

## CHAPTER 5: THE FUTURE OF GENDER AND HOUSING IN ZIMBABWE

The study sought to investigate the gender perspective of housing poverty in urban settings in Zimbabwe's Chitungwiza Town. This chapter provides a summary of the study, an overview of the conclusion drawn from the research results and an outline of the recommendations is presented.

This study examined the gender, housing poverty nexus in urban settings based on the case of Chitungwiza Town, a dormitory town located 30km South of Harare in Zimbabwe. Low-income households and mostly women are at the receiving ends of housing poverty and the gender dimension to this crisis. Thus, the study primarily focused on people's social constructions of housing and poverty and the impact it has on their socio-economic and political status. The study mainly examined how gender equality is a key variable in the success or failure of housing interventions, also focus was on how improved access to housing is a key variable in women's/gender empowerment, who makes the decisions of what type of house/dwelling is to be rented or acquired within the household, and who benefits, how women cope with their housing problems and how gender mainstreaming influences policy making to ensure participation of women in the production and distribution of housing.

However, it was found out that unemployment was very high in Chitungwiza especially among women and the sources of livelihood were commonly vending, small to medium enterprises and home industries. There was concern of underrepresentation of women in key structures of community development since there were regarded as passive participants and that they were not taken seriously by the responsible institutions. Poor social service delivery which includes water supply, refuse collection, street lighting health services and poor

road networks were quite a cause for concern on how the town council was managing its operations. Patriarchy still affected women's access to housing due to lack of knowledge of legislature on the administration of their deceased spouses. Women were facing challenges due to environmental deterioration such as pollution because of garbage and sewerage refuse. Finally, some locations have poor roads and road networks hence are difficult to access such as Nyatsime which is a new residential area in Chitungwiza.

The study used a qualitative research approach in which the case and was a narrative study. Specific data collection tools included extensive documentary analysis (reports, policy and legislative documents); household survey (involving 10 conveniently selected households, from Chitungwiza Town, in which a semi-structured questionnaire was used); a focus group discussion of ten participants from the Chitungwiza Community and four key informant interviews with purposefully selected officials (from Town Council, Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development and the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate Change. The total population sample drawn for the study was twenty-four.

During data gathering the views of both men and women in the community were that gender is trivialised as women's issues and problems and due to a strong patriarchal society and culture. The researcher used her communication and public relations skills and observed the culture of the community to encourage the men to participate. Another limitation was that the participants were uneasy about their real names being published so many would decline; the researcher assured the participants that she would use pseudo names to protect their identity.

The study showed that the community has suffered from the socio-economic and environmental pressure surrounding them in relation with gender, housing and poverty issues. Using a qualitative methodology and its research techniques the researcher managed to capture the essential information that answered the research objectives. Issues that emerged from the research findings were that Chitungwiza residents have problems having access to housing due to low or no income, unemployment, which therefore, impacts on their livelihoods due to poverty. The study observed that women are more vulnerable to poverty and housing poverty more specifically. The study also observed that there was low stakeholder participation in current legislation and policies and economic and political development interventions.

Housing is a major driver of economic growth and development and that the existing structures and processes within the housing sector and authorities are such that they do not benefit the poor due to the inaccessibility and affordability of modern housing directly from the town councils most people had resorted to joining cooperatives. The study concluded that these problems are perpetuated by factors such as the history of the place, income levels among urban dwellers, lack of defined and clear-cut policies and commitment by institutions towards the creation of sustainable livelihoods and the poor economic growth.

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Housing is a major driver of economic growth and development and the existing structures and processes within the housing sector and among the authorities do not benefit the poor due to inaccessibility and unaffordability of modern housing. Consequently, many people have resorted to joining cooperatives as a way of circumventing the costlier council housing. The study concluded that these problems are perpetuated by factors such as the history of the place, income levels among the urban dwellers, lack of defined and clear-cut policies and commitment by institutions towards the creation of sustainable livelihoods and the poor economic growth.

One of this study's objectives was to influence the reduction on gender disparities to ensure good governance, gender balance and the participation of women in the distribution of housing. The study concluded that most women in Chitungwiza either had little knowledge or no knowledge at all about existing housing policies. The women had also not received any civic education; hence it was a challenge for the women to participate in the governance and management of housing initiative of housing programmes. Poor service delivery was a key concern within the residents of Chitungwiza. Environmental degradation was also another cause for concern since it was a hindrance to sustainable development. The lack of amenities such as street lighting had triggered the rise in crime and abuse of residents especially women who would be afraid to go night school, hence deterring development.

The study concluded that access to housing was a key variable in women's empowerment and in gender equality. Women lacked access

to housing due to socio-economic factors such as poverty, culture and education. Most women were small business owners and most of the time they could not afford to access housing. The rampant corruption was a hindrance to women's participation and good governance of the municipality. The women had to forego social responsibilities to ensure that had a sustainable livelihood. Although the proportion of women engaging in urban housing development is on the rise, society has yet to fully appreciate their efforts and consider their investments as having originated from the women's genuine efforts, the very same way men's housing investments are regarded. This is due to the gender ideology that seeks to subordinate women, for when a woman owns a house, she is more likely not to tolerate an unhappy marriage compared to her counterpart who may tolerate such a marriage because she lacks accommodation alternatives. Besides, some women own rental houses, which increase their economic power to lead an independent life. Women's house ownership is therefore construed as a harbinger of broken marriages and as female independence (Lee Smith 1995).

The social relations in housing development were construed within the context of the complex set of values, traditions, customs, habits, norms and beliefs governing real property acquisition and development. The gender variable in the social relations, therefore, referred to how these values, traditions, customs, habits, norms and beliefs polarize men's and women's acquisition and development of housing and further set parameters for each gender's engagement in the acquisition and development processes in urban housing development. The study held that before a woman buys a stand or seeks to rent a house, she should consult her spouse since he may not afford the price. Hence the study concluded that most women did not make decisions on the type of housing to be acquired or to be rented, since the economic power of the household was the man. For women-headed households the harsh

economy would decide for them what type of a house to rent or to buy.

The study's conceptual framework was based on the Longwe/Women Empowerment framework hence Table 5.1 below outlines the conclusions of the study based on the framework.

**Table 5.1** - Conclusions based on the Longwe /Women's Empowerment Framework (*Longwe & Clarke, 1994 and Field work, 2016*)

Issue	Manifestation and Degree of Concern
Economy	Unemployment is very high in Chitungwiza hence most people are in the informal sector in which run small to medium enterprises, vending and home industries.
Tenure	Most Residents in Chitungwiza are Lodgers and Tenants who are on the housing waiting list which has increased yearly without any housing initiatives helping to reduce it.
Habitability	Some areas in Chitungwiza have houses that are too old hence they are no longer habitable and in turn become life-threatening hazards to residents.
Good Governance	There is concern among Chitungwiza women that women are regarded as passive participants in community initiatives and the underrepresentation in key structures of community development such as the Town Council itself. Their concerns and initiatives are sometimes not taken seriously by the responsible institutions. Regarding these concerns can be instrumental in lightening the burden of work on them which includes sustainable housing. Lack of transparency and corruption has marred the Chitungwiza town council and has made access to housing a tall order for residents.
Service Delivery	Poor social service delivery are the order of the day in Chitungwiza this includes, water supply, refuse collection, street lighting, health services and well as poor road networks coupled with an incompetent engineering department of the town Council.
Education	-Women are more likely than men to be illiterate. Women are less likely than men to have access to information and be included in political and community life.
Culture	The strong patriarchal society still has an effect on women's access to sustainable housing; hence due to lack of knowledge of intestate laws they are losing their homes and property to property grabbing relatives.
Environment	Environmental deterioration and problems related to sanitation and pollution (including air and water pollution from garbage and sewers). Women tend to be most affected, since they face the challenges.
Location	Some locations have poor roads and road networks hence are difficult to access such as Nyatsime which is a new residential area in Chitungwiza.

Table 5.1 illustrates the study's conclusions according to the Longwe/Women's Empowerment Framework as follows:

**Welfare** - The study concluded that socio-economic policies such as housing and economic policies were not gender sensitive to the specific needs of women such that women found themselves destitute due to lack of housing. According to the Women's Empowerment framework the study concluded that women's welfare is improved if they have shelter and adequate social services thereby reducing labour and risk of disease or poor health. Another conclusion is that women did not make decision of what type of house to be acquired or rented hence also compromising their welfare.

**Access** - Very few women had no knowledge of or access to policies which resulted in them facing socio-economic challenges to access housing and poverty being the main challenge. The study also concluded that women would be empowered socially and economically if they had access to housing and if they would make better decisions they would have access to habitable and well located housing.

**Conscientisation** - Women were not informed with regard to housing policy, the legal and by-legal procedures of accessing housing, hence women needed to be educated on housing and housing development to have adequate knowledge of how to access sustainable housing. The study concluded that there was a lack of gender equality and education of women on their housing rights.

**Participation** - Few women participated in policy formulation and policy development of socio-economic policies in Zimbabwe. Women were regarded as passive participants in housing initiatives and distribution since it was regarded as a men's domain. The study also concluded that enabling women's participation in housing initiatives and distribution would empower them and guarantees good governance and sustainable development in Zimbabwe. Gender

equality was important to enable women's participation in housing initiatives and community development.

**Control** - The study also concluded that women had no control over policy, governance and management of housing in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe. Women were underrepresented in government, Chitungwiza town Council and Community Development Committees so they had little control or decision-making power in the distribution of housing. It was also concluded that improving the socio-economic status of women would enable women to be in control of their resources and livelihoods thereby reducing poverty

The study recommends:

Inclusion and participation of community members in development projects and local and national policy formulation and implementation to ensure good governance and sustainable development.

That, if gender aspects of the housing-poverty nexus are to be adequately dealt with, two major transformations must take place. Firstly, women must be empowered to make choices about housing and this will also impact socially and economically. Furthermore, enabling choice is linked to issues of sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation, including access to income generating activities. Secondly, changes on the housing distribution side are necessary. It will require responsiveness by the housing sector in the provision of habitable, well-located and accessible housing that reduce the drudgery of much of women's labour, and that at affordable prices. The government should formulate economic policies that create employment for the people to eradicate poverty.

The government and stakeholders should promote innovation and enhance access to sustainable housing, which can prove to be a powerful catalyst for decentralized employment and wealth creation,

thereby contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals of eradicating global poverty by 2030 and ZIMASSET.

The right to adequate housing should also be taken as a national priority (Rakodi, 1995). That is, to solve the fundamental problem of poverty, governments must focus on ensuring that this right is observed, and putting in place institutions that make housing to be both affordable and accessible to everyone (Owen, 2000). In addition to that, governments must ensure that legislation favours the right to adequate housing for everyone including the poor. The only reason homelessness is allowed to exist is because a person's need for a home is seen as a means of someone else making a profit, (Owen, 2014). Thus, governments must guard against profiteers especially in market oriented housing provision.

A framework of objectives must be prepared to determine the requirements and formulate strategies to support social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability.

However, innovations can accelerate or decelerate the process of sustainable development as it can have positive and negative impacts to the socio-economic status of people. Sustainable housing requires a strong supporting institutional (policy) framework to accelerate and integrate the process of development. At strategic level, sustainable development principles and approaches should be integrated into policy strategies and the planning process.

Urban governance must be gender-sensitive if it is to be equitable, sustainable and effective.

Table 5.2 is a recommendations matrix that tries to capture the different issues that have emerged from this study. The issues are then

tied to the responsible persons or institutions and the expected actions and outcomes that this might bring.

Table 5.2: Recommendations Matrix

Issue	Responsibility	Prescribed Action	Desired Outcome
Sustainable Housing/Habitats	Households	Embrace civic education on housing, environmental management and sustainability.	An informed and responsible citizenry
	MoLGPWNH and Chitungwiza Town Council	Ensure a clear housing policy and incorrupt implementation of housing initiatives, through good governance and management of Town councils	Good governance and community development and observation of human rights
	MoEWC	Tighten on policy implementation of the Environmental Management Act and embark on projects on environmental rehabilitation (saving wetlands)	Enhanced trust that the law can help preserve the environment
	Chitungwiza Town Council and MoEWC	Make a commitment on the provision of housing and social services delivery (e.g., incentives for developing houses and supplying the necessary social services)	Committed institution in addressing gender, poverty and housing needs
Social Services Delivery	Chitungwiza Town Council and Households	Improve on refuse collection, water supply, road networks and health services delivery. Engage in recycling	Improved human health, sanitation and creating a more sustainable environment and development by

Socio-Economic status of Women		of waste to reduce spread of diseases. Enforce better building standards	addressing the challenges
	Households, MoWAGCD	Embrace self-reliance-based initiatives on increased skills, income, social status, and decision-making power and enabling women to take control of their own transformation process.	Balanced households in terms of distribution of income and decision making in the home.
	MoLGPWNH and MoWAGCD	Ensure access to affordable housing which enables access to educational information and communication. Improve on street lighting to ensure the safety of women and girls at night, allowing them to attend night schools and participate in community activities. Ensure equal distribution and access to housing services (e.g., women are Involved at senior level in housing sector decision-making)	Eliminate gender disparity in education and related institution embracing community participation.
	MoWAGCD	Research and prescribe gender-sensitivity on the contribution and role of women's incomes and cash flows in the cost of housing and related services in homes.	Affordability of housing and gender-sensitive policies in place.
	MoJLPA	Provide legal advice	Informed women

Poverty		and housing development support services to Women who seek to engage in urban housing development.	in terms of the Law and Legal issues pertaining to housing.
	All key Stakeholders	Address extreme poverty and hunger through housing policies and programmes that consider the needs and constraints of women.	A well-developed community that is not an environmental and institutional burden due to high costs in housing and related services