

# **The Impact of Handicrafts on Economic Development: A Case Study of Bulawayo Kraal in Binga, 1990-2000.**

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## **Abstract**

*The study examines how commercial basket weaving in Bulawayo Kraal Village in Binga District in Zimbabwe during the nineties contributed to the economic development of the community. Binga district is faced with a stagnant economy, poverty and lack of basic infrastructure. Governmental and humanitarian aid development strategies since independence have largely been ineffective in improving the economy of the region hence there is need to explore how indigenous knowledge systems such as the production of handicrafts can bring economic development. The paper shows key findings from qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews with basket-makers of Bulawayo Kraal and traders who used to buy Tonga baskets for resale. The data gathered established that commercial basket weaving in Bulawayo Kraal as a local initiative generated income for the people and as a result improved the economy but the community remained largely underdeveloped. The research revealed major challenges faced by basket makers leading to the decline of the trade but identified the potential of handicrafts in the economic development of rural economies with low agricultural potential.*

## **Introduction**

At independence the government of Zimbabwe inherited a largely neglected peasant-based rural economy whereby most of the rural population lacked adequate and fertile land, infrastructure and basic social amenities because of inequitable distribution of resources during the colonial era. Soon after independence, the new government introduced economic policies that attempted to address the social and economic injustices inherited during the colonial era. According to Mashingaidze (2013:384), most of Binga District (Matebeleland North Province) was not considered for these social and economic developments and the region remained underdeveloped, marginalized and poorer than most rural areas in the country. *Basilwizi's* report (2010:18) asserts that ninety per cent of the population in the Zambezi valley is chronically poor and Binga suffers from chronic food and water shortages as well as lack of

basic socio-economic services. Most of the socio-economic problems that the Tonga of Binga are facing can be traced back to the colonial era when they were forcibly displaced from the banks of Zambezi River between 1957 and 1958 into inhabitable areas when the Kariba Dam was constructed.

Many rural development projects such as provision of basic rural infrastructure and irrigation services have not been implemented in most parts of Binga by the government after independence. There was very little growth in the economy since resettlement and the district has been isolated by poor roads and communication networks (Financial Gazette 31-10-2013). The district lacks basic infrastructural development and hence has few employment opportunities for its inhabitants. Manyena (2008:310) analysed how development and humanitarian programmes implemented by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) after independence attempted to promote post-resettlement development in Binga but have failed to address the root of the problems facing the Tonga. These policies aimed to improve the economic and social life of the Tonga through a top-down approach. Even though NGOs in Binga claimed that they used a participatory approach, they failed to bring transformative economic empowerment and development (McGregor 2009). This widespread failure of a top-down approach to rural development planning has led to limited attention being paid to the indigenous knowledge systems of communities in an attempt to generate more effective development strategies. The concept of indigenous knowledge describes the inclusion of local voices and priorities, and guarantees empowerment at grassroots level (Limkriengkrai 2010:45). The local knowledge and wisdom of Binga communities are needed to inform and frame development projects which would consider the needs of the people as well as their environmental and technical knowledge in order to achieve sustainable food security and wealth creation. The Tonga handicrafts such as baskets, wood carvings, drums and pottery have a potential to develop and diversify the economy of the region if they are linked to the tourism industry for markets.

The study looked at commercial basket-weaving and trade during the nineties in a village known as Bulawayo Kraal in Binga district, Matebeleland North Province, as an initiative by the Tonga to circumvent deepening economic challenges and to develop as well as diversify their economy in an attempt to make a living in one of Zimbabwe's harshest environments. Basket-weaving is one of the oldest economic and social activities of the Tonga that has been carefully nurtured for centuries and has been renewed by each generation. Before displacement

from the Zambezi, basket-making was an integral part of their tradition and almost every woman was able to weave baskets because of the availability of the *mupokwe* (palm trees) and *mateete* (reeds) on the banks of the Zambezi. These resources grew in abundance in Bulawayo Kraal thus women continued to utilize them for making baskets mainly for local use after resettlement. The people used baskets (*nsangwa*) as utensils for carrying the harvest from the fields, carrying wild fruits and food gathered from the forest, winnowing sorghum, when grinding grain, as well as for storing food. The Tonga developed an independent identity to their basket making skills and styles, and today Tonga baskets are well known on the international market because of their artistic value (for example, Tonga baskets for sell are found on Mbare Contemporary Art, (<http://www.mbare.com/800.684.5429/html>)).

Although subsistence agriculture is important to the people of Binga, the area itself usually receives low rainfall per year since it is under Region V of Zimbabwe and that makes it near impossible for the people of that area to succeed in communal subsistence farming. This paper discusses the contribution of a non-farming activity, basket-weaving, to the economy of the Tonga during a period of nationwide economic, social and political hardships due to economic reforms of 1990-1999. The people of Bulawayo Kraal village commercialized basket-weaving at a time when agriculture and food production were not functional to meet their economic and social needs. Basket-weaving diversified their economy and improved the quality of life of the people. Richard (2007:11) suggests that income generation, by itself, is not a synonym for development but it can become the key and catalyst for many other aspects of the development process such as independence, health, community building and women's emancipation. This paper examined how basket-making contributed to economic and social revitalization of women in Bulawayo Kraal during the time of economic hardships and hunger. This study unveiled the positive past of the Tonga after resettlement as they took initiatives to circumvent socio-economic challenges, with basket-weaving as a way of improving their lives. The study contributes to the role and potential of handicrafts in rural development and employment creation in areas where farming is difficult or impossible because of environmental and climatic challenges.

The research assumed that handicrafts can significantly contribute to the development of the economy of Binga District. In order to examine how basket-weaving in Bulawayo Kraal contributed to the economic development of the community during the years of economic restructuring in the 1990s, the study sought to firstly, identify the economic problems which

Bulawayo Kraal community faced during this period, and secondly, examine how basket-making affected the economic needs of the people during the 1990s, and lastly, identify the major challenges which led to the decline of basket weaving in the late 1990s.

The study used the qualitative research methodology in the gathering and analysis of data and depended more on oral history. Data collection was done using the interview method in order to get aspects of historical experience which are absent from written works. Six key informants were purposively selected for in-depth interviews; these included four adult women who were engaged in basket-weaving in the nineties, and two men whose wives were involved in basket making during the period under study. Semi-structured informal interviews were also conducted with two female informants from families who were well-known basket makers during the period under study but no longer reside in Binga. A woman from Harare who used to buy baskets from Binga and exporting them to South Africa was also interviewed, and pseudo names were given to the informants. The information obtained from these interviews was very rich and useful in revealing the potential of handicrafts to rural economic development.

### **Economic problems faced by the Tonga during the 1990s**

Zimbabwe was colonized by the British in 1890 and the colonial regime expropriated land from Africans without compensation for farming, mining and urban development. Fifty-seven thousand Tonga-speaking people lost their land on both sides of the banks of the Zambezi River to pave way for the construction of the Kariba Dam's hydroelectric power project and were forcibly resettled on barren land (Colson 1971:20). Twenty-three thousand people on the southern bank in Southern Rhodesia were settled on the upper Zambezi plateau where the land was not good for crop cultivation and received erratic rainfall. Only between five and eight percent of the land in Binga region was considered suitable for agriculture by the colonial officials upon resettlement (NAZ file S3599/389). These people began suffering chronic food shortages after losing the fertile valley lands where they had been able to plant and harvest crops twice a year on the river banks (Scudder 1982:11). They had to adjust to largely unproductive extensive farming that depended on the unreliable rains on poor, sandy soils. Manyena (2009:121) studied the agricultural coping mechanisms of the Tonga of Siachilaba village (who are neighbours to Bulawayo Kraal village) in dealing with near-famine starvation and perennial food insecurity after resettlement. He discussed their initiatives in growing drought resistant millet varieties intercropped with drought resistant vegetables and other crops in order to increase the chances of having a good harvest even in a bad year, but farming and

food security remained a challenge to the people.

Although food production in Zimbabwe is the backbone of most rural economies, the Tonga remain unable to sustain themselves through agriculture. As mentioned above, Bulawayo Kraal is located in Natural Region V where the climate is arid; the soils are poor and the summer temperatures are very high. The sandy soil of the area was heavily leached and requires lots of fertilizer for subsistence farming to be successful. Nyathi (2012:133) observed that NGOs like Catholic Development Commission (CADEC) and *Kulima Mbobumi* Training Centre (KMTC) were involved in agriculture in many villages in Binga including Bulawayo Kraal with the aim of achieving long-term food security but their programmes were not sustainable and hunger remained a major problem in the village. Both NGOs distributed seeds and fertilizers to the people every year but the recipients of these valuable farming inputs could not produce significant yields. Instead of wasting the inputs on non-productive farming, the people ended up selling maize seed and fertilizer to Zambia for an income (Nyathi 2012:134). Interviews with some Tonga women revealed that sometimes they thoroughly washed and dried the maize seed before taking it to the grinding meal for immediate consumption because crop cultivation is risky business (personal communication, Bulawayo Kraal, May 20, 2017). Manyena (2003) argues that although NGOs did a commendable job in Binga they seemed to miss the needs of the people. What the people of Bulawayo Kraal needed most was an irrigation project that could harness water from the perennial Zambezi which was in close proximity to their village in order for them not to depend on erratic rains for farming. NGOs like Save the Children (UK) (SC (UK)) distributed food aid every year in the village instead of assisting the people to get water for irrigation in order for them to produce their own sufficient food. There is need for change in development strategies used by NGOs if the economy of Binga is going to be developed.

After resettlement, farming was also difficult in Bulawayo Kraal because of conflict between the government and the community over conservation of wild animals. Marauding elephants usually destroyed crops at night and affected the harvest of a good crop in a fair agricultural season. The villagers complained that Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) which was introduced in 1982 (Dzingirai 1996:21) theoretically gave them control over their wild animals but they could not kill the elephants which were destroying their crops and contributing to an unstable economy characterized by a critical shortage of food for family subsistence (personal communication, Bulawayo Kraal, May 20, 2017). Hunting was illegal in the area even though wildlife was the largest resource in Bulawayo Kraal. Monkeys and baboons also affected crop yields and made crop cultivation

time-consuming because people had to be in the fields day and night, chasing monkeys and baboons during the day and scaring elephants at night. Furthermore, when the sorghum crop was ripe but not yet dry for harvesting, women and children had to spend the whole day scaring birds. As a result, their farming was not productive enough to support families and the community at large; and people could not even have a surplus to sell for income generation that would lead to development of their region.

The problem of farming affected the economic base of Bulawayo Kraal and made it impossible for a capitalist form of development to take place in the community because it was difficult for the people to accumulate a surplus of food which could lead to the accumulation of wealth. According to Karl Marx's theory of classes, it is the accumulation of surplus which leads to development of a rich capitalist class (Mandel 2003). This capitalist class which owns the means of production in turn uses its surplus to develop a capitalist mode of production which creates jobs for the majority of the people. Bulawayo Kraal had a narrow economic base and was ranked as one of the poorest communities in Binga. During the nineties, there were few 'better-off' people who depended on migrant labour in mines and towns. Very few people owned cattle for draught power, milk, meat, and for exchange with grain during periods of drought. The community consisted basically of the poor class who owned less than five goats and less than five chickens, and the major assets owned by most people was the hand hoe while a handful owned a plough, a wheelbarrow or a scotch cart (SC (UK) 2003:10). This lack of a strong and vibrant economy constrained development of the community in a number of ways. Binga in general and Bulawayo Kraal in particular suffered from lack of basic resources and access to basic social services because of political neglect and marginalization. Traditionally, the women made baskets all year round but they had no access to larger markets in urban centres because their village was inaccessible by road. The community valued baskets mainly for functional utility, and used to barter them locally for millet and sorghum. A woman would sell about twenty baskets within a year mainly to those who stayed in areas where materials for making baskets were scarce (Reynolds and Cousins 1993:117). External trade in basketry with other districts was not possible because Bulawayo Kraal was more than one hundred kilometres away from neighbouring districts like Hwange, Lupane, and Gokwe. There was no reliable transport to towns and cities because the roads were bad, and as a result, they had no access to information on income-making opportunities. This severely affected the potential of economic development of the region.

The expansion of health and education services during the first decade after the attainment of independence eluded Binga District and affected the social, economic and political development of the region (Mashingaidze 2013:381). The people could hardly access health services because there was no clinic or health service centre in or near Bulawayo Kraal to treat common ailments like malaria and diarrhoea, and the nearest centre was Binga District Hospital which was more than fifty kilometres away. The more vulnerable people were pregnant women and children who could not walk the distance when they needed health attention. The HIV/AIDS pandemic brought many health challenges during the nineties when there were no Anti-retroviral drugs to prevent common infections. Affected people could not walk to Binga Hospital but the authorities failed to establish a health service centre in or near the village. Simatelele Clinic had not yet been opened then. Health is a basic right for all Zimbabweans and a healthy population contributes significantly to the development of a community.

The government failed to develop better rural social services during the nineties largely because of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) of 1991-1995 which removed subsidies in the economy and cut government expenditure. A retired primary school teacher in the village lamented about lack of development initiatives because of the problem of high illiteracy rates in the community. There was only one primary school in the nineties in Bulawayo Kraal which was mostly staffed by Ndebele and Shona-speaking teachers who could not communicate effectively with Tonga children (personal communication, Bulawayo Kraal, May 20, 2017). Very few people in the village had attained secondary education because the nearest school, Manjolo, was more than fifteen kilometres away, and walking to the school was dangerous because of wild animals, particularly elephants. Furthermore, Manjolo Secondary School could not produce good grades because it was staffed mostly by untrained Shona-speaking teachers. Trained teachers did not stay in most schools in Binga because the region was remote; therefore they chose to work in better developed districts. Lack of better education opportunities affected the development of the community because they could not compete with educated people from other districts in employment opportunities in the civil service and in NGOs in Binga. Owing to high illiteracy rates, the community had limited skills and knowledge to stimulate the development processes of their area that would address their needs.

### **Impact of basket-making on the economy of Bulawayo Kraal during the 1990s**

Many traders (*babuzyi*) began coming to Binga in the nineties following the economic hardships introduced by the ESAP and also because of the growth of the informal sector in Zimbabwe. ESAP which was launched in 1990 introduced IMF mandated economic and social

reforms which led to an increase in rural and urban poverty because of massive retrenchment of workers, price controls and inflation (Mapondera 2014:3). The resultant decrease in standards of living in many parts of the country forced many people to venture into the informal sector as hawkers, small scale backyard producers and cross-border traders. Informal cross-border traders who sold a variety of crafts in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia started flocking to Binga to buy Tonga baskets and wooden carvings for resale in order to cope with the demands of a higher standard of living.

Growth of the informal sector economy led to some Zimbabweans venturing into the transport industry as they sought profitable routes that were not well-serviced with regular buses. These improvements in transport opened Binga district and allowed people from many parts of Zimbabwe to travel there looking for trading opportunities. Tarring of the Binga-Kamativi Road in 1990 made it possible for traders to travel from Bulawayo, Hwange and Victoria Falls to Mlibizi and Binga Centre. Furthermore, from 1991 there was a regular *Chawasarira* bus which came to Binga Centre on alternate days from Harare via Gokwe, which informal traders took advantage of (personal communication, Binga Centre, May 19, 2017). Most informal traders came to purchase fish from the Zambezi River in Mujele and Mlibizi for resale in urban centres, but they also bought handicrafts and even ivory tusks for resale out of the country. Tonga baskets soon became highly sought after when informal cross-border trade grew big in the mid-nineties and involved a large population of mainly Zimbabwean women travelling to South Africa for informal trade. Cross-border traders who bought Tonga baskets came mainly from Harare. These baskets were sold in South Africa because of their artistic beauty and excellent craftsmanship as a unique form of art. The most popularly bought were the small and medium-size decorative baskets (*nsangwa*) which were displayed as pieces of art in many homes of South African families who stayed in high density suburbs.

A cross-border trader who used to travel from Harare to Binga between 1993 and 1997 revealed that people who exported Tonga baskets usually bought them using a variety of goods in barter exchange and rarely paid cash for them (personal communication, Chitungwiza, January 2, 2017). Groups of informal-traders would travel from Binga Centre to Dongamuse or Bulawayo Kraal where baskets were mostly found at relatively lower prices than in areas such as Manjolo, Samende, or Siabuwa where there were fewer basket makers because of scarcity of reeds and palm fronds which are used in making baskets. One group which used to get baskets from Bulawayo Kraal would spend about a week moving around the village placing orders for various sizes of baskets and then collecting them after weaving was complete.



Although basket-making skills and knowledge were acquired through experience, the process of weaving one basket normally took two weeks. The women made baskets during their spare time after working in the fields and performing household chores (Reynolds and Cousins (1993:115). They had to cut down the *mateete* reeds, the fronds of the *mupokwe* palm tree and the bark of the berchemia tree and then strip the palm fronds into thin strips which were boiled and dried. The bark was pounded and boiled with the palm fronds to be dyed and dried for making weaving patterns called *maabala* (Muyambi 1980:139). Weaving was only possible during daylight because there was no electricity in Bulawayo Kraal and many families could not afford alternative lighting systems. The traders had to wait until the number of baskets they required was enough before going back to their towns. When demand for baskets increased, most women moved from small to medium scale, and to some extent large scale basket-weaving in order to satisfy the demand and generate income. Their traditional income generating projects which included beer brewing, agriculture and bartering livestock could not improve their lives as much as basket-weaving during the nineties. The women recognized the potential of the basket-weaving enterprise and reacted immediately to fully exploit it. Basket-weaving became sustainable for many years unlike most development programmes introduced by NGOs which lacked women's participation in the elaboration, designing and implementation of policies and programmes. One woman recalled how most women abandoned NGO-funded projects like candle-making and soap-making in favour of basket weaving. She explained how her husband helped her in cutting the palm fronds, the reeds and the bark for dye for her to meet deadlines for baskets to be collected by the traders (personal communication, Bulawayo Kraal, May 20, 2017). Basket-weaving contributed to economic development that was people-centred and participatory in Bulawayo Kraal therefore the women embraced this commercial basket-weaving and trade for almost a decade.

Binga has long been considered a chronic poverty area where the majority of the people lack basic needs such as food, clothing, healthcare, education and clean water but basket-making improved the lives of the Tonga in Bulawayo Kraal in a number of ways. The women who were part of the study revealed that cross-border traders usually did not buy Tonga baskets using money but exchanged them with a variety of goods which they brought from South Africa. The traders brought second-hand clothing and other consumer goods such as sugar, salt, petroleum jelly, soap and cooking oil. New clothes were so expensive that most people could not afford to buy a new set of clothes even once a year on the Christmas festival. Cross-border traders brought a variety of second-hand clothes which improved the lives of many women and children as they became better-dressed in the community than those who did not weave baskets.

The traders usually brought clothing for women and children; hence the people obtained clothes and shoes both for home use and for church, and even school uniforms for children. Although most children in Bulawayo Kraal during the nineties could live without clothes during the hot summer months, they needed uniforms for school and a set of clothes for church. A cross-border trader from Harare used to bring the much-demanded uniforms that were worn at Bulawayo Kraal Primary School in order to encourage the women to make as many baskets as possible and keep them in stock waiting for her return. Arrangements such as these benefited both the traders and the weavers, which made it possible for the trade to survive for a number of years.

Due to their needs for decent clothing and other consumer goods, the women in Bulawayo Kraal made as many baskets as they could in order to improve their standards of living. They were able to innovatively exploit the market opportunities presented by informal traders in order to satisfy their needs. The basket-weavers claimed that although the cross-border traders brought second hand clothes, these clothes were of better quality than the new ones sold in shops because they lasted longer. Basket-weaving also helped many people in Bulawayo Kraal to access some goods which they could not easily afford because of lack of money and unavailability of employment opportunities in the area. During the nineties, sugar, soap and cooking oil were regarded as luxurious goods in Bulawayo Kraal which could not be obtained or used by most families for months. One woman taught her two primary school-going daughters to make baskets in order to increase the number of goods she could get from trade (personal communication, Bulawayo Kraal, May 20, 2017). Many families got used to these basic goods and increased their basket weaving techniques and keep in stock many baskets waiting for traders to come.

The Danish NGO, MS Zimbabwe established Binga Craft Centre in 1990 as a community-based organisation to economically empower women producing crafts through sustainable use of natural resources. Although Bulawayo Kraal women joined as a *Nsangwa* Club and met once a month to share their experiences, they traded their baskets as individuals. The study revealed that sometimes the weavers entered into exploitative partnerships with the informal traders because most of the Tonga women were illiterate. A cross-border trader from Harare testified that she made a lot of money from selling Tonga baskets in South Africa. She would spend two weeks of every month moving door-to-door in Thokhoza and Thembisa suburbs in Nelspruit, Johannesburg, in South Africa, before coming back home. Most of her baskets were bought for cash but she also asked for second-hand clothes for some of her baskets. On her journey back to Zimbabwe, she used to buy at least five sewing machines, five bicycles as well

as television sets and radios for cash from South Africa for resale. She used the profits from basket trade among other things, for building a seven-roomed house in Chitungwiza between 1993 and 1996 (personal communication, Chitungwiza, January 2, 2017). This shows that cross-border traders sold the baskets at a greater profit in South Africa which could not match the value of the second-hand clothes and other goods which they exchanged for the baskets in Binga. They should have shared the profits with the producers by buying their baskets for cash instead of cheap goods.

As the basket trade grew, some women took the initiative of searching for markets outside of Binga after having experienced the economic value of basket trade. When traders took long to come for baskets in Bulawayo Kraal, some women could not passively wait with heaps of baskets at home and instead searched for alternative markets where they could sell their merchandise for cash. One woman who was a widow with four school-going children had at one time woven more than thirty baskets with the help of her daughters for a woman from Harare who did not come to collect her large order of baskets in May 1996. She had no mealie-meal at home because elephants had devastated her sorghum crop before it was ripe, and SC (UK) had not yet started giving food aid soon after the harvest. The woman decided to take a few baskets for sale at Binga Centre where four of them were bought for cash. She used the money to buy some mealie-meal and soap for her family and kept some for bus fare to Bulawayo where she hoped to get many customers for her baskets. She then visited her cousin in Mzilikazi Township in Bulawayo where she stayed for a week selling her baskets. She walked to Saurestown, Queenspark, Romney Park and Paddonhurst low density residential areas (*emayadini*) carrying baskets on her head and knocking on gates searching for customers. A few baskets were bought for cash but the rest were taken on credit. She then travelled back to Binga with fifty kilograms of mealie-meal and some groceries for her family where she devoted most of her time to weaving more baskets. Basket making and selling in Bulawayo increasingly became her source of income and food during the remainder of the year of 1996 (personal communication, Bulawayo Kraal, May 20, 2017).

The study established that although there were more customers in Bulawayo for baskets during the nineties, it was far away for most women to travel and conduct business on a regular basis. Some women who had relatives in Victoria Falls and Hwange travelled there to sell their baskets for cash to cross-border traders, and to middlemen who had contacts with tourists. However, because of high illiteracy rates amongst the Tonga women, most middlemen offered them very low prices for their baskets than what they would in turn charge tourists. They had no access to information on tourist trends in Hwange and Victoria Falls and this affected their

bargaining power on prices for bulk orders of baskets. Nevertheless, they managed to get some income and used it to buy assets. One woman who regularly sold baskets to middlemen in Victoria Falls managed to purchase three goats and a number of chickens for cash from her neighbours who needed school fees for their children. These goats increased over the years and she used to barter them for grain during years of bad harvests. Unfortunately, her goats got depleted during the 2008-2009 drought when she used to exchange a goat for ten kilogrammes of maize because no food aid was distributed that year (personal communication, Bulawayo, April 7, 2017). In addition to accumulation of a surplus, basket trade improved the social lives of the Tonga of Bulawayo Kraal. Those who sold baskets for cash were able to pay school fees for their children at the local primary school among other things. They were also able to access health care at Binga Hospital because they could pay for transport to Manjolo and then to Binga which was a total of about fifty kilometres. Basket-making indeed revitalized the lives of many families at Bulawayo Kraal for almost a decade.

### **Challenges faced by Tonga basket makers**

Although demand for Tonga baskets boomed in the early nineties, it began to decline towards the turn of the new century because of many factors. The main reason for this decline was the problem of poor access to large markets. South Africa has been the main destination for Tonga decorative baskets, but demand for crafts depends on the overall economic climate of a country. The economic downturn after South Africa attained independence in 1994 affected the demand for baskets as the cost of living increased and there was less and less of disposable income for spending on works of art. By the end of the decade the unemployment rate was high in South Africa and this affected the people's ability to buy decorative goods.

Furthermore, the new black government in South Africa pursued the UNESCO mandated Ten-Year Plan of Action (1990-1999) for Development of Crafts for economic development and poverty alleviation (Richard 2015). During the apartheid era, traditional crafts had been neglected from mainstream trade and industrial policy but the new government realized the potential of rural crafts for sustainable development. Government and non-governmental organisations invested in further training of craftspeople, crafts promotion and the funding of community projects and marketing of handicrafts (Joffe and Newton 2007:14). More cooperatives were established in most parts of South Africa and received grants from the government for production of handicrafts for both local and foreign markets. This policy saw an increase in the development of local talent which significantly reduced the demand for foreign crafts such as Tonga baskets. In Western Cape Province, there was increased emphasis for youths to participate full time in crafts industry as a solution to unemployment (Oyekunle

and Filies 2016:63). This meant that Tonga baskets had to compete for markets with locally made crafts that were heavily subsidized by the South African government.

Furthermore, cross-border traders revealed that the Department of Home Affairs increased tariffs for imports of crafts, which in turn increased the price of Tonga baskets in South Africa. The baskets were counted or weighed and then taxed at the South African border as a way of discouraging imports and encouraging the marketing of locally-made crafts. This increase in cost further affected the demand for Tonga basket in favour of locally made baskets which were affordable and becoming increasingly available. As the trade in crafts with South Africa declined, the Tonga failed to access new foreign markets because of sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe after the controversial Fast Track Land Reform Programme of 2000 which gave a bad name for the country internationally. NGOs such Ntengwe for Community Development attempted to empower vulnerable Tonga women in sustainable development through small scale community based tourism and handicraft enterprises but this project was not successful in creating large markets for Tonga baskets.

It has also been difficult for Tonga baskets to access new bigger markets because of severe competition amongst producers of decorative products, mainly from Asia. When the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, globalization increased trade between African countries and the rest of the world. The Asian countries which were on the path to industrialization flooded African nations with cheap goods which killed local industries and affected the survival and expansion of the Tonga basket industry. The influx of cheap and unique decorative products which were partly or fully mechanized from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan greatly affected the demand of crafts in general and the Tonga baskets in particular in South Africa.

The local market for baskets has also been affected by modernization which undermines the confidence of Africans in their cultures. Many people looked down upon hand-made crafts as archaic products from the past in favour of imported goods. The utilitarian value of baskets in Zimbabwe in general and Binga in particular has been steadily replaced by cheap mass-produced goods. Plastic products imported mainly from China are overtaking the daily use of baskets in most Tonga homes. Plastic dishes, bowls, buckets, plates and trays are favoured by the Tonga more than locally made baskets because they are cheap, easy to clean, colourful and waterproof, although most of them are of poor quality.

Although basket-weaving has been an integral part of women's economic empowerment in Bulawayo Kraal, very few young girls are still learning to make baskets because they are busy with school (Reynolds and Cousins 1993: 115). There is need for adults to continue passing on

the knowledge and skills of the trade to the younger generation as a way of fighting deindustrialization due to the influx of cheaper alternative goods. The production of handicrafts in general is no longer practiced by many people in Binga. Handicrafts played an important socio-cultural and economic role in development of societies like India, Thailand and Tunisia and can be an important tool for the development of the remote and arid Binga District where agricultural-based form of development is a challenge.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion has revealed that commercial basket-weaving has great potential in the economic development of Binga. If fully developed, together with the production of other handicrafts, this industry can have great impact on the economy of the region. The boom in basket trade in the nineties helped to boost the economy through provision of basic needs, income generation and accumulation of a surplus by women in Bulawayo Kraal who had few other income generation opportunities. The study also identified that basket-making began to decline in the late 1990s mainly because of lack of markets and has not yet recovered because of general economic and political challenges facing the nation. This study will assist the government and NGOs to develop and reinforce handicraft production as a way of promoting employment and development for most marginalized populations such as the Tonga of Binga where farming is difficult.

Although basket weaving improved the socio-economic life of the people for a decade in the nineties, the community still remained underdeveloped and lacks food, infrastructure, basic social services, and employment opportunities mainly because of political and economic marginalization. A shift of focus from agricultural production as a vehicle for rural development to promotion of handicrafts production for trade can help to diversify and develop the economy of Binga. Improving direct links with the tourism sector could open new markets that could contribute to the viability and sustainability of basket-making in Bulawayo Kraal. There is need to improve communication networks in Binga in order to increase access to information on local and international trading opportunities. An expansion of both primary and secondary schools increases education opportunities in Binga for women that would enable them to get literacy skills necessary for them to be able to keep basic records of their trade. In line with UNESCO's global vision of the role of handicrafts in economic development (Richard 2007:15), there is need for the government and NGOs to develop formal training courses for women and the youths in Binga in handicrafts-making skills and quality control in order to commercialize their crafts on the international market. Handicrafts-making can become a full-

time career and business for unemployed women, men and youths hence there is need to increase awareness on their economic value and their role in development.

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### **Notes**

The name *Bulawayo Kraal*, according to oral traditions, was derived from a headman called *Bbulayo* who had a big kraal for his of cattle. The whites used to call his village 'Bbulayo's Kraal' which changed with time to become 'Bulawayo Kraal.'