

CHAPTER FIVE - CASE-BASED DATA AND EVIDENCE

This chapter critically presents data that were collected in Mbare business centre during the research where 8 business women from diverse micro businesses such as vending, canteens, farmers, grocery stalls, clothing stalls (Mabhero), to mention but a few, were interviewed. The chapter also presents the different themes that came out of the research on women's perceptions on Thrive Microfinance and women empowerment. These themes emerged because the researcher made use of thematic content analysis as explicated in the previous chapter. As such, the themes became the basis for data presentation.

Table 1: Demographic profiles of respondents

Participants	Marital status	Age of participants	Educational level
P1	Married	50	Secondary
P2	Single	25	Secondary
P3	Married	23	Primary
P4	Married	30	Secondary
P5	Widow	48	Primary
P6	Widow	35	Secondary
P7	Married	40	Primary
P8	Married	45	Secondary

During the research, the researcher managed to interview more married women compared to single women. The research revealed that there were more married women involved in business compared to those that were not married. The fact that there were more married women involved in business might actually display more vulnerabilities of women where women who are not married might not be involved in business because they lack capital, thus as a result, are more economically excluded owing to them not having someone to offer them money for business. The fact that more married women are into business can also be explained by the fact that by virtue of being a couple, women might be at the fore of business that the man manages hence looks like the woman are into business yet it is the man who is into business. This can best be explained by the study conducted in Malawi by Goetz and Gupta (1994) on microfinance loans given to women for business that

indicated that most married women's businesses were being run by their husbands and that they have less control though they might look like they are at the forefront. In further concurrence are Ukanwa *et al.* (2018) that observes that most women in microfinance had no control over their finances as the husbands were in control of the funds making it impossible for these women to have financial freedom. Married women in business lack financial autonomy as the men are in control of the finances of the family and the businesses.

All the women interviewed none of them had managed to get to tertiary level of education with the highest level of education being secondary education and the lowest being primary level of education. The issue of low levels of education amongst women in business was best explained by the backgrounds that came out during the interviews. The researcher realised that these were attributed to their impoverished backgrounds that had made it impossible for them to further their studies thus indicating women vulnerability and how poverty of women is perpetuated by deprivation of basic education hence feminisation of poverty. Consistent with the study findings are Abebe and Kegnee (2023) that alludes that women in microfinance enterprises lack training and the education to understand the entrepreneurial skills. However as argued by Kasynathan study in Brown (2011), Microfinance highlighted that women in the study would require financial skills because of low levels of education and felt involvement in microfinance business training would help in their education level and influence thus bringing in low level education of women all over especially those in informal micro business. Similar to the study findings is Maganga (2021) that argue how women in microfinance schemes lack the education and training to understand book keeping. Despite the low levels of education, the women were literate hence, it was easier for the researcher to converse and understand each other.

During the study, the researcher discovered that the majority of participants were between the age group of 35 to 50. This came as a surprise to the researcher who would have expected more of the twenties that are the economically active group, however the researcher later concluded the age group might have been influenced by high dependence with the economically

active group unemployed the older generation will have high dependence ratio from supporting both children and grandchildren. In support of these findings are Parwez and Patel (2022) that observes that lack of access to resources is limiting young women's microfinance participation. Young women lack financial autonomy due to dependency on partners causing a deficit in young women as most of them lack sustainable livelihoods despite depending on the husband.

The section explores the subthemes that emerged in objective 1 of women's perceptions on microfinance lending that are mistrust of savings account, business training as burdensome, high interest loans.

In one of the interviews that were conducted by the researcher, some of the participants expressed involvement in microfinance trainings as burdensome. Some women explained how they were caught in family and business trainings in microfinance became a burden for them. This is indicated when the one of the participant (3), says:

Unenge waneta nekumboita mabasa epamba, ne kuita zvevavana vechikoro apa uchida kuenda kutraining ye kuMicrofinance institution zvinobva zyawandisa, saka unobva watozvinetera;

I would have been caught up with house chores and attending to schoolchildren and to actual think of attending microfinance business trainings after all this work will be burdensome.

The above statement spoken by the participants indicates how the participants feel about their involvement in microfinance trainings. This clearly shows the burdens of the triple roles to which women involved in productive work are burdened with. The perception that women's involvement in microfinance training is burdensome is echoed by Gender and Development (GAD), approach that speaks to the issues of the triple roles of women that is production, reproduction and community work and development. Consistent with the findings of the study is Power (2020) that alludes that while women are already burdened with unpaid work they also face lack of time to train in microfinance. Moreover, how women involved in development has to do with the three roles of production, reproductive and community roles that now becomes a burden given the responsibility and commitment (Kabeer 1996).

Harris (2000) and Bretton (2015) also share the same views in their research of women, where women indicated that their involvement in microfinance training became a burden as they had less time with their family hence a feeling of disempowerment rather than empowerment. In support of the study are Vogel et al. (2021) that alludes that women are burdened at home and this makes their workload heavy leading to a deficit in attention spans during microfinance training. This clearly shows the high workload exerted on women given their role in the home and in society that has been ascribed by the society. This however correlate with issues of culture and societal expectation of women as mothers in the home that hence increases the burden given there are now also involved in productive work thus bringing out how women perceive business trainings in microfinance. The care burden makes the microfinance training of women heavy as they have to deal with the domestic front before participating in the public domain.

Most of the participants portrayed mistrust when asked about microfinance savings in business. Most women highlighted that they could not trust the institution with its savings. This was clearly articulated when the participant (1) said;

Kuisa mari yangu yemasavings kupi? Haziite! Ndinozoiwana here?

(Placing my savings in an account is a risk and cannot be done, as I am not guaranteed of getting my money back)

And when the other participant (4), said

In as much as I would want to put my savings in the account institutions are not reliable

The above statements by participants show a high level of mistrust of microfinance institution in terms of savings service. Women expressed mistrust in placing their savings in the institution and accessing their money when need arise for use of the savings. Women also indicated that their mistrust of the savings service was based on the economic prevailing situation and less of the organisation. Concurrent with the findings are Ediabonya and Tioluwani (2023) that observes that women in Africa Nigeria had attitudes towards financial institutions with most of them expressing the volatility of the economies as a challenge that makes them trust microfinance. These findings can best have explained by the transnational feminist theory by

Mahantony in (Kaplan and Grewal, 1999) that state that women perceptions differ as per geo-political environment and experience. Women in Zimbabwe expressed their mistrust based on their experience in 2008 where there was inflation and people lost their money in the banks and microfinance institutions thus developed mistrust of use of savings service thus bringing out the sentiments of the transnational theory of the role of experience in how one perceives a situation. Hence indicating how social factors such as mistrust affect economically hence the need to look into microfinance on both angles. However, when the researcher interviewed the key informant from Thrive Microfinance the key informant managed to clarify on highlighted issue of mistrust on savings, when the key informant said:

I understand their fear they cannot be blamed given the economic situation, we as a microfinance institution has been collaborating with ZB in saving provision service and as an institution, we have already stopped encouraging savings.

The statement above that was uttered by the key informant clearly explains the institution's understanding and awareness of prevailing situation and women's mistrust. As argued by the key informant, they understand that women's mistrust is based on the economic environment. That is explained by the transnational feminism as women's differing experience is a result of geopolitical environment. In support of these findings are Tok and Heng (2021) that alludes that women are not using financial institutions for savings due to the lack of trust for the financial systems.

Women were asked about their perception on Thrive Microfinance loans women indicated that the institution had loans with high interest. This was clearly alluded to when one of the participants said:

Vanowanza interest ndosaka ndichita mukando
(They have high interest, hence take preference in mukando)

Moreover, another participant said,
Maloan acho ane interest yakawandisa
(The loans have high interest)

The statements above clearly spell out less participation of women as being attributed by high interest loans in Microfinance. Women's perception of high interest loans of Thrive Microfinance clearly indicates that women are not involved owing to high interest that marginalises them hence less

economic participation. In support of the findings of high interest loans as obstacles to women development Dr Yunus speaks to issue of women participation in economy in his book, Banker to the poor, micro-lending battle against world poverty (1999). In support of these findings is Lamichhane (2022) that observes that high interests are becoming a determinant creating loan delinquency in microfinance causing women to shun loans while discouraging loan defaults. As argued by Dr Yunus (1999), the poor, especially women, fail to participate in economic development as they may fail to access credit owing to the high interest to which he exemplifies the women who were involved in bamboo making stools and could not afford to live a better life owing to high interest. Hence, high interest loans have actually marginalised women more in economic development.

Concerning high interest loan, a key informant was consulted and asked to comment on the stance of the institution regarding interest on the loans. The key informant highlighted that:

We have been operating at 5percent interest all this while but due to the economic situation, we are now operating at 20 percent interest.

The statements highlighted above by the key informant indicate that the economic situation is affecting microfinance hence making women more vulnerable. The increase of high interest loan will not only affect the institutions but also will also affect women's welfare and issues of gender equality and will make women more vulnerable. Thus explains the social development approach that state that they more to development than just economic they are social factors (Kaseke, 1993). Similar to the study are Naz *et al.* (2024) that observes that economic situations and high-interest rates contribute to loan defaults affecting both the women and the microfinance outfits. By virtue of tempering around with women's source of income through economic instability, a lot of social aspect might be triggered such as domestic violence, stress and depression hence affecting the person and their environment and these stresses can be poured down to children thus the need to look into these issues.

most woman highlighted their need for loans as part of their expectation for the organisation. Women indicated that they would want the organisation to

provide them with loans that can help in their business growth. This came out when participant (6) who is a vendor alluded that;

Ndodawo loan kuti ndiisimukire mubusiness rangu nditenge nekutengesa zvakawanda ndoitawo kaprofit karinani kanondibatsira kuendesana vana kuchikoro
(I would want to get a loan so that I will be able to boast my business and get higher profits that can help me, send my children to school).

The statement uttered by participant (6), clearly indicates the need for loans in the growth of business for women. It also indicates given an opportunity women can grow their families and in better their lives and of their family. In support of the findings, Dr Yunus (1999), points out that the poor especially women are in need of loans that can help empower them. As argued by Dr Yunus's book, banker to the poor also explores the reason behind the Grameen model was to provide loans where a woman could not get a loan but is offered a loan by Dr Yunus after conversing with the woman who was a bamboo stool maker realised their main challenge was on getting loans. Hence, the issue of loans is not new to the discourse of microfinance and women empowerment. This however is critical to the research as it indicated women's expectation of the organisation and how these expectations can help empower them economically and socially, as they will be able to send their children to school.

Contrary to what the other participants highlighted, a few of the women indicated that they had no interest in getting loans. However, they would appreciate financial skills through business training. A few of the participants highlighted that they preferred financial skills compared to loans. This was highlighted when one of the participants said:

Ini hangu loan handiyide pamwe ma skills ndiwo angatobatsira
(Personally I don't want a loan probably skills might help),

The other participant also said this:

Nyangwe vakatipa maloo mari yacho inotengei mukore uno, vakatotidzidzisa how to run business zvinenge zvirinani?
(Even if they are to give us loans, they are useless, except if they teach us on how to run a business)

The statement above clearly shows how some women prefer financial skills compared to loans. This clearly highlights how sustainability is preferred over

short-term loans hence the desire for skills. Women highlighted that need to acquire skills over loans are also based on the premise that skills are a personal development to which no one can take from the individual unlike money. In support of the findings in a study that was carried out by Kasynathan in (Brown 2011), where a similar study on microfinance was done women highlighted their interest in skills over loans to which they explain that the financial skills would make them knowledgeable and were able to participate in other spaces that they initially would not participate because they did not know what to say but with financial skills their knowledge was increased. Consistent with the study are Sangwan *et al.* (2021) that alludes that women prefer training in microfinance projects than loans so as to avoid indebtedness. This reduces debt delinquency with most people avoiding debt trap that exacerbates the vulnerability of women. They also highlighted that skills would give them personal empowerment through high self-esteem thus making them participate and contribute in community affairs. These echo the same sentiments with the empowerment theory that ascribes to the multidimensional aspect of empowerment stating how personal empowerment (power within), need to be considered for economic empowerment to take place and how personal empowerment can attribute to cultural empowerment, economic and political empowerment.

When participants were asked on how Thrive Microfinance could intervene in terms of assisting women, women highlighted the need for low interest rates. Women indicated that they were expecting low interest rates from Thrive Microfinance. This was alluded when one of the participant said;

Toda maloan anewo low interest inobhadharika (We need loans that have low interest rates)

The statement above brings out the need for low interest rates for women. Women by virtue of being vulnerable and less economically stable require loans that can facet growth of their business hence high interest rates often affect their way of doing business. Similar to the study are Mia *et al.* (2022) that argue how high interest rates on loans was preventing women from accessing loans and financial assistance. These findings mirror those of Dr Yunus (1999), in his book bank to the poor where he explains how his assistance to a women who was into bamboo stool making business, who was lending from a supplier at high interest could not grow the business and

remained poor as a result of hence remained poor as a result of the high interest thus need for low interest that can facilitate the growth of the business of women. As argued by Otero and Rhyne (1994), high interest makes it difficult for women to repay and be able to get another loan hence increasing women's exclusion in the economic sector.

Findings also show that women have requested for flexible payment of loans. Women highlighted that they needed flexible payments so that they can be able to pay back. This is indicated when one of the participant says:

Todawo maloo anozobhadharikawo

(We want loans that can be paid in terms of flexibility of payment)

The above statement indicates the need for flexible payments for women. Women have always requested for flexible payment that could help them to be able to pay back on time, also be able to handle a lot of family work, and not struggle. The issue of flexible payment that speaks to issues of women's failure to repay owing to the inflexibility of payment that makes them more vulnerable. In support of the findings Dr Yunus (1999), in his book bank to the poor highlights on issues of inflexibility of payment as one of the reason that made the famous bamboo stool maker poor as the terms were inflexible hence making the women poorer each day, so they can ensure payment of loan. In support of these findings are Omokhoa *et al.* (2024) that alludes that women needs loans with lower interest rates that do not discourage them. Inflexible payments also affect women as they might not be able to plan ahead nor increase their business growth as they are limited with the loan payment time frame hence this can be marginalising for women hence it is critical to consider women's expectation of flexible payment as it affect them and brings exclusion of women in economic and social spaces.

When women were asked about the potential impact for accessing microcredit loans, they highlighted that accessing loans would increase growth of business. During interviews women highlighted that access to loans would improve their business, as they will be able to buy more goods. This can be noted when the participant said;

Tikawanawo maloo tinokwanisa kuhorda zvakawanda, tosimukirawo

(...if we are to get loans, we will be able to order goods in large quantities therefore uplifting the business)

The statement by the respondents clearly shows the impact of capital injection in women micro business for success. The statement also spells out the need that women have for loans that can help in the growth of their business. Similar sentiments have been echoed by Kasoga et al. (2021) that alludes that women require the infusion of financial assistance into their businesses to help them grow. Thurman (2007) also echoed the same sentiments of the impact of capital injection for business growth of women in his case study in Ukraine where a woman was able to borrow a loan and expand eight stationery stalls in her village owing to the microfinance loan thus indicating that access to loans can help in improving women's business growth. However, some scholars have argued that it is not in black and white to clearly say women provision of loans automatically leads to growth of business as some studies have highlighted that women given more money spend the money on family education and home thus giving them more money does not transcend to women's business growth thus indicating that issues of microfinance and empowerment has other social factors involved.

Most women highlighted that involvement in microfinance lending reduces domestic violence in the home. Most of the participants highlighted that by merely being involved in microfinance lending scheme to which the women has access to credit reduce the rate of domestic violence in the home. This was clearly spelled out when the participant said:

Kana wane kamari kako murume anenge asisa kunetsa, anotokunyengerera achiziva kuti hauchina basa nemari yake
 (...when you have your money the husband will stop harassing you, owing to the realisation that you are now independent thus do not need his money)

The above statement by the respondent clearly spells out how women access to credit reduces domestic violence in the home due to economic independence. This indicates how domestic violence in the home is being perpetuated by poverty thus; access to credit for women reduces the rate of domestic violence hence critical. These findings relate to the social feminist theory that states that women are oppressed because of economic dependence thus with economic independence being achieved through credit access women will not be violated. Hence influencing positively in the lives of women. However researches conducted by Kim *et al.* (2007), and Bretton (2015), were contrary to my findings as they highlight that women's access to

microfinance credit increased domestic violence in the home. As argued by Bretton's (2015), research domestic violence was being triggered by economic independence to which the men felt less valuable and ego crashed with the woman now contributing more in the household (male chauvinism), and the change in roles with woman now being the provider accelerating domestic violence in the home. These issues also speak to socio-cultural values and roles in society that underpin issues of women empowerment hence it is critical to note the effect of culture in the empowerment of women thus need for sensitivity hence showing how issues of empowerment and microfinance goes beyond the financial paradigm but as indicated by the underlying social factors of domestic violence that can be perpetuated or alleviated by microfinance lending.

Findings have revealed that women gain personal empowerment by gaining financial access. Women highlighted personal empowerment as potential impact. This is clearly spelled out when one of the participants (2), said;

Ukawana mari unenge wakukwanisa kuzviitira tunhu twako, uchizviriritira usinganetsane nevanhu

(When you have your money, you be able to do your own things without having to ask someone)

The above statement reflects on personal empowerment of women that is attributed by access to finance. Women expressed that accessing finance would change their power within and self-esteem, as they were able to get the buying power and freedom to do what they want, as they would have the money to do it. In support of the study are Chitema and Chitongo (2020) that observes that microfinance programmes empower women as they lend money to boost the businesses of these women. The aspect of power within that is echoed in the empowerment theory as critical in achieving authority over many things. The findings of personal empowerment mirror the control degree by Longwe (1991) that speaks to the personal empowerment as the highest level of empowerment that can be noted by high level of control over one's life and decisions. In support of the findings, Kato and Kratzer (2013), echo the same sentiments of personal empowerment being achieved by access to finance in the study that they conducted in Tanzania were women involved in microfinance were measured on self-esteem and self-efficacy and these women indicated high level of self-esteem and empowerment contrary to

those that had not been involved in microfinance. Similar findings were also observed of personal empowerment in a study conducted in Sri-Lanka where psychological empowerment that reflects the power within in empowerment theory was seen on women through access to finance availed through microfinance (Hansen, 2015).

However, in some of the studies that were conducted in Malawi access to finance did not increase personal empowerment rather it disempowered the women who had access to finance. In the study in Malawi women who managed to get loans from microfinance upon assessing their progress based on gender-based empowerment control, results indicated that some of the women did not have control of the loan and money and with most married women, not involved in the activities that the loan was being used (Goertz and Gupta, 1994). Thus indicating that access to finance does not always guarantee personal empowerment, it might also be disempowering. Thus, the need to consider social factors that come as a result of empowerment through microfinance.

The following sub themes emerged on objective four on women recommendation to Thrive Microfinance that is group lending, voluntary business training, loans in forex and provision of farmer input service.

When women were asked on probable advice to the microfinance, they highlighted group-lending system as ideal. Women highlighted that they would recommend the group lending system when one of the participants indicated that;

Tikakwanisa kuwanirwa mari muzvikwata zvedu sezvatoita mumukando (If possible, be given loans in groups)

The above statement reflects women's request for group lending system as part of the recommendations. Women's recommendation of group lending is critical as it highlights their preferences. In some studies, recorded it was highlighted some women prefer group lending since they are more secure in groups than in individuals and teamwork thus, in the event that something happens to a group member another group member can assist. In support of the findings Dr Yunus (1999), who is the founder of group lending in Microfinance indicates that group lending is a conducive approach of

providing loan to the impoverished and to this regard formulated a model to which he asserts the Grameen Model of banking to which he introduces group lending system that is supported by social capital to which he uses social relationships to guide loans were women choose themselves for group loans and are each other's watchers in terms of loan use and repayment as repayment will facilitate availability of loan to the next person. Hence, as a result each one is a watchman for the loan as it affects them. Thus, group lending becomes ideal.

women preferred voluntary training compared to compulsory business training. During interviews women highlighted that they were not in support of compulsory business training but rather voluntary training. This is highlighted when one of the women indicated that;

Vanofanira kunzwisisa kuti tetisina nguva, saka training ngavasaimanikidza (They should understand that we don't have time thus should not enforce business trainings)

The participant's words bring out how business training was entrapping her thus recommends that it becomes voluntary. Women have recommended voluntary business training as a result of the workload that overwhelms them thus the triple roles of women by Gender and Development framework that ascertain that women are overburdened with workload of the triple roles that is reproduction, production and community role that in-turn increases their workload hence it is critical to consider it thus need for voluntarism in business training. However, when the key informant was contacted for comment in regards to voluntary business training recommendation. The key informant had this to say:

Business training is offered as security to the borrowers so they can manage their funds well hence it is compulsory.

The above statement by the key informant indicates how the training are almost impossible to be voluntary as they regard it as security to ensuring that the borrower is knowledgeable about handling finance thus without business training the institution feels there are risking with people without financial know how. In support of the findings is Chuma *et al.* (2013) that alludes that poor training of women was making microfinance a failure as women lacked training on book keeping result in loan defaults. Thus bringing the economic paradigm to which social development denounce as they fail to

regard the social aspect of women's triple roles and how they might affect women participation as they might fail to attend to the business training hence excluding women into the mainstream of both economic and social development.

women highlighted the need for loans in foreign currency given the prevailing economic situation. Women highlighted that they would recommend for loans to be accessed in foreign currency for the ease of doing business. These were the exact words of the participant:

Vakatipawo malooan neforeign currency zvinotibatsira kuhodha nekutengesa tisinganetseki nekutenga forex yekuhodhesa.

(If they facet loan provision in foreign currency that can help us in buying large scale goods for resale without having to worry about buying forex for supplies)

These statements above by the participant clearly shows the myriad challenges being faced in buying supplies thus the request for loans in foreign currency. The issue of loan provision that is new in microfinance findings is peculiar to Zimbabwe prevailing economic situation hence the supported by transnational feminism that state that women's perceptions are different as a result of experience and geopolitical environment that is different, hence the finding on loan provision in foreign currency is mainly based on a Zimbabwe experience of the economic situation of destabilisation hence critical to consider macro and micro environment issues in microfinance hence bringing out the social development that states that microfinance issues goes beyond economic issues it might also be affected by political situation hence critical to consider it.

However, when the key informant from Thrive Microfinance was asked to comment in regards to the recommendation by women of providing loans in forex. The key informant had this to say:

In as much as we would want to provide loans in forex to women to ease the way of doing business for them, it is unconstitutional and as a registered Microfinance to provide foreign currency for women conducting business locally, thus the Microfinance Act 24 guides us.

From the above statement, it is clear that the institution is not in a position to provide loans in foreign currency especially for women conducting business locally as they are guided by the constitution. However, failure of the

institution to provide loan in foreign currency often affect women as the value of the money to which they are borrowed loses value before they can buy and sell supplies that then affects their ease of doing business, business growth and the welfare of their family hence continuous feminisation of poverty.

one the participant recommended that the Thrive Microfinance assist them by providing input service for farmers. In one the interviews with a participant, the participant highlighted the need for support with input when she says:

Dai vakatibatsirawo ne mafertiliser nembeu nokuti hazvichatengeka, tozodzorerwa mari yavo takohwa nekuti kutita mari yekupihwa kutenga mainputs haikwane.

(If the institution could help with input service for farmers that can be repaid after harvesting as loans has become insignificant in trying to buy inputs like fertilisers and seed that are now exorbitant.)

The above statement by the participant clearly shows the need for inputs for business survival. The recommendation for input by the participant was based on the premise that the loans were not enough for business but rather input provision would help ease the way of doing business. However, the finding is new to microfinance researches that have been conducted thus it is critical. However, with regards to the recommendation of provision of input to farmers the key informant had this to say:

As an institution, we think it is a noble idea we will consider it, given already that our clientele is mainly rural populace that are into farming thus it is key to consider it.

The institution embraced the recommendations of input service to farmers as a noble idea. The facilitation of input to farmers does not only develop their farming business but also improves women 's family and women participation thus it is critical as it enhances women economic participation in light of vision 2030 of a middle income economy.

This chapter has presented the findings of women 's perceptions on Thrive Microfinance and Women Empowerment. The findings were presented in narrative form in line with the objectives of the study and the various themes that emerged from data analysis. The following chapter ties up the study by presenting the summary, conclusions and the recommendations of the study.