gender justice across sectors. The National Gender Policy is designed to translate and deliver on the provisions of an array of international, regional and national provisions (National Gender Policy, 2013-2017). According to the National Gender Policy, the following are some of the policies adopted by the government at International, Regional and National Level:

International Policy Framework

Zimbabwe is part to a number of international conventions that include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDEW) (1991), the Beijing Declaration on the Platform for Action (1995), the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), the Equal Remuneration Convention among some others.

Regional Policy Framework

At regional level, Zimbabwe has ratified the protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women, the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender and Equality in Africa, the Southern African Development Community’s (SADC) Gender and Development Protocol. Zimbabwe has also ratified the COMESA Gender Policy which fosters gender equality and equity at all levels of regional integration and cooperation.

National Legislative and Policy Framework

At National Level Zimbabwe has made significant strides in amending and enacting legislations to advance the gender equality and equity objective. These include the Maintenance Act (1999), Administration of Estate Act (1997), Education Act (2004), Labour Act (Chapter 28.01), Domestic Violence Act (2007) among some others.

The new Zimbabwean Constitution adopted in 2013 is also widely acknowledged for its firm commitment to gender equality. These policies and legislative framework and the prevailing social, economic and political developments provide a firm basis to pursue gender equality and equity defined in the National Gender Policy.

To this end, Ushewokunze (2012) posits that the Zimbabwean government’s policy on women empowerment and development, like any other policy is there to act as a principle or rule that guide decisions on women empowerment, with the objective of achieving rational outcomes that are in line with the international human rights framework and provisions for women’s rights as human rights. Ushewokunze also noted that until 2004 when the Zimbabwe National Gender Policy came into force the Zimbabwean government had been silent on local policies to complement their actions at international level where they had signed and ratified international human rights instruments on women’s rights as human rights. The introduction of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development has been welcomed as a positive development towards the empowerment of rural women. This ministry works hand in glove with the Victim Friendly Unit department, a section that was formed within the Zimbabwe Republic Police to assist victims of gender based violence. The department of Social Services has also been known for complementing the efforts by the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development to promote gender related programmes.

However, the UNICEF strategy paper (2008-2011) has described government policy on women empowerment as paper gains in women empowerment. The same paper has expressed the need to turn this into real transformational gains as Zimbabwe is still a long way from achieving a balanced gender equality status. Ushewokunze (2012) agrees with this perception when she states that implementation of government policies depend more on morality by individuals than on policies because decision making policies are flooded by men who tend to overlook some policy aspects that may have an impact on women empowerment and development. When women participate in project design and implementation, project sustainability is improved (IFPRI, 2000). Rural women are normally overlooked because the majority of them are not included in decision making. Successful program implementation calls for the community’s active participation (Population Communication Services, unpublished document) because empowerment of women cannot be achieved in a vacuum. Empowerment should also not be viewed as a zero-sum game where gains for women automatically imply losses for men.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Zimbabwe has signed a number of conventions and protocols on gender related issues, signalling its commitment on women empowerment activities. Various laws that support the empowerment of women have also been enacted. It would seem these policies have not been fully implemented, particularly in rural communities like Hurungwe District, the area under study. To some extent, the UNICEF strategy paper (2008-2011) is justified when it describes the government policies on women empowerment as paper gains in women empowerment, as the majority of women in rural communities are still lagging behind. Inferences drawn have been that the majority of the organisations fight for women rights are found in bigger cities. This leaves the government of Zimbabwe with the main responsibility to advocate, educate and capacitate women in rural

communities through its district offices to ensure the full and equal participation of these women in all spheres of life. The objective of the study was thus to analyse women empowerment and the implementation of gender related programs in Hurungwe District, a rural community in Zimbabwe.

METHODOLOGY

Research Setting

The study was carried out in Hurungwe District, located Mashonaland West Province, in central northern Zimbabwe. It is located approximately 85 kilometres by road, northwest of Chinhoyi, the nearest large town, and the location of the provincial headquarters. This location lies about 200 kilometres, northwest of Harare, Zimbabwe's capital and largest city. Hurungwe district borders with the Republic of Zambia, about 170 kilometres, northwest of Karoi. Hurungwe District has a population of 361 370 people and of these 187 160 are males and 179 210 are females. Organisations that are charged with the duty of implementing gender related programs are located in Karoi Town. As such, government employees should travel out of the town to implement these gender related programs. The areas that need to be attended are widely spread. There are five non-governmental organisations that are operational in the district, which have been complementing the government efforts to implement gender empowerment programmes. These are World Vision, Family Aids Counselling Trust (FACT), Led Trust, GOAL and Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED).

Research Methods, Research Design and Data Collection

This was a case study of factors affecting government employees in implementing gender related programs in Hurungwe District. A case study was used because it provides a detailed profiling of the factors affecting the implementation of gender empowerment programs in the rural set-up. A case study is an intensive investigation into an individual or social unit or small portion of the community in order to gain a deeper insight. A case study method allowed the researchers to present the findings in the form of words, that is, a case study as an example of a qualitative research, enabled the researcher to present findings in a narrative form. It also involves a small number of subjects and a small definable geographical area; this therefore demanded less in terms of time, money and physical effort. Data was collected using key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Patton (1990) posits that the purpose of open-ended (semi-structured) interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind but to access the perspective of the one being interviewed. The researcher also has to take cognisance of the nature of the topic they are investigating (Bryman, 2008).

A total of 9 respondents participated in this research study. The key informants were drawn from government departments that have been known for championing gender related programs in the district. These are; Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, the Zimbabwe Republic Police, through its Victim Friendly Unit section, and the Social Services Department. The Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development have decentralised its operations by recruiting coordinators at ward levels to ensure the outreach of its programs. The researcher had to carry out in-depth interviews with 1 key informant from the district office and 1 Ward Development Coordinator to have their insight on the implementation of gender related programs in the district. The Victim Friendly Unit, on the other hand is found at every police station in Zimbabwe and is manned by police officers commonly referred to as Victim Friendly Unit Officers. The researcher interviewed 2 Victim Friendly Unit Officers to get their insight on the implementation of gender related programs in the area. Another key informant was selected from the Social Services Department and 4 key participants were drawn from the non-governmental organisations. The total number of key informants was 9 and convenience sampling was used to identify the respondents in this study.

The researchers also carried out a focus group discussion which comprised of 8 females and 4 males to have their insight on the gender issues in rural communities. Focus groups are useful for gathering information from a group of respondents at one time. The face-to-face involvement of a qualified moderator can ensure that the conversation is always on track and interaction of the participants led to the in depth discussion.

Study Limitations

The major limitation of this study is that it is based on the in-depth interviews carried out from 9 key informants and a group of 12 group participants from Hurungwe District. However, this is not unusual

in qualitative studies. The study, nonetheless brings out the implementation of gender related programs in rural communities of Zimbabwe.

Data Analysis

In-depth interviews were recorded, translated into English and typed in Microsoft Word. Content analysis was then used to analyse these interviews. The interviews were read several times and recurring themes were identified. For the purposes of this study, the analysis focused on the gender issues in the district, gender related programs and challenges faced in implementing these programs. The analyses of data was done by the researchers.

RESULTS

Gender Issues Affecting Women in Hurungwe District

The Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD) (1998) describes a gender issue as one which arises when a sense of grievance and injustice is felt by women. For instance, when only male needs are met at the expense of women’s needs. The following are some of the gender issues that were identified in Hurungwe District.

Unfair Distribution of Resources

In Hurungwe district where the study was carried out, the incidence of poverty is high and soils are sandy and in need of a lot of fertiliser, which is not available. The government and some non-governmental organisations assist with inputs like maize seed and fertilizer during the farming season. The biggest challenge is that the majority of the women do not have access to these inputs. A woman group participant explained:

“Now that we are close to the farming season, the government and non-governmental organisations bring some inputs like seed maize and fertilizers to assist us. The biggest challenge is that these are all taken by men. As women, we are not considered when it comes to the inputs. My husband has many wives; he takes the inputs with him to the other women and leaves me to suffer with our five children. This is unfair.”

The participant is surviving in a polygamous marriage. She cannot access the inputs because she is married. Her husband takes the inputs with him to the other women, and she has to find a means to sustain herself. Another group participant also explained:

“Look, my husband passed away some five years ago. But these men take the inputs away with them. How am I supposed to survive?”

These women are side lined because Hurungwe West is a patriarchal community. This has exposed the majority of the women into poverty, a fact that participant 2 confirmed.

Decision Making at Local Level

This explains why women are not complaining in about unfair distribution of resources at local level. Women are not participating in decision making processes at local level. Women are also not involved in planning and findings reflected that they are somewhat satisfied with that.

Gender Based Violence

Gender Based Violence is also rampant in the community. Participant 3 confirmed that there are a lot of domestic violence and rape cases which are received from area under study. A woman group participant bemoaned:

“Even if I am assaulted, there is nothing that I can do. He is my husband, the father of my four children. If he goes to jail, what will I do? Who will look after my children? What will my husband’s relatives think about me? I have no choice but to let it go. God knows.”

The woman cannot report her husband because she is economically dependent on him. She is also worried about how her husband’s relatives will treat her. Participant 3 also added that cases of rape, particularly rape by close relatives are on the increase. These are rape by close relatives, especially

uncles, brothers, step-fathers, fathers and neighbours. It would seem, the cases that they have received are tip of the ice berg considering that many cases are only reported after an awareness campaign has been carried out. A woman participant had this to say:

“It is true, there are a lot of cases rape being committed particularly against children. These cases are not reported because they are committed by close relatives. It can be brother who has raped your daughter, what will the relatives think if you sent him to jail?”

Participant 4 disclosed that the majority of the cases are resolved through a round table system, where in family members sit together to try to solve the matter at family level. Asked why they do not tip off the police if they happen to know these cases, a group participant shouted:

“*Tinotyia kuroiyiwa!* (We are afraid to be bewitched!)”

The community believes in witchcraft, but this has exposed the children, particularly the girl child to these heartless men who similarly believe in witchcraft activities. Participant 4 narrated a recent case which occurred in the area:

“A 54 year old man raped her 4 year old niece. It so happened that as he was right on top of the survivor, he was seen by his wife who the reported the matter to the police. His wife could not hold her tears as she narrated the ordeal because she and her husband (the rapist) were both on the Anti-Retroviral program.”

The offender is HIV positive, confirming the assertions by one male group participant who said people in the area are raping children because they are misinformed by traditional healers that if they have sexual intercourse with children it cures AIDS.

Child Marriages

Findings revealed that a number of cases that are not reported cases of statutory rape. A statutory rape is a situation where a girl under the age of 16 years have sexual intercourse with a men over the age of 16 years. The majority of these girls have ended up getting married early. Child marriages have become a cause of concern in this area. Participant 1 noted that this could be the reason behind the rise of domestic violence cases because these girls are premature to be mothers.

Culture

Culture was also identified as another challenge in the area under study. The community still believes in wife inheritance, where a woman should be married with the deceased’s young brother, or else she has to pack her bags and go. Some group participants felt that some traditional issues are difficult to report and among these are appeasing ancestral spirits. In some cases parents who are unable to pay what is required by the spirit medium end up pledging their daughter instead. Some family relationships were blamed for the exploitation of the girl child and among them the relationships between the girl child and a brother in law (*chiramu* in Shona or *sibale* in Ndebele).

Education

The study also found that there was lack of appreciation for education leading to low literacy levels. There was no concern for girls who drop out of school. Participant 7 disclosed that his organisation is offering fees for the girl child but the number of drop outs is so disappointing

One group participant said,

“Some parents do not care whether the girl child goes to school or not, if she says I no longer want to go to school, they just accept it.”

Lack of appreciation of education has long time negative effects on women. The researcher experienced this and felt sad that some young women could not read or write. This was confirmed by a group participant who had this to say:

“Some women do not even know their date of birth and cannot read what is written on their hospital record card. Do you think a woman who has not completed her education will be able to assist her child with homework or be concerned if the child drops out of school?”

High levels of illiteracy also affected the parents’ response to school development programmes.

The results revealed that gender mainstreaming is still a long way to go in Hurungwe West. This has exposed women to higher levels of poverty. Gender based violence is also rampant in the area, in particular domestic violence and rape by close relatives. Child marriages have thus been seen to be on the increase. Culture was also identified to be at the centre stage of all the challenges related to gender in the community. The community still believes in wife inheritance, appeasing ancestral spirits and there is no appreciation for education. Some people cannot afford to pay hospital fees. It is against this background that the government must implement the gender related programs. But, does it have any gender related programs in place?

Gender Related Programs

Mutswanga, Dube and Gandari (2010) have described these programmes as those which target women and or men to address equality. A gender related programme is based on the analysis gender relations, unlike women projects which tend to focus only on the situation of women. In coming up with gender related programs, one has got to study the contextual factors influencing gender inequality, and in this case the factors are women not participating in decision making at local level, gender based violence, the illiteracy rate among women which is poor, and culture.

Findings revealed that there are a number of programs that have been put in place to deal with gender issues. The Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development is the lead Ministry in coordinating these programs using a multisectoral approach where it is working hand in glove with other government departments and non-governmental organisations.

Awareness Campaigns

Awareness campaigns are being carried out on the rights of women and children. The community is also being educated on gender based violence, laws and mechanisms of assisting women and children. Findings also revealed that the ministry ensures the implementation of the National GBV strategies and policies. The community is also educated on the referral system and reporting procedures on GBV including case management. The district spearheads prevention and protection measures for survivors. It also spearhead commemorations of the International Women’s Day, International Day of Families and 16 days of Activism against GBV in line with national, regional and international requirements. As outlined above, the ministry works hand in glove with other government departments. These include the Victim Friendly Unit, the Social Services Department, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

Participant 4 disclosed that the multisectoral approach is proving to be useful as the section is managing to meet its objectives. These include carrying out at least five awareness campaigns per month, educating the community on the various laws that protect women and children against gender based violence. The Victim Friendly Unit has also ensured that cases of gender based violence are prioritised and attended in accordance with the minimum standard outlined in the Police Service Charter, which demands that all reports must be attended as soon as possible. The Victim Friendly Unit also prioritise supporting victims with timely access to medical examination, treatment and access to Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) and Emergency Contraception (EC) within 72 hours of the incident. Participant 8 added:

“We are working as a team. We recently held an awareness campaign in Birimahwe which was attended by over 1500 people. It was an Anti-Domestic Violence public awareness campaign. It was attended by women, men and children. Senior government officials were invited and they attended. Several awareness campaigns have been held at Batanai, Chundu and Kazangarare. Our objective is to educate the community on the dangers of domestic violence.”

The Social Services Department has not been left out in the fight against gender based violence. Participant 5 outlined its roles, which include ensuring the immediate safety and well-being of the child. It also ensures emergency medical care is given to survivors and that all cases have been reported to the Victim Friendly Unit. The department also strives to increase economic opportunities for the vulnerable groups.

Empowerment of Women

A number of women are subjected to gender based violence because they are economically dependent on men. The Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community development works hand in glove

with non-governmental organisations to try to empower women so that they can stand up for their rights. Participant 1 disclosed that the ministry has increased the number of women groups benefiting from women’s development funds. They are also mobilising resources to empower women. They are also strengthening and establishing mechanisms for women to effectively participate and benefit from various empowerment programs. These include the land reform programme in which the ministry has advocated for women to get pieces of land. The ministry is also striving to ensure that all women benefit from the agricultural inputs scheme. Participant 9 revealed that local non-governmental organisations that are complementing government efforts of empowering women. These are Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) and World Vision which are providing educational assistance. Participant 7 also disclosed that Led Trust and Goal are also supporting with agriculture inputs. Participant 1 also added that the district is working with other organisations like which are based in Harare. They come and hold workshops in the district and this has helped in implementing gender related programs.

From these findings, the researcher noted that there are two main programs that have been put in place by the government at district level. These are carrying out awareness campaigns and empowering women. The district has adopted a multisectoral approach in implementing these programmes.

Implementation of Gender Related Programs

Mutswanga, Dube and Gandari (2010) identify four key areas that should be considered in programmes implementation. These are participation of women and men in the programme including decision making, strategies that involve men and women, equitable access and control over resources and steering the programme with a view to increasing women and men’s equal benefits.

Participation of Women and Men

Findings revealed that men are not participating in awareness campaigns that are held in the area. Participant 6 disclosed the majority of the awareness campaigns are attended by women, yet men are the majority of the perpetrators of gender based violence. Participant 3 stated that the Victim Friendly Unit has adopted an approach of giving feed back to the community, particularly in cases of rape to inform the community on the consequences that would have befallen the perpetrators. However, the efforts have been futile because of the non-attendance of men. Men in the area have a negative attitude towards these awareness campaigns. On the other hand, women are not part of the decision makers at local level. This has affected them particularly when it comes resource allocation. Culture was also identified as another challenge to the implementation of gender empowerment programs in the district. Participant 9 disclosed that it is still a patriarchical society where men still believe women should not be empowered. This perception has hindered the progress of gender empowerment programs because women too believe that men are the only decision makers. A male group participant commented:

“The women’s role is in the kitchen. I am the father and it is my responsibility to look after the children. We cannot be two men in the same house.”

If women are empowered, some men believe they will not listen to them, as such they should stay like that. Women too, it would seem have accepted that position. For instance, a woman group participant said:

“Well that is our culture. The man is the breadwinner.”

This women is convinced that the men is the decision maker and her role is in the kitchen.

Strategies to Involve Men and Women

Men do not support gender empowerment programs in the area. For women to come out and participate in gender empowerment programs, they need to seek permission from the husband, who may deny them. The end result has been that women are not participating in these programs. Findings revealed that men are not participating in the implementation of the gender related programs in Hurungwe district. The steering committee for programmes implementation involve men and women at district level. The district has also came up with a strategy of involving men and women in steering the programmes at ward level. The Chiefs, Headmen and Village heads have been mobilised to ensure

that men attend the awareness campaigns that are held in the community. To ensure this strategy succeeds, the steering committee ensures that the Chief in the area is attendance. People in rural communities have so much respect for their chiefs, and no one would want to abscond these meetings. Participant 1 noted:

“At times we take advantage of non-governmental organisations when they go to distribute food. Obviously, men will be in attendance because there is food distribution.”

These strategies have proved to be effective in the implementation of gender related programmes in Hurungwe district.

Equitable Access and Control over Resources

There is a gap which was identified in the distribution of resources and control of resources. Women are not getting equal access to resources, like agricultural inputs. The village head is responsible with the distribution of these resources. Women are also not in control of resources like cattle and goats. A group participant remarked:

“Ndezva baba! (It’s for husband)”

Women are only in control of chickens, and perhaps their property in the kitchen. This has affected women in several ways because the husband can make a decision to sell the property without the women’s consent. To this end, the steering committee is striving to educate the community on the women’s rights. The programmes are therefore being steered with a view to increase women and men’s equal rights.

Challenges Faced in the Implementation of Gender Related Programmes

Hurungwe District is widely dispersed and the offices of the programme implementers that include the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, the Victim Friendly Unit, Department of Social Services, non-governmental organisations are located in Karoi Town and Magunje Town. The programme implementers stay away from the rural community. To ensure its outreach, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development has decentralised its operations at ward level. There are Ward Development Coordinators who continuously carry out awareness campaigns on gender based violence. They are also responsible for identifying skills enhancement for women at community level and implementing relevant empowerment programs.

The major challenge disclosed by the participants is transport, to go into the community to promote gender empowerment programs. For instance, awareness campaigns need to be carried every now and again to keep the community in touch with the developments. Participant 1 said that at times they have to take advantage of the non-governmental organisations when they go out to the rural communities.

Participants also identified financial challenges as another factor that is affecting the implementation of empowerment programs in Hurungwe district. Findings revealed that the programs are poorly financed. The community has been rated as poor, and the poverty level is high. What it means is that they need financial assistance if the programs are to succeed. Program implementers from the government departments also need some allowances when they go out to motivate them.

From these findings, it can be seen that Hurungwe district is trying to implement gender related programmes by encouraging women and men to participate in these programmes. Strategies have also been incorporated to ensure men and women participate in these programmes. The programmes endeavour to ensure equitable access and control over resources. Be that as it may, the district is facing some challenges in implementing these programmes. These include resources like transport and finance.

DISCUSSION

There are a number of gender issues identified in Hurungwe district and these are; unfair distribution of agricultural inputs, participation of women in decision making at local level, gender based violence, child marriages, unfair cultural practices and unfair education system.

The majority of women do not benefit because they are not in the decision making position exposing them to higher levels of poverty. These findings agree with the observations by FAO (2009) that in

traditional rural societies, commercial agricultural production is mainly a male responsibility and rural women have the primary responsibility for maintaining the household. This is the belief that the majority of the people still have. The African Capacity Building Foundation (2009) observed that gender mainstreaming promotes the full participation of women in decision making so that women needs move from the periphery to the centre of development planning and resource allocation. If women in this community are mainstreamed in the community programs they will have access to the resources.

Gender based violence was also identified as an issue of concern in this community. Cases of domestic violence and rape cases continue to rise in the community. Sadly, the majority of these cases are committed against children and they are not reported because women are economically dependent on men. In a similar study in Zambia, the Zambia Association for Research and Development (1998) came with a similar finding when it noted that reported cases of violence against women are usually under estimates as most cases are not reported. Reports are not reported because the service providers are located in Karoi town, which is a distance away from rural community.

Culture has also been identified as an issue in Hurungwe district, for instance wife inheritance and using the girl child for spiritual appeasement. Some community members still believe that the girl child must not be sent to school. Mutswanga, Dube and Gandari (2010) notes that the degree to which communities share values, and or respect each other’s values is an important component. The majority of the community members believe in these unfair cultural practices. But for Giles (1995) values tend to change as the community grows more complex and more connected to the world. As such awareness campaigns can assist to change the views, perceptions and the attitude of the community towards gender issues.

Using the multisectoral approach, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development has come up with of programmes to assist the community. These include carrying out awareness campaigns on the various laws that protect women and children and empowering women economically. This is in line with Kabeer’s (1999) thinking that empowerment is about the ability to make strategic life choices which constitute three dimensions; resources, agency and achievements. Resources here are defined broadly as they include material human and social services. The agency include decision making, implying coming up with programs as is in this case has been a success. If the resources and the agency are well coordinated, one should come up with achievements, implying wellbeing outcomes.

The government departments and non-governmental organisations as the agency of gender empowerment have come with strategies to ensure the implementation of gender empowerment programmes. These include the participation of women and men in gender related programmes, strategies to include men and women in gender related programmes and equitable access and control over resources. These implementation strategies are well in line with Creig’s thinking. Creig (2007) has suggested that talking to men about power, gender justice is a necessary part of social justice. Creig also believes that the shared interests and common struggles that join women and men together is an important way to mobilize men for gender equality. He goes on to say if the first step is to get men engaged, the next is to get men organized.

Zainab (2007) claims that deciding to involve men in gender empowerment work does not mean that women must turn their attention away from the specific needs and realities of women—who, in many societies around the world, continue to face abuse, injustice, and marginalization at greater levels than their male counterparts. Rather, the decision to involve men acknowledges that building a gender equitable world requires social transformation, and social transformation requires all members of society—women *and* men—to work toward that goal. She goes on to say that an inclusive approach that fosters cooperation among all community members will increase the likelihood of sustainable change.

There are some challenges faced in Hurungwe District in implementing these programmes. The distance between the location of the offices of programme implementers and the community requires resources such as transport and finance. The Department of Transport in South Africa (2003) has noted that one of the reasons for transport being important for the development of women in rural

areas is that it has an impact on women’s access to health services, educational facilities, employment and participating in key decision making forums. Since the majority of these women are located in the rural communities transport has been observed to be a critical component in the implementation of gender empowerment programs. Duflo (2012) also notes that empirically, there is a strong a correlation between economic development and women’s legal rights, in areas as diverse as property rights, access to land, access to bank loans, and violence against women among some other things. What it implies is that women need to be empowered economically if they are to stand up for their rights. As such, gender related programs need full financial support if the government’s objectives are to be met.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates the implementing gender related programs in rural communities of Zimbabwe. It is apparent that there are a lot of gender issues in the rural communities that include unfair resources allocation, lack representation of women in decision making bodies at local level, gender based violence and unfair cultural practices. Programs such carrying out awareness campaigns and women empowerment have been crafted to help women and children in the rural community. To ensure the implementation of these programmes, women and men must participate in these programmes, including in decision making. Strategies must be crafted to ensure the participation of women and men in gender related programmes. The programmes must also ensure the equal access and control resources by women and men.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend that gender related programs, particularly in rural communities must be fully funded. Programme implementers must always be on the ground, with the people educating them on the developments. Gender related programmes need to be monitored and evaluated. Bates and Jones (2012) define monitoring as the regular collection and recording of information about the delivery of day to day project activities. Similarly, data on the day to activities must be captured to ensure the success of these programme implementations. These programmes must also be evaluated. Bates and Jones (2012) describe an evaluation as a process of measuring how successful an organisation or project was at in achieving its aims and objectives. Quarterly evaluations are recommended in this case to ensure the programmes being implemented are in the right course.

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