

## **Challenges Women face in Accessing the Benefits of Development Policies in Rural Areas: A case of Gokwe District in Zimbabwe.**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the challenges women face in accessing the benefits of development policies in remote rural areas like Gokwe district. Rural women can be effective at increasing national development growth rates if they are included in development policy formulation, planning and implementation phases. However, their contribution is not significant because they are excluded from mainstream development activities. The study employed a mixed methods approach to identifying the challenges that rural women face in accessing development policy benefits. Using Gokwe as a case study the researcher administered 260 questionnaires to participants in the district in addition to 8 focus group discussions comprising 10 participants each during the period May 2020 and May 2021. The results showed that rural women are aware of the challenges which deter them from accessing development policy benefits. These challenges include lack of education on the part of the women, strict traditional structures, lack of supporting legislation, and male dominance amongst others. The paper recommends that Government should continue formulating inclusive policies specifically meant for women. Strict monitoring and evaluation at all stages of project formulation and implementation should be observed so that maximum development policy gains can be realised for rural women. In addition, some development programs can be introduced for*

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*both boys and girls right from high school so that women's empowerment starts earlier in their lives.*

**Keywords:** Challenges, development policies, policy implementation, social inclusion and exclusion, women empowerment

## **1.0 Introduction**

This study takes its main argument from the phenomenon of gender disparity in the world. Women have been discriminated against in many ways because most countries in the world have patriarchal societies, in which men are given preferential treatment in all facets of life (African Development Group 2015). This scenario has made women remain economically dependent on their spouses. Statistics indicate that women remain the poorest in the world because two-thirds of people living on less than \$1 per day are women, a scenario which is deplorable and needs improvement in all sectors of the economy across the world (Africa Partnership Forum 2007, UN Women, 2017, and UN Women 2018). A UNDP report indicates that the world's richest 225 people are all men and more than 70% of the poorest people are women because they earn less than men for the same work, a situation that continues to perpetuate gender inequality across the world (UNDP 2021). This is an indication that women are the lowest in numbers in terms of property ownership, which makes poverty feminised in most parts of the world. In addition, women are rarely found to be leaders in political parties or executive branches of Government the world over (UN Women 2018). Very few countries have reached the 30% target outlined by the Beijing platform for action for women parliamentarians, let alone the 50% current guideline in international, regional, and national policies as specified by Africa Partnership Forum (2007 and UN Women 2017). It is from this background that this study seeks to explore the challenges women face in Zimbabwean rural areas in terms of accessing benefits from development policies, whether it is due to deliberate social exclusion, or a lack of understanding of the benefits of inclusive policy implementation.

## **1.1 Defining Concepts**

According to Uguanyi and Chukwuemeka (2013), a policy is a course setting that provides the direction, the guide, and the way to the achievement of certain goals or objectives desired by the Government. In addition, Ezeani (2006) and Ikelegbe

(2006) concur as they proffer that a policy is an integrated course of action that the Government has set and the framework or guide it has designed to direct the actions and activities to solve a certain situation. According to Obor (2005), policy implementation means all activities done to achieve the goals of an established policy. It is concerned with the process of converting financial, material, technical, and human resources into outputs, which are goods and services. Edwards (1980) (in Obor 2005) explains that policy implementation is the stage between the establishment of a policy and the consequences for the people it affects, with its activities ranging from issuing and enforcing directives, disbursing funds, making loans, assigning and hiring personnel and so on.

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process that involves the lack/or denial of resources, rights, goods, and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in the economic, social, cultural or political arena (United Nations 2013:19, Mack 2016, and O'Donnell 2016). The paper notes that social inclusion is found along the lines of gender, age, tribe, religion, and political affiliation amongst others. This paper also notes that social exclusion due to age has significant effects because it starts at the household level where the parents own all the family assets while children, even those above 18 years, do not have any properties registered in their names. This situation promotes deep-rooted inequality, especially on the part of female children who would enter into marriage without anything of their own as compared to their spouses. Social inclusion is a process that ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political, and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in society in which they live (United Nations 2013:20, Bellani and Fusco 2018, World Bank Group 2020).

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Economic and Social status of women and Development Policy Globally**

Development policy has been tackled internationally through so many forums which should be emulated by individual nations for the benefit of their populations (Kraay 2020). Agenda 2030 or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is one such international framework that gave priority to gender equality at the international level

(SDG 5), which countries should emulate and make national plans and frameworks to promote gender equality (OECD 2019). According to Howes (2020), the formulation of any development policy should be critically analysed for its effectiveness in solving the problems at hand. Although many countries have enacted laws on gender equality, the last 20 years have been patchy and unequal (Amnesty International 2018). According to the World Economic Forum (2021), very few countries have closed the gender gap which appears to be persistent. Women continue to face challenges of exclusion and vulnerability despite the existence of policies (African Union 2021). Even before the enactment of the SDGs, Gender equality has been a priority on the development agendas for a very long time (Ortenblad 2017). UN (2005) avers that the Beijing Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 proposed strategic objectives and specific actions in critical areas of concern, which, taken together, would contribute to building an enabling environment for women's participation in development. It also stated that it is essential to design, implement and monitor effective, efficient, and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies, programs, and institutional mechanisms that foster the empowerment and advancement of women. Whenever a policy is drafted and implemented, women themselves should be part and parcel of the planning team so the long-standing negative attitudes obtained through institutions like socialization and patriarchy can slowly be eliminated (Badey 2015). However, it is rarely the case as women continue to be excluded from participating in the policy cycle, making them passive recipients of policy benefits (Moodley et al 2019, World Economic Forum 2021 and African Union 2021). Empowering women and leaving out men in the whole equation will be futile since men are a critical part of the equation (Maphosa et al 2015). When men understand the rationality behind giving women the wings to fly and contribute to the economy and other special development sectors, then it will be easy to achieve all the strategies and mechanisms arranged for women.

In concurrence is the UN (2002) emphasizing the need for gender mainstreaming in development policy for effective results and offering some strategies which can be used to ensure that development policy is impacting men and women. While mainstreaming is essential for securing human rights and social justice for women as well as men, it is also increasingly recognized that incorporating gender perspectives

in different areas of development ensures the effective achievement of other social and economic goals (Hivos 2017). Mainstreaming can reveal a need for changes in goals, strategies, and actions to ensure that both women and men can influence, participate in and benefit from development processes. This may lead to changes in organizational structures, procedures, and cultures and the creation of new organizational environments which are conducive to the promotion of gender equality (Moodley et al 2019 and Andrus 2021). The stakeholders should be consulted on their views about the responsibilities, activities, interests, and priorities of women and men, and how their experience of problems may differ (Otenblad 2017, Kraay 2020 and African Union 202). Gender mainstreaming involves the appreciation of differences between men and women which is inevitably visible when special lenses are used to view the needs of each individual. This heterogeneity will reveal the differences in approaches used by the two groups of people which should never be overlooked or overshadowed but treated with particularity (Moodley et al 2019). Involving everyone will ensure that no single individual is left behind irrespective of colour, age, ethnicity, or physical and mental ability (OECD 2019). An example can be cited where very few development programs are lined up for women with mental challenges for example their sexual reproductive rights, which includes access to condoms or family planning tablets. Including men and women in all development initiatives on equal representation presents a better chance of remembering all vulnerable groups of people to be included in national economic activities.

## **2.2 The Economic, Social and Political Status of Women in Africa and other Selected Developing Countries**

In Africa and other developing regions, corruption (Ruzengwe 2019), lack of continuity of Government policies, inadequate human and material resources, and lack of knowledge of the policy cycle have promoted implementation gaps due to unplanned leadership changes have always become the nemesis of these policies (Makinde 2017). According to Moodley et al (2019), Africa has so much potential economically but the persistent failure to embrace gender diversity is leading to missed opportunities. Poor policy formulation and strict implementation procedures promote the failure of development initiatives. In Nigeria for example, the story of the three first ladies from 1983 to 1998 indicated that the policies were never really meant to empower the ordinary poor woman but to pursue the individual egos of the

power-hungry first ladies (Ajulor 2018 and Makinde 2017). Each first lady would come and change the names of programs, and start their own committees and strategies in a bid to outsmart the former first lady and this did not help women's empowerment at all but rather wasted state resources at the expense of the poor women. In Malawi, policies for women's empowerment fail due to, the financial incapacitation of the institutions, lack of human resources, and politicisation of the policy implementation process.

These challenges are more or less the same across Africa (Cloete and De Coning 2011, Hussein 2018). In South Africa, Tebele (2016) posits that policies had to be formulated to benefit the poor and to redress the colonial injustices but real women empowerment still failed due to poor planning (Vengesai 2019). The policies showed the 'what' and 'why' of policy formulation but lacked the 'how' part. Education and training, awareness and sensitisation, and lack of consultation and involvement of the concerned beneficiaries greatly affected women's empowerment and the success of development policy in South Africa (Cloete 2011, Mtetwa 2014, Mkhize 2015 and Tebele 2016)

In other developing countries like Saudi Arabia, women wish more challenges could be eliminated instead of a simple lift of a ban on driving (Takenaga 2018). Structural challenges, lack of empowerment, lack of resources, strict guardianship policy, and exclusion from public life are among the challenges Saudi women face that bar them from equal treatment in their country (Al -Ahmed 2011, Rajkan 2014). More research is needed on how development policies can be implemented for the meaningful inclusion of women since strategies employed in most countries discussed in this empirical research appear to have flaws here and there.

### **2.3 The economic, social, and political status of Women in Zimbabwe and Gokwe District**

In Zimbabwe, rural women continue to be poor even though they are the backbone of agricultural production (Nyamudeza 2012, Sawu 2018, and Vengesai 2019). According to (Sawa 2018), Women are the poorest and they fail to send their children to school. Their businesses and livelihoods are on a small scale, and they fail to raise enough income for basic needs like clothes, education, and food). When Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980, the Government recognized the role of women

during the liberation struggle, and new laws were put in place to ensure that women reap the benefits of independence. Some changes were noted for the women and the whole population in general. As noted by Mungwini (2007), one thing that is clear from the outset is that the government was committed to changing the plight of women in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980. At independence, women were for the first time in the history of the country officially recognised as an oppressed group and as such were the target of a conscious government policy to change their situation. The government wanted to transform the status of women so that they could assume their rightful position in society and work alongside their male counterparts in the development of the nation. To achieve this goal several initiatives were undertaken that ranged from landmark legal reforms that were meant to safeguard the rights of women to inclusion of women in adult education and cooperatives for enlightenment and economic engagement. However, all these efforts have not yielded the much-desired goals and objectives, thus this paper intends to examine the challenges which have led to the exclusion of rural women in the Gokwe district. According to Chichester et al (2017), Zimbabwe has taken more important steps in ensuring that gender equality is promoted through legislative procedures is the inclusion of a section on gender balance in the 2013 constitution as shown by the extract from the constitution below:

“17. Gender Balance (1) The State must promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society, and in particular-(a) the State must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society based on equality with men; (b) the State must take all measures, including legislative measures, needed to ensure that-(i) both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level, and (ii) women constitute at least half the membership of all Commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under this Constitution or any Act of Parliament; (c) the State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must take practical measures to ensure that women have access to resources, including land, based on equality with men. (2) The State must take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from past practices and policies” (GOZ 2013:8).

The above part of the constitution clearly defines the duties and responsibilities of the state in ensuring that women and men are on equal footing in all aspects and all spheres of life.

In addition, the Government of Zimbabwe has drawn up and adopted a National Gender Policy that aims at providing guidelines and institutional frameworks to engender all sectorial policies, programs, and activities at all levels of our society and economy. It endeavours to improve the lives of both women and men by removing the various discriminatory customs and legislations. According to GOZ (2013), the policy sets out eight priority policy interventions around which policy objectives and strategies, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation are formulated.

The policy intervention areas are: (i) Gender, Constitutional and Legal Rights; (ii) Gender and Economic Empowerment; (iii) Gender, Politics, and Decision Making; (iv) Gender and Health; (v) Gender, Education and Training; (vi) Gender Based Violence; (vii) Gender, Environment, and Climate Change, and (viii) Gender, Media and ICTs.(Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development 2013) Section 5.3 and 5.5 of the same policy makes special reference to the importance of ensuring the attainment of a 50/50 representation of men and women in politics and other decision-making positions as well as ensuring equal access to education for boys and girls and their retention at all levels, respectively. Such policies if implemented as outlined, monitored, and evaluated for success periodically are likely to go a long way in ensuring gender equality.

Zimbabwe also signed the SADC Protocol on gender and development in 2008 along with other 14 African states as a way to show commitment in matters concerning gender equality. The articles in this protocol promise a lot of measures that should be undertaken by state parties to empower women and create inclusively and enable economic, political, and social environments for the participation of men and women in the continent. If all these instruments could be followed meaningfully, then gender equality may be a reality in the foreseeable future.

However, despite the existence of all these blueprints for gender equality, gender disparities are still evident in Zimbabwean society (Gudhlanga et al. 2012). Girls continue to be marginalized and gender parity is still an illusion for most societies, particularly the rural areas where the majority of people reside (ZimStats 2014). In



critical fields like education and political participation women and girls continue to be outnumbered by men (Hivos 2017). According to Maphosa et al (2015), the discrepancy between the perceived and actual realities of women's participation in politics is not by accident but is founded on a manoeuvre by politically dominant males to open up the political space when necessary and convenient for them. Research has shown that societies and communities fare better when women are educated on the same level as their counterparts because there will be improved health through reduced child mortality and higher nutrition levels (UNESCO, 1996, Chabaya and Gudhlanga 2013). In addition, Matera (2016) posits that policies are not working as they should be and they have to be strengthened through sanctions that punish those companies and parties that do not meet the stated local gender quotas, as well as giving incentives to those organisations adhering to the stated gender parity targets. Unless the state takes a leading role in effectively implementing its blueprints in favour of gender equality, then gender disparities will persist for generations to come (Gordon 2006 and 2010). It is against this background that this paper intends to explore the challenges which continue to deter women from accessing development policy benefits in the rural Gokwe district, to generalise the same challenges to the rest of the country.

There are some scholars like Nyambara (2002), Nyamudeza (2012), and ZimStats (2012) who wrote about the Gokwe district before it was divided into two districts and they portrayed the district as a remote place with economic and political participation of women very low. The situation in the Gokwe district is further aggravated by the fact that Gokwe is a very remote marginalised area where development initiatives were never a priority. This gave the district a disadvantage compared to other districts in Zimbabwe. Gwimbi (2009) posits that Gokwe, which has been divided into Gokwe North and Gokwe South, is the largest district in Zimbabwe and lies to the northwest of the country. Like any other rural district in Zimbabwe, poor infrastructure, lower levels of education and lack of initiatives that keep girls in schools remain some of the major challenges hindering women and girls from accessing the benefits of development policies in Gokwe district (Musasa 2020).

### 3.0 Methodology

#### 3.1 Description of Study Area

The study was carried out in Gokwe North, an area in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. Gokwe North is a remote rural area with Nembudziya Growth Point as the Administrative centre. Nembudziya growth point is 72 kilometres from Gokwe town, 165 kilometres from Kadoma, and 305 kilometres from Harare (Gwimbi 2009). Gokwe region, which used to be one district, and now divided into Gokwe North and Gokwe South is delimited by the Sanyati River to the east, Chemagora forest and Nkayi districts to the South, and Kariba and Binga to the West and North respectively. Gokwe is in ecological region 4 experiencing very high temperatures (26 degrees Celcius on average), and low rainfall (250-500mm/year) (Nyambara 2003). Figure 1 shows Gokwe North and South.

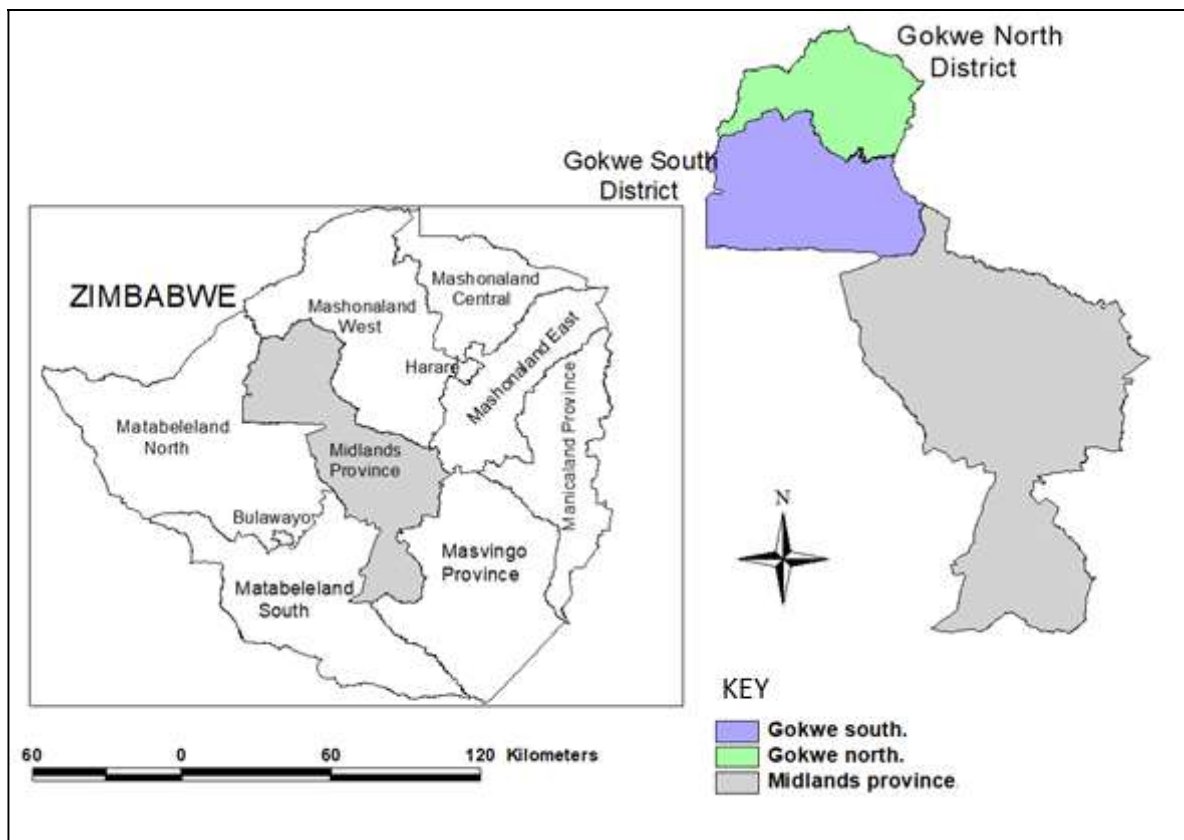


Figure 1: Gokwe North. Source: Author (August 2022)

### **3.2 Research Methods and Strategies**

The study employed mixed methods in data collection and analysis. Questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interviews were employed for the sake of triangulation so that responses from one method can be validated with responses from another method. Questionnaires were self-administered to 260 participants from the Gokwe district while eight (8) focus group discussions consisting of 10 participants each, were conducted during the same period of May 2020 and May 2021. The total sample in the study was 340 women. Follow-up interviews were made through teleconferencing, WhatsApp calls, and messages. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling, and adult women above 18 years voluntarily consented to participate in the study with full knowledge of the purpose of the study. The participants were made aware of the objectives and purpose of the study and they voluntarily participated.

### **4.0 Results/Findings**

The study presents the following findings, gathered through desktop research and primary research tools which are mainly questionnaires and interviews in addition to observations made during the data-gathering process.

#### **4.1 Challenges from Reviewed Literature**

The following challenges were gathered from the literature reviewed by the study:

- a) Lack of inclusive policies (Tebele 2016, Moodley 2019)
- b) Male dominance (Maphosa et al 2015, Moodley 2019)
- c) Terrorism and conflicts (African Union 2021)
- d) Marginalisation due to distance, poor roads, and poor infrastructure, leaders prioritise those in urban areas (Kraay 2021). This was termed urban bias by Sawa (2018)
- e) The historical triple effect of exclusion, being a woman, being rural, and being in a remote area (Chichester et al 2017, Tebele 2016, Vengesai 2019)
- f) Lack of girl-child empowerment initiatives. (Otenblad 2017, Musasa 2020)
- g) Lack of education for women (African Union 2021, Amnesty International 2018)
- h) Persistent gender gaps (World Economic Forum 2021)

## 4.2 Challenges from Quantitative Findings

Table 1 below presents the variables associated with the challenges women face in accessing the benefits of development policies. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method used extracted 3 components that are detrimental to women in their quest to access the benefits of development policy. Components 1, 2, and 3 had 4, 1, and 2 variables respectively. However, the other variable for component 3 was ignored since it was a negative loading value, and only values close to 1 were chosen ranging from .499 – to .937 (Virupashka and Puranik (2016). The variables used to determine component 1 were: Strict traditional structures (.756), male dominance (.715), Poor communication (.706), and nepotism and corruption (.641), and all these components show that women exist in over-controlled environments (spouses and society) where they do not have the freedom to exercise their potential without interference. These ideas are in line with ideas from (Wodon 2018, Ajulor 2018, Makinde 2017, and Hussein 2018) outlining a host of challenges women face in accessing the benefits of any development program in third-world countries. Component 2 only had one variable, the laziness of women while component 3 also had one variable, the issue of male dominance.

The two components had values of .937 and .499 respectively. Despite having single variables, the two components could not be discarded because of two reasons. The first reason is that component 2 had the highest loading value of .937 and its relevance could not be ignored. The second reason was that the two components are both widely discussed in the literature in this study, so they could easily be concluded to have the same characteristics as women in other rural areas from other African countries. Scholars like Cloette 2011, Siambombe (2015), Chigudu (2014), and Zhou and Zvoushe (2012) all concur that woman in third-world countries, always face challenges in accessing benefits from developing policies.

Table 1: Challenges Women Face in Accessing Benefits from Development Policy

	Component		
	1	2	3
Strict traditional structures are a challenge to the success of development policies for women	.756		
Male dominance is the greatest challenge to women’s empowerment	.715		.499
Poor communication channels are one of the challenges negatively affecting development policy implementation	.706		
Nepotism and corruption negatively impact policy implementation	.641		-.619
Development policies face challenges because women are lazy		.937	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Source: Primary Data

### 4.3 Challenges from Qualitative Findings

Table 2 below shows the responses from the participants to the Focus Group Discussions. The challenges which came from the participants include the distance women have to travel to the main centres to source raw materials and other necessities, while lack of education, particularly higher education remains a hindrance to women’s empowerment and access to benefits from development policies.

Table 2: Qualitative Responses from Focus Groups

Group	Challenges Women Face
1	Distance from the main centers, exclusion, male dominance
2	Lack of education in the women, lack of vocational colleges in the district, more tertiary education needed for women in the district
3	Lack of inclusion, Women are not consulted, traditional structures are too

	strict and segregate women
4	Women exclusion, distance from main service centers, male dominance
5	The triple exclusion, being a woman, being rural and being in a remote area.
6	Lack of education for the women, lack of resources, exclusion of the women
7	Corruption, laziness in some married women, excluding widows and single women
8	Marginalization due to distance, poor roads, and poor infrastructure, leaders, priorities those in urban areas

The responses above (Table 2) from the 8 focus group discussions indicate that women are aware of the barriers to their empowerment. One middle-aged woman in the 25-35 age group lamented their disadvantaged position in which they enter into marriage without anything of their own. As a result, the women are always frustrated, threatened, and constantly reminded that they do not have anything in the family since everything belongs to the man. This was recorded here during the discussions:

“Young women enter marriage without anything of their own and that is a disadvantage. If only our maiden families could equip us with all the education, the money, or the businesses so that I enter marriages as an empowered equal partner then one would not suffer from unequal treatment at the hands of spouses, in-laws, and communities. It is not possible to be innovative when you are controlled and never given a chance. There is no room to be creative”

This response shows that the women in the Gokwe district are not happy with their status quo. Most indicated that they could change their situation if only the hand of time could be turned and they would not rush into marriage without anything to their names.

## **5.0 Discussion of Findings**

The demographic analysis of the participants in the focus group discussions shows that very few women in the Gokwe district attained degrees and the majority only attained secondary education, an area that needs improvement in line with sustainable development goals (Goal number 4) which emphasizes the achievement of universal and primary education for all as well as affordable tertiary and vocational education for all (UN 2018). Implementation of development policies in rural areas of Zimbabwe and Gokwe in particular is full of challenges that hinder women from accessing the benefits of those development policies. The study revealed the following findings as the major challenges: poor communication channels, strict traditional structures, and male dominance. These were the most outstanding challenges, while lack of education due to early marriages in rural areas was also among the hindering factors.

In most cases when individuals seek to market their businesses, they have to look for contacts, who are usually friends, family, and other colleagues. Women lack these connections because of the lack of social lives that men have in beer halls and workplaces. This will hinder their ability to be known for anything they are good at; thus, it is very essential to increase the communication channels for women for the success of their businesses and projects. This factor was also echoed by UNCTAD (2012). The latter also emphasizes the lack of communication channels, lack of education, and lack of resources among other bureaucratic challenges which hinder successful policy implementation for women. Samman (2016) also summarized the challenges as a lack of education and training, lack of skills, lack of access to quality paid work, the burden of unpaid work at home, and lack of access to assets and property among others.

The study established that lack of access to the internet and social media and in some cases, lack of contacts and famous colleagues hinders the ability of rural women to be connected to better-paying jobs and they remain with their low-paying vegetable markets. An increase in communication channels is a good initiative which should be encouraged at all levels.

Strict traditional structures also hinder the potential of women to perform to their maximum potential because they are expected by society to be in the home where

no opportunities for employment and promotions are ever found. This is so because in the home the woman does unpaid work which no one appreciates or recognizes as worthy of payment. During the quantitative inquiry, 52.2% of the respondents agreed that strict traditional structures are a hindrance to women's empowerment while 41.9% strongly agreed to the same hindrance to women's empowerment. This is an indication that women have been restricted for centuries and African countries have lost out on economic benefits had these women been given a chance to contribute according to their skills, potentialities, and intelligence. Male dominance was seen to be the worst challenge women face when they try to access benefits for women's empowerment. Any development policy is dominated by men even though women are the majority in the communities or the nation at large. Evidence can be seen even in ministries that were crafted for women where men still dominate the leadership positions. About 52.9% of the respondents agreed while 40% strongly agreed that women cannot be expected to surpass men in anything no matter how good they are. Detailed explanations came from the focus group discussions in which participants lamented that women are never seen as able-minded partners in development. Even simple matters like when to plant, when to harvest, what to sell, and when are all delayed until the husband gives their consent which is anti-developmental due to time wasting. Some programs especially in the farming business are time bound and they should not be delayed because a husband is not there to give consent. Even when a woman does anything good for the family, the man will be praised for marrying a good wife rather than the woman receiving the praise and the encouragement as an individual in her own right. Some respondents even indicated that their in-laws would prefer to call them using the totems of their married families rather than their totems which they feel is a lack of acknowledgment and appreciation that they are also individuals who came from well-respected families as well. This is the reason why some women have resorted to initiatives because they are always overshadowed by this male dominance at home and away.

Scholars like Ferim (2013), Mkhize (2015) in Tebele (2016), and Siambombe (2015), all concur that all women, particularly rural women are never consulted in any policy plans even if they are the beneficiaries and this leads to exclusion of the female beneficiaries to development policy. Even if the women have the willpower to improve their status and livelihoods, they lack adequate resources (Ajulor 2018 and



Makinde 2017) because everything they have ever worked for does not belong to them as individuals, but belongs to their male counterparts. Their projects, therefore, become less viable as compared to their male counterparts who can quickly make decisions to sell the property or other resources owned to improve their businesses without many bureaucratic consultations. Instead of empowering the women, society expects the women to do more tasks for the family as was once expressed by Nyamudeza (2012) on the situation of cotton production relationships in the Gokwe district where tasks for the women are increased on the introduction of any new activity in the family, but not their access to income, decision making or empowerment in general.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper makes conclusions that rural women in the Gokwe district are marginalised and they are excluded from meaningfully enjoying the benefits of the development policy. These challenges include neglect of rural infrastructure leading to marginalisation as transport operators shun such remote areas, strict traditional structures, male dominance, lack of education for the women, poor communication channels, lack of girl-child empowerment initiatives, and the historical (colonial) triple effect of women exclusion among others.

The paper makes the following recommendations:

- 1) Special Social inclusion programs should be done by the government based on age, gender, geographical location, ability, or disability so that development policy does not leave anyone behind.
- 2) Uproot corruption and social exclusion at all costs. This requires a multi-stakeholder approach where everyone is educated.
- 3) Socialisation processes should incorporate gender equality aspects at tender ages so that women are seen as equally competent partners in households, communities, and the nation at large.
- 4) Increased education, sensitisation, and awareness programs on the need to keep the girl child in school no matter what the circumstances.
- 5) Re-introduce adult literacy classes for everyone.
- 6) Include women in the planning, implementation monitoring, and evaluation of development Policies.

- 7) Allocate major resources like land and residential stands to women in their names so that they benefit directly from development policies not as beneficiaries of men.
- 8) Promote women's empowerment and participation in politics and leadership based on merit so that they can be competitive role models to their counterparts.
- 9) Reduce the distance between schools to 5 kilometres, especially in rural areas like Gokwe district where schools are found between 15 kilometres. Less distance will promote school attendance and eliminate school dropouts and child marriages.

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