Chapter 2: STUDY THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The present chapter provides a critical overview of literature reviewed for the study. It was conducted and written from a level of abstraction, firstly, tracing the historical and conceptual of women empowerment followed by the concept of growth points. In addition, literature on the Zimbabwean political economy trajectory was traced, as it depicts policies that have had an impact on socio-economic status of women since 1980. Literature was also reviewed on the two theories adopted for this study, the Women Empowerment Theory (Sarah Longwe Framework), and the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach. Empirical trends and patterns were discussed considering the rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy analytical optic. Finally, the chapter identifies gaps within the literature and the significance of carrying out this study.

Gender equality/women empowerment has been acknowledged as a goal aimed at attaining international development (Malhorta & Schuler, 2005). Empowerment, according to Kabeer (2011) is the expansion of the freedom of choice and the ability to express opinions and obtain and control resources. Thus, empowerment can be viewed as a process and not a goal. Regarding process, Kabeer (1999) argues that an individual moves from a lesser to a higher state. The process is about changes in one's life that result in greater freedom of choices and equality. Mosedale (2005) further asserts that empowerment entails people being able to make choices and being able to carry them out. Hence for one to be empowered they must be disempowered. The process of empowerment begins with the recognition of male domination and understanding how it perpetuates women oppression (Mosedale, 2014). This means that for one to acknowledge oppression they must be oppressed and marginalised. The government of Zimbabwe also has its own definition of empowerment that influences how it champions the designing of policies and projects to empower the disempowered. According to the GoZ (2012) empowerment is the process that gives individuals greater freedom of choices and action.

This means that choices are linked to the action to be taken. There are therefore a mutual understanding of what empowerment entails and what it does for the poor and marginalised including women. It is related to the concept of power (Kabeer, 2005) and borders on three key elements that is agency (the ability to perform an action), resources (the resources needed to perform a certain action) and outcomes (the result of agency and resources). Hence, Alkire (2008) posits that although empowerment is an iterative process, it is assumed that agency and resources are most likely to result in positive outcomes.

It is critical to observe that between 1940 and 1955, women's empowerment efforts post World War II were gaining momentum. Some of the milestones achieved during this period included the agitation to challenge traditional gender norms, formation of the UN in 1946 taking gender equality as a fundamental principle of recognising women's rights. Additionally, the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 included some articles related to gender equality and women's rights (Defeis, 1994). This period also witnessed the emerging of feminist groups and Women's Trade Unions and labour movement with the later advocating for improved working conditions and equal pay. However, besides all these formations, progress was slow, but the initiatives laid the groundwork for several approaches and platforms around the world (Thurlow, 2006). For example, some notable platforms and approaches such as Ester Boserup's WID approach up to the time of the Beijing platform in 1995 were major driving forces for women empowerment. In the same vein, countries in the third world were also beginning to acknowledge issues of gender equality and women empowerment. Boserup's work further contributed to the recognition of gender roles in development leading to public attention. This view also gave rise to organisations such as the World Bank acknowledging women's roles in development (Ege, 2011).

Over and above the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, others included CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the current

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs/Agenda 2030). Each of these platforms recognised gender inequalities and provided strategies to address them. For example, rural women's equal economic rights and empowerment lies in the guidelines of these platforms and most importantly the SDGs/Agenda 2030 and the AU's Agenda 2063.

To this end SDG number 5 is regarded critical for its advertency in the promotion of gender inequality. Governments have therefore been propelled to recognise women's rights in terms of eradication of poverty, hunger, access and basically improving participation (Sen, 2019). In the African context the region's Agenda 2063 observes issues of gender in what is termed the 'African way'. The African Union adopted Agenda 2063 in 2015 right at the end of the MGDs. Sparks (2016) has noted Africa's efforts to promote regional economic integration and addressing inequalities at regional level. This idea was prompted by the failure by all African countries to meet the MDGs which were mainly applicable to developing countries. Thus, Agenda 2063's aspiration 6 goal number 1 calls for promotion of full gender equality in all spheres of life. The ushering in of Agenda 2063 therefore ensures inclusivity since it provides Africa with a consensus on common challenges within the African context and is driven by SDG goal 5.

The concept of rights is anchored on what scholars such as Amartya Sen (development as freedom) and John Rawl (the veil of ignorance) have, respectively tried to explain as key to economic empowerment. For example, freedom is viewed as the ability to pursue one's goals underpinned on the right/freedom to participate in political, economic and social matters (Miletzki & Broden, 2017). Sen (2002) further argues that development should focus on the creation of an environment where all individuals (including women) have the freedom to make choices. In essence, the emphasis is on the expansion of people's capabilities depends on the elimination of oppression and provision of necessities such as education and health (Sen, 2002). On the other hand, Rawl's theory believes that the veil of ignorance shields one from knowing what could lead then to be knowledgeable on injustices (Gwavaranda, 2012).

Rawl's focus is on an individual to know their rights that, essentially culminates into the freedom that Sen (2002) rightfully shows. In terms of women's rights and gender equality, Rawl's veil of ignorance places importance on the notion that no one has authority over the other unless agreed to. This brings into context the issue of patriarchy that downplays gender equality and women empowerment. Behind the veil of ignorance, women are not aware of their rights. In this regard, both Rawl and Sen's thoeries try to highlight the importance of freedom, knowledge of one's rights and ultimately proposes the principle of equal opportunity for all.

In light of the above, most African countries have placed gender equality at the centre of development initiatives. Kemboi & Sangura (2022) observe that countries like SA, Kenya, Namibia and Nigeria have had policies adopted for equality purposes and equal participation, driven by global and regional frameworks alluded to above. In the local context, Zimbabwe is also guided by the Zimbabwe National Gender Policy.

The Zimbabwe National Gender Policy (ZNGP); 2013 – 2017 was formulated in the backdrop of the urge to achieve gender equality. Chabaya *et al.* (2009) argue that over the years, Zimbabwe has strived to remove all forms of discrimination in its society. And by this, several declarations and conventions have been ratified for example, the Beijing Platform, CEDAW, MDGs, SDGs, Agenda 2063 and the National Gender Policy based on the country's Constitution especially Section 56 of 2013. Even though the ZNGP was initially instrumentalised in 2004 yet it is the current 2013 – 2017 version that this study seeks to analyse and evaluate.

The ZNGP cannot be discussed in isolation from the 2013 Constitution. Dziva (2018) describes the 2013 Constitutional reform and protection of women's rights as being gender sensitive. It protects women and seeks to improve their access to health, capital and employment opportunities. Strides have therefore been taken to recognise, include, protect and ensure there is no discrimination of women. The policy is validated by the fact that women's contributions are included in the Constitution. For example, promoting women's participation in politics. Women's

contribution to political participation dates to the war of liberation, where it is believed that Zimbabwe's independence was obtained with the help of 10000 women (Maviza *et al.*, 2013). However, Schotting (2013) argues that women have been sold a political dummy where several measures have been put in place, but their participation has remained a mirage for them.

In view of the above, it is important to observe that the ZNGP is also spearheaded by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Community Development and there are several women empowerment groups too such as ZWLA, WAG and WOZA, all meant to bring awareness of gender equality, women's rights and promote equal opportunities for men and women (Chabaya, *et al.*, 2018). In 2020 the government launched the National Development Strategy1 (NDS1) directed by Vision 2030 and gender mainstreaming is one of the major tenets in this policy. According to Choruma (2021), the instruments specifies that although government has made some progress with regards to gender mainstreaming, the current situation is still largely characterised by exclusion and limited gender mainstreaming. Women still lack access to financial resources, land and property rights and limited opportunities to influence policy due to patriarchal barriers. The NDS1 therefore commits to give priority to gender mainstreaming through interventions that confer equal opportunities guided by the Constitution, SDGs, Agenda 2063 and the SADC Gender Protocol on gender equality.

However, of interest to this study is the persistent marginalisation of women in the face of the various policies for gender equality. Dengu (2015) argues that women's rights are human rights, hence Section 14 of the Constitution provides a framework for government agencies to empower marginalised groups. The World Bank (2012) further posits that unequal access to economic activities, opportunities and gender gaps in productivity have contributed to inequalities. For example, the Indigenisation Policy of Zimbabwe mandated with empowering disadvantaged groups overlooked women as such a group (Matunhu, 2012; Magure, 2010). The same was experienced with the Fast Track Land

Reform Programme (FTLRP) that women constitute 68% of the rural population yet they accessed less than 18% of the land that was distributed (Mutopo, 2014). This shows lack of application of gender perspectives to economic development policies.

Zimbabwe is also signatory to the SADC Gender Protocol that aims to eliminate barriers for women's participation by breaking inequalities that hinder their advancement. Moreover, the Maputo Protocol's Article 9 also guides member states within the SADC region to ensure that women have access to key productive resources that includes land. The issue of land has been a major focus of discussion noting that it has not been accessed by rural women. Hence, Mutopo (2014) concurs that women lack access to land, capital and inputs to increase their livelihoods. Thus, even though major milestones have been made thus far, for example the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and women's representation in parliament, women have not fully benefitted from this policy and are still underrepresented in the political arena. Again, for this reason, lack of participation in development initiatives by rural women is a major contributor to poverty.

From the ensuing discussion, it is noted that efforts have been made to promote gender inequalities guided by various global, regional and local frameworks. However, women still suffer discrimination and marginalisation, particularly in developing countries including Zimbabwe. To this end, women's lack of participation in development policies spans back to the days of Women in Development by Ester Boserup which focused on women in the areas of agriculture and industrial development. She highlighted the way in which development policies and processes since the colonial eras have excluded women (Kanji & Toulmin, 2007). This study assumes that lack of women empowerment through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe has also been attributed by the policy's lack of participation and gender mainstreaming.

Globally, the subject of the growth point/pole concept has contributed much to the economic growth discourse for distressed regions and rural

areas. Several researchers and proponents have analysed this concept to establish its strengths as an economic growth intervention for underdeveloped areas. Conceptualised by French Economist Francoise Perroux in the1950s, other proponents of the concept such as Boudeville (1950), Hansen (1967), Todd (1974), Myrdal (1957), Hirschman (1958), Lasuen (1973), Hansen (1967), Hermansen (1969) and Richardson (1978) among others have modified, added on, supported and critiqued Perroux's ideaover the years. The same concept has also contributed immensely to the development of the growth point policy in Zimbabwe and has been extensively written on by geographers and development practitioners such as Wekwete (1991, 1987, 1988), Manyanhaire *et al.* (2001, 2009, 2011), Nhede (2013), Chirisa & Dumba (2011), Moyo *et al.* (1985), Mutenga & Namasasu (1985), Gasper (2008), Nyandoro & Muzorewa (2017) and Mushuku & Takuva (2013). Past and current studies have tried to explain why the strategy has not been successful and effective for regional economic development.

The main proponent of the concept is Francoise Perroux who is credited with formalising and elaborating on the concept. Perroux (1958) cited in Gantsho (2008) defined it as technically advanced industries that are concentrated in a particular location or locale. Perroux's definition is based on Joseph Schumpeter's theories of the role of innovations and large-scale industries. In Schumpeter'sanalysis, it is noticeable that development does not occur everywhere at once but appears in spurts ordevelopment poles. Schumpeter's theory focused on innovation which emphasises investment as the main driver for expansion based on new ideas and practices. Naturally, such changes are nuanced to improve production due to new technology, enablers for new markets that are drivers of economic growth (Vertakova *et al*., 2015). So, Perroux's definition was generally based on economic space, assumed to be triggered by propulsive or stimulant industry through inter-industry linkages and industrial interdependence (Kimengsi & Fombe, 2015). Nonetheless, the concept has been subject to various interpretations as its application has considerably spread across the globe.

Richardson & Richardson (1978) have also described the growth pole concept as a set of expanding industries that are in a central place and have the potential to induce further development of economic activity throughout its zone of influence. This is what Perroux was more focused on. However, the concept was also elaborated on by Boudeville (1966), Hansen (1967) and Hermansen (1967). These scholars transformed the concept by moving it from an abstract economic space to a geographic space thus, having it contribute to the possibility of practical implementation in addressing the economic development of distressed regions (Boudeville, 1966; Parr, 1991). It is therefore argued that it was Boudeville (1966) who brought the concept to life. As such, the assumed growth patternis shown in the illustration below.

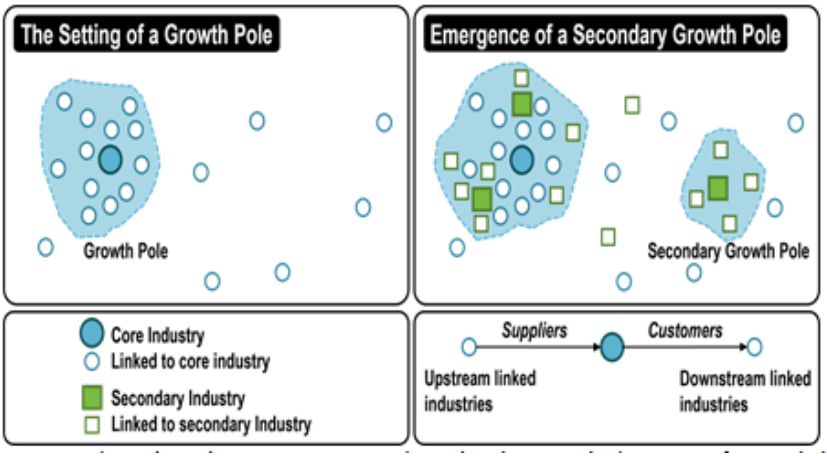

***Figure 2.1**- Regional Economic Growth (geographyclass.com)*

The illustration above shows what Perroux describes as the assumed economic growth of a region because of the presence and bunching up of leading or propulsive industries. In short, the rapid growth of a leading industry leads to economic and geographical polarisation whereby the areas around the pole or the centre benefit from the polarity in a backward and forward linkages pattern (Ke and Feser, 2010). This is also attributed to the concept of agglomeration of economies, which

according to Puga (2009) firms and workers become more productive in large, urbanised environments. Additionally, growth poles based on propulsive industries, encourage the development of the economic process. The anticipated results are employment creation, industrialisation and urbanisation (Mustatea, 2013) that would resultantly improve the standards of living of the population. To this end, Vertakova *et al*. (2015) affirm that redistribution of investment into growth centres facilitates synergies that not only result in economic growth but also improved social indicators such as health and education among others (Nhede, 2013). They further argue that this can be achieved if the leading industries (manufacturing) of a growth point interacts with the environment and does not conflict with the resource potential that includes manpower resources. In essence, the growth point strategy is based on three main concepts, propulsive industries, polarisation and the spread out or trickle-down effect. It is therefore believed that if the above is in order, backwards and forward linkages are enhanced (Leonov, 2019). Backwards and forward linkages, in this context are discussed in view of growth that spreads from the centre to the periphery with one as a raw material supplier and the other as the consumer of the raw materials.

The illustration below shows the main concepts of the growth point.

***Figure 2.2** - The Concepts of the Growth Point Strategy (www.geographyclass.com)*

In light of the above, propulsive/rapid economic growth, is based on the assumption that there willbe highly advanced technology, high demand for goods and strong industry linkages that would eventually even out the uneven economic development that the growth point strategy seeks to address. Owing to the assumption of advanced technological innovations, the strategy appears to favour nations with financial muscle rather than poor-resourced countries that still rely on primitive technology, particularly in the rural sector. In this case, the concept becomes questionable in its suitability for regional planning as well as women empowerment taking into cognisance that agriculture is their mainstay but lack land (Mungwini, 2011). Dynamic propulsive industries as depicted by Perroux, are characterised by a fast-growing sector with a high demand for goods (Darwent, 1969). Those supporting the concept of propulsive industries such as Vertakova *et al.* (2015) also believe that growth poles and propulsive industries foster the push for an economic process that enables employment creation, industrialisation and investments that facilitate and promote synergies for infrastructural development (Chirisa *et al.*, 2013). These factors are key for rural women empowerment considering that there could be employment creation and dependable livelihoods.

The presence of non- essential industries characterising most growth points in poor regions has little significance to the development of distressed areas. In this context, Manyanhaire *et al.* (2009) observe that most economic activities in the growth points are mainly petty trade based and have no significant positive outcomes. However, the scholars in this case addressed the issues homogenously without mentioning the gendered aspect of petty trades. Mushuku & Takuva (2013) argued that rural industrialisation within the concept of growth points remains subdued due to lack of investment and will-power by governments. It is therefore notable that rural women empowerment outcomes are therefore compromised without rural industries.

Myrdal (1957) one of the proponents of the concept defines economic and

geographical polarity as the process by which poles are created and enlarged. The creation and expansion of a centre or point can result in stagnation and decline of other areas, especially the peripheral areas. He is also of the opinion that rapid growth of industries will most likely lead to polarisation. Another proponent, Glasson (1974), believes that economic polarisation leads to geographic polarisation with the flow of resources and concentration of economic activities within an area. With the growth of the centre there is bound to be uneven growth in the periphery where resources are exploited from. So, while the concept of propulsive industries is assumed to result in efficiency, ensuing is also the economic and geographic polarisation. Myrdal (1957) is also of the opinion that poor-resourced region's polarisation effects are formed in growth points that are likened to the core-periphery theory by Friedman. The core-periphery view is based on the thinking that the core develops at the under-development of the periphery. A study carried out by Robey & Bolter (2020) established that too much agglomeration exacerbates inequalities. To evidence this, most of the poor countries have witnessed this dualism pattern of growth resulting in more developed urban centres and underdeveloped rural areas such as are to be found mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, some proponents have called for the reduction of polarisation for coordinated development to occur. This is so because it is envisaged that the production factors in the peripheral areas are gathered for use in the growth pole, are anticipated to eventually increase growth in the pole (Dobrescu & Dobre, 2014). To this end, polarisation will result in unbalanced economic growth between regions as has been witnessed by several countries that have adopted this strategy. As the centre grows, the effect in the periphery weakens hence the core-periphery phenomenon (Chakraborty *et al.,* 2021).

This proves that even though polarisation is anticipated to uncover the inequalities existing in the economy of a region, it indirectly promotes it. However, the emphasis is still on promoting propulsive industries (that are linked to innovation) to address inequalities (Dobrescu & Dobre,2014). The cynosure is also on decentralisation which is critical in bringing closer key

elements of the economy to the population (Munzwa & Jonga, 2010). Decentralisation, therefore, is, to a greater extent applicable to distressed regions as most lack access to major essential services. Manyanhaire *et al.* (2011) argue that the peripheral regions are set to benefit from all the facets of concentration of new industries. However, this has not happened, since the propulsive concept is all about fast growth and technological advancement, it is evident that the same is transferred from the centre to the peripheral regions in a bid to reduce inequalities. This is more so as these regions face economic stagnation. However, the question that arises is: is this concept a catalyst for uneven development? This question is partly answered by Hirschman (1958), another proponent of the concept. He acknowledges that regional imbalances are inevitable when following economic growth-driven approaches designed for territorial development. Since growth does not spread evenly across regions, balanced development cannot be expected. There are therefore distributional effects on their surroundings that fuel regional imbalances (Barrios & Strobl, 2009).

Contextually, views from the proponents have overlooked the fact that linkages that support the idea of propulsive industries might be weak or poor, that is, from the centre to the periphery. Resource distribution might be compromised. Just as the concept assumes that the success of the periphery is determined by growth forces from the growth centre, this is over-simplifying issues as shown in the following section.

As noted above, rapid growth (due to propulsive industries) leads to both economic and geographical polarisation and in turn to what Hirschman (1958) describes as spread-out effects. Nijkamp (2016) observe that the spread-out effect is hinged on the polarisation concept. The growth point and the hinterlands are two main bodies underpinned by ambivalent polarisation effects. They have the corresponding capacity base generation, a strong influence on the periphery that forms polarisation effects. Myrdal (1957) believed that with the development of the core, there is bound to be growth in the periphery too, the outer areas of the

pole. He also believed that regional economic relations involve unequal exchanges as the weak are always exploited (core-periphery). There is always a case of the core benefitting from the periphery leaving the latter vulnerable. In this context, the development of urban areas has resulted in the underdevelopment of rural areas through resource and labour exploitation. They foster uneven growth hence the concept becomes questionable.

However, without a doubt, Perroux's views were more directed to a growth point strategy that would automatically channel investment and bring about big firms. This is notwithstanding the availability and attainability of the resource base in a particular region. Firstly, not all regions have resources that may result in propulsive/big industries that may additionally promote economies of scale. Secondly, if the resource base is not within reach, the establishment of the envisaged industries might be a challenge. These assumptions, therefore, call for the promotion of the hinterland as the major supplier of raw materials to the centre. For example, women in the rural areas of the developing world are the major suppliers of raw materials (agricultural-based) but they lack the key socio-economic capabilities to improve productivity. Moreover, because they also lack land and skills, they are not able to compete in national economies (Mutopo, 2014). Of interest to this study is that women are not recognised as major raw material producers. Patriarchy renders women voiceless affirming segregation and inequalities.

In essence, the trickle-down effect, in this context, has not been achieved owing to various constraints that include poor implementation and resource limitation in countries such as Zimbabwe (Manyanhaire *et al.,* 2009). Consequently, women's economic empowerment in under-developed/rural regions remains a dream as rural regions lack technological diffusion and investment as noted by (Adams-Kane & Lim, 2011). Naturally, women would benefit a lot from modern technology and capital investment in the agricultural sector where they derive their livelihoods, but lack of gender mainstreaming is a barrier. It is, therefore,

critical to promote productivity in the hinterlands concurrently with the growth point as one depends on the other.

To this end, it was, therefore, necessary to carry out this study in an environment like Tsholotsho Growth Point where, besides the presence of the growth point, there is evidence of high levels of poverty. Most of the proponents of this theory agree with it in theory but in practice, its ability to address rural/regional economic imbalances has remained questionable. However, these include Wekwete (1991, 1997, 1998); Manyanhaire *et al.* (2001, 2009, 2011); Chirisa & Dumba (2013); Nyandoro & Muzorewa (2017); Christofakis & Papadaskalopoulos (2011); Mushuku & Takuva (2013); Nhede (2013); Parr (1991); Glasson (1974); Gantsho (2008) and Richardson (1975) fall under this category. This study therefore aimed at developing and coming up with insights into how the growth point policy in Zimbabwe has been applied to locate rural women empowerment outcomes since 1980. Furthermore, the proponents of the growth point in their various arguments, have raised some issues that have brought to the fore, some gaps in their characterisation of the economic benefits through the growth point concept. Manyanhaire *et al.* (2011) postulate that the oversimplification of the concept is a weakness on its own. It treated development as a linear process with attainable stages of growth. The various factors that may affect development have not been considered or taken into effect. The latter is more inclined towards poor economies that have a continual cycle of economic downturns.

The study recognised that the growth point policy is not in a vacuum but there are other policy interventions (shaped by the Zimbabwe political economy) that have had an impact on rural women empowerment since 1980 as discussed below.

The political economy of Zimbabwe is traced from 1980 and explores the socio-economic and political events and their impact on rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. The study argues that a trajectory and enmeshment of socio-economic and political

trajectories in Zimbabwe contributed to rural women's experiences of poverty to this day. A complex interaction between social, political and economic elements, has defined Zimbabwe's political economy. The nation's economic history has been characterised by ups and downs, frequently brought on by political decisions and outside shocks. Policies during the early years of independence were focused on integrating formerly excluded groups into the mainstream economy to correct imbalances from the colonial era. Due to their lack of resources and ability to engage in economic programs, the government was forced to help these by offering free healthcare, education and job development in addition to land resettlement. These developments had an effect on women, especially rural women.

The Zimbabwean political economy has a complex and multifaceted relationship with gender equality. Mungwini (2007) argues that the government of Zimbabwe has been committed to improving the situation of women in the country since independence in 1980. They recognised women as an oppressed group and implemented policies to transform their status and empower them to work alongside men in the development of the nation. This was a positive step towards achieving gender equality. This important policy shift was rubber-stamped by the enactment of the Labour Relations Act in 1985 which stated that "no employer should discriminate against any employee on the grounds of race, tribe or place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex." The latter act was also integrated with other legislative acts such as the Legal Age of Majority Act, and Equal Pay Regulations (Chabaya *et al.*, 2009). All these policies emphasised on women playing a significant role in the political economy and development of the country.

However, women empowerment campaigns in Zimbabwe and other African countries also presented a huge threat to the patriarchal system which has been dominant in many African societies. In rural Zimbabwe, women have always been relegated to being second-class citizens who are viewed as not being good enough to hold significant leadership positions.

This means that policies were formulated and implemented with very little input from women in rural settings. The common belief held by many older individuals is that tradition should be upheld because it represents long-standing practices that are valuable and define their identity. However, this mindset reinforces patriarchal values, ultimately marginalising rural women even more (Mungwini, 2007).

The Zimbabwe drought of 1991/92 was recorded as the worst in living memory. It changed the country's status of being the Southern Africa's bread basket to net importer of food. The effect of the of the drought on the economy had dire consequences on women who rely on rainfed agriculture as the key livelihood earner. To this, Matsengarwodzi (2022) observes that in rural Zimbabwe, women, children and the elderly make up a substantial portion of the agricultural labour force and are responsible for managing household nutrition, making them increasingly exposed to the effects of climate change. Daughters were increasingly married off to older men in return for grain or animals, ensuring enough food for the family to subsist. In other cases, the division of labour and the effects of drought would be more severe for women. Men, who are typically the primary breadwinners, would go to cities in pursuit of employment, while women, children and the elderly would stay in rural areas to tend to crops and harvests that were becoming more susceptible to the effects of climate change.

During the 1991/92 drought era women had the least control over land ownership and they suffered disproportionately from the scarcity of food, water and forced migration. Women find it difficult to obtain loans and credit that can aid in their recovery from shocks caused by climate change because they lack land titles or other assets that can be used as security. During this period, for example maize production decreased by 75% thereby leaving many the population in need of food assistance (Nangombe, 2015). Intake by the Grain Marketing Board was 13 000 tons which was just enough for two days consumption for the whole nation. Over a million head of cattle died of starvation as a result. As a result, the

livelihoods of women were affected and there was much reliance on donor hand-outs. Chigavazira (2019) further asserts that besides such huge impact droughts, women still depend on rain-fed agriculture and natural livelihoods posing livelihood challenges and adding on to their vulnerability.

Moreover, rural women's coping mechanisms are weak because of lack of access to resources such as capital, access to land resources and the skills needed to navigate their circumstances. According to Nangombwe (2015), women employ weak unresponsive strategies to drought and are entrenched in a cycle of poverty. They exhibit a tendency of despondency whereby they do not opt for different livelihoods other than farming. Furthermore, women are less likely to embrace sustainable land management techniques that could help stop further climate damage or boost crop yields because they lack access to money and technology (Schonhardt, 2022). Men and women are allocated different socio-cultural, political and economic roles hence gender has a significant impact on both the allocation and accessibility of water. Women and girls are typically responsible for finding water for household usage in rural communities in the majority of developing nations. They are more vulnerable to physical abuse and assault because of this. Recent data suggests that the violence women and girls endure when trying to obtain water during shortages is primarily gendered. The types of violence encountered at the water point include sexual, psychological and physical aggression (Chisungwa *et al.*, 2023).

The government and its partners therefore came up with several mitigation measures that included food for work, relief aid and at household level there was sale of livestock and remittances. Most of these strategies targeted women and children but did not go a long way in addressing the situation (Dube, 2008). The capacity to adapt to these strategies was low hence communities had to come up with measures based on what was readily available. A study carried out in Bikita by Mushore *et al.* (2013) concluded that 72% of communities were not happy

with the strategies delivered by the government citing unfair distribution. Conversely, the drought situation exposed the government's poor disaster management policy and early warning systems. Studies have also shown that the early warning systems for droughts at national level are not fully functional (Chitonga, 2013).

Subsequently, the 1991/92 drought cannot be discussed independent of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP/SAPS), hence, Shoko (2016) claims that the impact calls for understanding of both events. Both ESAP and the drought had serious repercussions on the poor including women.

When the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) were introduced in the early 1990s as part of a broader network of adjustment programme under the so-called Washington Consensus, Zimbabwe saw a rise in poverty. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) developed structural adjustment programs (SAPs) to boost economic development by cutting back on government spending. This led to widespread layoffs and job losses, which raised the unemployment rate. Estimates of the jobless rate increased from 22% in 1992 to 35% in 1996. Poverty increased, with female-headed households experiencing even higher rates of poverty. The cost of living rose sharply, and most individuals found it difficult to make ends meet (Mandinyenya, 2014). However, there is not much literature on the actual impact of the SAPs on rural women, this might be because the reforms directly targeted the employed and people in the urban centres. However, this is not to say rural women were less affected. For example, Kawewe & Dibie (2000) argue that SAPs plunged the country into an economic crisis that saw subsidies being removed and user fees re-introduced for health, education and agricultural inputs. There was therefore a decline in the number of children registered for primary education, low agricultural production and this affected rural women.

Additionally, ESAP saw those that had lost jobs relocating to the rural areas with the hope of engaging in farming activities, but the drought made it difficult to. Brett & Winter (2020) argue that the credibility of SAPS is difficult to judge since they were supposedly anticipated to lead to rapid economic expansion. But what was witnessed and experienced was increased poverty particularly during the first half of the 1990s. The government tried its best to prioritise poverty reduction measures but with not much success. Alwang *et al.* (2002) describe the livelihoods changes that came about because of the SAPs as compounded by increase in prices of basic commodities that affected women in the rural areas too.

Women make up half of the world's population and one-third of its labour force. They also work two-thirds of all working hours and receive only one-tenth of global income and less than 1% of world property (Mishra, 2014). While planning for the SAPs implementation, the reforms did not take gender into account, data suggests that gender has had a significant role in determining economic advances and that the SAPs have had varied effects on men and women in Zimbabwe. Macro-economic changes brought about by structural adjustment programs are expected to have differing effects on the living standards of men and women. For example, removal of subsidies had an adverse effect on agricultural production that women derive most of their livelihoods from. The removal of maize subsidies and continued increase in input cost affected production (Moyo, 2001).

Mandinyenya (2014) also posits that as the years passed, Zimbabwe also had other issues that had a severe effect on its economy and ultimately caused an economic collapse. The unstable political and economic environment impeded the nation's progress. Because of this, there was a significant brain drain as highly qualified individuals moved abroad, primarily to South Africa and the United Kingdom in search of better living conditions. As a result, the nation had less human capital available for development. Most of the surviving men left to go to neighbouring nations in pursuit of employment, leaving women and children in charge of

heading families. This had a detrimental effect on the family unit and the poverty of women as confirmed by Kawewe & Dibie (2000), that SAPs have been an inappropriate public policy in Zimbabwe.

Women are primarily responsible for the management and conservation of resources for their families all around the world. Women's closeness to nature contributes to their sustainable usage of the environment. Most women, particularly in rural areas, are active in household activities such as food, water, fodder and fuel collection, which increases their awareness of the environment and enables them to implement appropriate conservation practices and technology (Mago & Gunwal, 2019). Since the early 1980s, governments were more aware of the link between the environment and gender issues. Changes in natural resources and environmental management began with the unique role of women in mind.

From the top to the bottom, the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit, India's Chipko movement and Kenya's Green Belt Movement all emphasised the importance of women's voices and perspectives in sustainable development (Mago & Gunwal, 2019). The Green Belt movement is significant in the history of women and the environment. Wangari Maathai, a Nobel Prize laureate, began this project on World Environment Day in June 1977, involving 80,000 women in tree planting. The Green Belt movement seeks to integrate environmental rehabilitation with societal economic prosperity. This Maathai-led campaign aimed to restore Kenya's rapidly dwindling woodlands while also empowering rural women via environmental preservation. Beginning in the mid-1980s, women in Kenya rebelled against the elites and large multinational firms that were coercing and dominating land productivity. Rather than allowing women to plant food for survival, both their husbands and the government put pressure on them to harvest coffee for foreign profit. Protests continued and grew stronger over the next few decades. The protests eventually resulted in a power transition in Kenya that mandated democratic national elections and allowed for redistribution of land (Kanyinga, 2009).

Consequently, this movement also gave rise to awareness of the ecological environment for countries such as Zimbabwe. Mukoni (2015) argues that women and men have different uses and benefits when it comes to resources conservation hence there is a need ensure that men and women participate on an equal level. Furthermore, there is a belief that any discussion on environmental issues should recognise the gendered aspect of sustainable development. Literature shows that women primarily harvest and use fuel wood in Zimbabwe. The more trees that women cut down for home energy, the longer it takes to find and fetch wood. As a result, women are locked in a cycle of growing labour and environmental deterioration. The Environmental Management Authority has responded by including gender considerations in environmental protection. Zimbabwe's environmental strategy aims to specifically incorporate women. It considers the demand for natural resources such as fuel wood to be a female need. Environmental Buddies (a female-led organisation) has reached a total of 5,000 women in four distinct areas of Zimbabwe through its environmental education and awareness programme (Matsengarwodzi, 2022). As part of the female empowerment programme, 100 rural women from Mutare, 263 kilometres (163 miles) from Harare, were trained in beekeeping in 2020 (Matsengarwodzi, 2022). Since 2012, Environmental Buddies has noticed an increase in the number of women interested in planting trees, particularly fruit trees, in their various households. Consequently, the ecological environment is critical for rural women empowerment outcomes as shown above. However, women are still affected in the agricultural sector by ever changing climatic conditions.

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) aimed to address population-land imbalances and alleviate poverty by redistributing land from minority white commercial farmers to majority landless poor black people (Chimhowu, 2002). The issue with this plan was that it was characterised by unlawful agricultural invasions, violence, disregard for the rule of law and corruption (Bourne, 2011). Because of the implementation of the FTLRP and illegal farm invasions, 50% of female permanent workers

and 60% of female seasonal farm workers lost their jobs, compared to 30% and 33% of male permanent and seasonal farm workers, respectively (Zimbizi *et al.*, 2007). Only 18% of women profited from land acquisition. Those who worked and lived on the impacted farms were forced to leave, leaving them unemployed and homeless. According to Bourne (2011), those who were affected experienced both physical and psychological stress. The FTLRP caused hyperinflation, a reduction in basic services, a currency shortage and a spike in poverty levels (Bourne, 2011). Additionally, men headed households received 18% of the overall benefits under the A1 model, but women received less than 12% of the benefits under the A2 model (Mazhawidza & Manjengwa, 2011). The main explanation provided was that most women were unable to qualify due to a lack of finances. The sources of this gendered land tenure inequity are a variety of constraints faced by women when applying for land. Included are bureaucratic constraints, gender biases among the selection structures. These are primarily composed of men, a lack of information on the process and a lack of mobilisation of women's activist organisations around the issue of applications (Mazhawidza & Manjengwa, 2011).

Zimbabwe, like most countries in the third world, has had its fair share of economic under-performance. The year 2008 saw the country reeling under a massive hyper-inflation period that left the whole country in economic dire straits. During this period, there was limited access to essential health services, food insecurity, insufficient human services and general loss of livelihoods (UNICEF, 2009). In 2007, hyperinflation stood at 20,000 %, up from 96% in 2006 (UNICEF, 2009). Hyperinflation had reached 231 million % by July 2008, resulting in acute shortages of vital commodities such as medications, food, fuel, industrial and consumer products (Bourne, 2011). Makochekanwa (2009) further asserts that while the use of foreign currencies was not official prior to this period, it later became official in September 2009.

According to Oxfam (2013) country profile report, "women are over-represented among the poor, have culturally limited access to resources

and opportunities, and are vulnerable to violence in the home, community and political arena" (Oxfam, 2013). This declaration explains the various issues that women face in the country. Job losses and lack of food stuffs also affected rural women in that remittances from the urban areas to the rural areas ceased and yet farming activities were under distress because of lack inputs and productivity (Makochekanwa, 2009). Like their urban counterparts, they struggled to feed their families and let alone pay school and health fees. Food insecurity and poverty increased as a result. However, Zimbabwe continues to endure a plethora of economic hardships largely attributed to the political impasse.

However, to address some of the challenges as alluded to above, use of official use of foreign currency. Zimbabwe gave up using its currency in 2009 and switched to a multi-currency system known as "dollarisation." Among other advantages, dollarisation assisted Zimbabwe in containing hyperinflation. Dollarisation has, however, also resulted in several economic problems, such as deindustrialization, staggering growth and liquidity crunches (Chidakwa & Munhupedzi, 2017). Pasara & Garidzirai (2020) postulate that for five years, the Zimbabwean economy was stabilised by the adoption of multiple currencies. This stability, though, was only temporary, as people began to step up their activities on the black market. After that, the monetary authorities decided to set the exchange rate, which caused exchange rate operations to become unpredictable and chaotic and forced many people to switch to barter trade. To protect themselves from hyperinflation, economic players began to replace local currency in transactions with foreign cash. The ongoing crisis has led to a rise in the illegal market's usage of foreign money. There has not been any certified currency since the Reserve Bank demonetised it in 2009. Other obstacles impeding Zimbabwe's economy, however, include outdated technology, erratic economic strategies, inadequate infrastructure, operational snags, power outages, the absence of an integrated financial and administrative system and an unstable global financial environment.

The adoption of the US dollar as the official currency led to an increase in the cost of living, as many goods and services were priced in US dollars (Makochekanwa, 2009). This disproportionately affected women, who are often responsible for household budgeting. Rural women involved in entrepreneurship struggled to get hold of foreign currency because it was not readily available at financial institutions located in rural settings.

The Zimbabwean government made several negligent decisions that hampered the nation's economic progress. Initially, it was the way the investment surge of the early 1980s was conducted. Zimbabwe did not have the productivity as a young, independent nation to support such high spending, so even though the new social infrastructure increased the country's standard of living, it also resulted in a large budget deficit, severely depleting its emergency reserves (Pasara & Gairidzirai, 2020). The nation's economic catastrophe worsened during the next five years. When inflation hit 1,000 per cent in 2006, the World Bank declared Zimbabwe to have the fastest-shrinking economy outside of a war zone. To put it mildly, the government's attempts to tap down the price explosion were, at best, ineffective *(ibid)*. The economic downfall experienced in the country also meant the deterioration of the livelihoods of women living in rural parts of Zimbabwe their entrepreneurial efforts were also affected by the economic policy inconsistency that prevailed during that time. However, literature has not been specific on the direct impact of dollarisation on rural women empowerment, but the general assumption is that their livelihoods were negatively affected.

Male migration, along with limited local economic options, can leave women extremely reliant on foreign remittances. This can render them especially vulnerable to poverty, especially when remittances are paid seldom (IOM, 2010). Accordingly, many of the women who have been left behind rely on remittances to survive. To help lessen their vulnerability, affordable and secure remittance transfer services should be encouraged, and care should be taken to ensure that these services allow women to readily and securely collect money.

In rural Zimbabwe such as Tsholotsho District remittances are the primary source of income for female-headed households (Ncube & Gomez, 2015). They are typically used to purchase needs such as food, clothing, consumer goods, education, and health care services, among other things. This is consistent with Hall (2007)'s view that 'families have become increasingly reliant on international cash transfers to meet their basic needs.' As a result, remittances are mostly utilised to protect households from vulnerability and poverty, which merely confirms earlier research on remittances. At the same time, remittances are utilised to strengthen rural households' asset bases. The majority of receiving households reported that the cash received enabled them to purchase assets that increased their income streams and kept them afloat in the event of a shock. Scotch carts, livestock, brick under asbestos and/or zinc dwelling constructions, wheelbarrows, tools, solar panels, generators, agricultural equipment, bicycles and sewing machines are among the items listed (Ncube & Gomez, 2015). Others utilise the money to buy agricultural inputs and instruments, which boost production and allow them to sell surplus crops

According to Ncube & Gomez (2015) remittances also boost employment development, particularly among unemployed women. Scholars such as Adger *et al.* (2002), contend that remittances improve household spending, making them a resource that is beneficial for poverty reduction, but neutral in terms of long-term productive potential especially for rural women.

Several countries in sub-Saharan Africa have adopted constitutions in which various forms of decentralisation for governance structures and systems, are contained. These are built on the notion of participation of communities in the human economic development (Moyo & Ncube, 2014. The concept of decentralisation brings government closer to the people and has it accountable to them. Among the many countries that have gone this route are South Africa, Malawi, Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia.

However, the major drawback on the concept has been that these countries and others have largely paid only lip service in that there has been more political decentralisation (devolution) than the much-needed socio-economic mode of it. Similarly, Zimbabwe has followed suit concentrating more on political devolution, without apparent robust structures and means for localised socio-economic decision-making. In Zimbabwe, the decentralisation policy has always been regarded as critical, leading to the inception of growth points at independence (Wekwete, 2001). Thus, it has been viewed as one of the key policies for economic development (Nyandoro, 2007). It involves transferring power from the central to grassroots authorities, and focuses on promoting wide ranging political, social and economic activities. However, several issues have been raised as to the effect of decentralising activities, and Wekwete (1991) argues that as an activator for industrial development and economic growth, it has since downgraded towards basic services provision. Musekiwa (2020) further acknowledges that decentralisation has evolved since independence. There is a change from the colonial system that centralised everything resulting in more movement in accessing key government services. So, the independent government took it upon itself to move from this 'asymmetrical system' by coming up with the concept of decentralisation. In contrast, the colonial era had caused a lot of damage to rural infrastructure hence the enacting of rural councils in the concept of decentralisation was to ensure that there would be a chance to rebuild (Malinga *et al.,* 2017). Henceforth, the concept of decentralisation/devolution is localised on policies geared towards addressing economic and political goals by transferring power from the central government to local structures (Musekiwa, 2020). But, Malinga *et al.* (2017) also argue that the government and its partners (NGOs) fail to consult communities before embarking on development initiatives. This has made it difficult to empower the local people to be in charge of their own development, as critical buy-in and ownership has often led to abandonment of the projects once the development partners withdraw. As such, White (2011) contends that decentralisation as a measure for rural development can only be effective if the local people are involved. It is

also agreed that sub -Saharan Africa has remained very rural regardless of numerous policies and projects for development with decentralisation being one of them. Therefore, the benefits that come with decentralisation can only be attained when there is transparency, accountability and empowerment of communities.

As a strategy to reduce poverty, Cook (2003) believes that decentralisation responds well to the needs of the poor hence it can reduce poverty since it promotes greater participation which permits greater choice and control over people's rights. This means that women's socio-economic status can improve owing to greater participation. For this reason, the concept of decentralisation/devolution gained momentum owing to the Zimbabwe new constitution. The Constitution of 2013 saw emphasis being put on realistically transferring power to lower levels of government because prior to it, devolution was just a creature of statutes, power was generally centralised (Chikwawawa, 2019). As such the new Constitution, Section 264 provides for good governance characterised by participation of the communities. This provision provides for empowerment that is due to participation and which in this context can give rise to rural women empowerment considering that women generally lack participation in critical development platforms. Interestingly, Chikwawawa (2019) describes the provisions of this section as weak in its articulation of ensuring that devolution is met.

It has also been observed by Moyo & Ncube (2014) that Zimbabwe chose to implement political decentralisation/ devolution. They further observe that devolution replaces deconcentration with the argument that devolution is more people centred and more participatory. Hence it has been espoused in the Zimbabwe National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1)'s Vision 2030 guided by the tenets of the Constitution for the government to provide for the devolution of powers and responsibilities to competent local authorities. This is set to be achieved by making decentralisation/devolution people centred. This policy was approved in 2020 with targets to be achieved by 2030. That being the case, in some

instances, attempts by government to facilitate the process of decentralisation have resulted in tension between centralisation and decentralisation (Todes, 2010). Manyanhaire *et al.* (2009) concurs that there is need to strike a balance between the desire to implement several policies and to generate local development initiates while at the same time resolving the conflicting claims of centralisation of political and administration power.

To find the balance, policies that have been adopted emphasised rural decentralisation while the political and financial implications of such programmes have meant continued centralisation. By this, Tanyanyiwa (2015) has called for clear legal frameworks that spell out how institutions are constituted because without the devolution fiscal resources to lower structures of government, and means of holding local government accountable, successful decentralisation remains a pipe dream. Thus, amid the popularity of decentralisation, studies show that women's participation in local institutions remains low. Decentralisation is often expected to foster women's participation in decision-making structures because it focuses on basic services that address women's needs (Todes *et al.,* 2010).

There is therefore a need to make use of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach as a guide to development that is participatory in nature, allowing the receivers of development to have a voice in matters that concern them. This would ensure that decentralisation through the growth point policy can contribute to sustainable livelihoods by promoting participation, access, control of resources and other key factors of production.

The above discussion has outlined the Zimbabwe political economy tracing it from 1980. Literature shows that the economic woes have been cascading to the level that they are currently and are likely to persist without the suggested approaches such as the SLA and other similar approaches.

The Women Empowerment Theory (WET) was adopted for this study to gain a better understanding on the levels of empowerment that are critical for rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. This theory is the brainchild of Sarah Longwe, postulated in the 1970s, in Zambia. The framework recognises raising the status of women to that of men. She viewed women empowerment as enabling them to take an equal place with men. Longwe viewed economic development as an enabler for women to take charge of their lives by escaping poverty and discrimination. The theory uses five levels of empowerment, namely control, access, welfare, participation and conscientisation, to assess levels of women empowerment in all their social and economic life. Hence, she further acknowledges that women should participate equally with men in the development process in order that they can have access and control over key factors of production on an equal basis with men (Liberata, 2012). However, this study selected three levels of women empowerment to analyse the rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe.

Taking from the WET, it is observed that development policies such as the growth point policy would benefit from this framework, to desist from homogenising empowerment for men and women. The central argument for this theory is that empowerment is of paramount importance at each of these levels. It differentiates between access/control for example, being able to farm on someone's land and control (owning that land and being able to decide how the land is used). Having women control the means of production or decision-making is key to bringing about change. In the context of rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy, the argument is that the policy has the potential of addressing women's issues within the rural sector, lifting women out of poverty through the interventions such as creating employment, infrastructural development and decentralisation of key services. Since the WET guides development interventions and compels policy makers and practitioners to look at the degree of access to and control of resources by men and women. It was fundamental therefore, for the growth point

policy to be gender sensitive to have a policy that speaks differently, to men and women. Resultantly, the levels of participation are all key to establishing whether women's issues are recognised or ignored (Fitri, 2019).

Williams (2005) further observes that the WET weighs on the extent to which policies and projects are concerned with women's development. In this case an issue becomes one when it considers the relationship between men and women because of its assumption that women empowerment is the concern of both men and women. Williams (2005) further attests that over and above the main levels enshrined in the theory, there are three additional ones that are anchored on recognition of women's issues, negative, neutral and positive levels. These explain how, at each level, recognition of women's issues is key for their socio-economic empowerment. For example, the negative level indicates that at project/policy formation there is no mention of women's issues, and they are likely to be detrimental outcomes due to women being left out. In this context, the growth point policy was not cognisant of women's issues since there is no mention of women empowerment/gender in the policy's provisions. Additionally, the neutral level denotes the fact that policies and projects recognise women's issues, but their concerns remain, meaning that even where there is mention of such issues, inequalities remain. This view is further explained by Mandinyenya (2014), Mutanana & Bukaliya (2015); Dzvimbo *et al.* (2018) and Kabeer (2008) that despite various interventions for women empowerment, they have largely remained poor and marginalised. Platforms such as the Agenda 2030 and 2063 view the centrality of women's equality and empowerment (Sparks, 2016) hence there is emphasis on the positive level where the objectives on an intervention are positively concerned with women's issues while improving their position relative to men. The WET therefore is cognisant of gender-blind policies and projects that leave out women's issues and is critical in illustrating how the role of empowerment is intrinsic to the process of development (Sparks, 2016).

Naturally, some scholars have also indicated that the WET's weaknesses are that it encourages analysis of women without understanding how they relate to men without an evaluation of men's needs (Sparks, 2016). Furthermore, the critics of the theory also assume that it looks at the relationship between men and women in terms of equality. However, there is no supporting literature to show which other areas need to be looked into.

The relevance of this theory to the subject of rural women's empowerment through the growth point policy borders on the notion that recognition of women issues about the level of participation in policy/project formulation, the capabilities they have in relation to access to and control of key resources. In this regard, the growth point policy applied a blanket approach where development strategies of the policy were not gendered hence classified on the negative level of empowerment where rural women's issues were not mentioned.

The WET details the aspect of women participation as leading to empowerment. This entails equal participation in the decision-making processes and particularly in policy making (Kanyinga, 2009). Moreover, lack of participation within the development trajectory has been attributed to lack of recognition of women. Empowerment due to participation means involving women in decisions by which they get to have a say in matters that are relevant to them (Williams, 2005). Even the Zimbabwe National Gender Policy gives rise to achieving a gender just society where women and men participate as equal partners with the aim of eradicating gender discrimination (Mawere, 2013). Studies by Onditi & Odera (2015) have also shown that women empowerment is viewed as levelling the playing field of both men and women. However, Lefton (2013) argues that there are many gender disparities that contribute to women's low participation at political, social and economic levels. This is because empowerment is also regarded as a process meant for women to gain control over their own lives. By this, Mosedale (2015) views women's participation in development as enabled by who controls the factors of

production. For example, Ester Boserup's WID approach contends that women's role in development is the cornerstone of any development initiative since the focus is on their contributions in economic activities such as agriculture (World Bank, 2012). Henceforth, rural women are regarded as illiterate, and most interventions do not aim at improving this status-quo but rather play it down (World Bank, 2012). Consequently, in this context, literature does not show the changes that the growth point policy has contributed to improving women's literacy levels that is key to participation.

This study views the importance of the growth point policy in rural women empowerment and recognises that women participation was lacking when the policy was crafted. It is also argued that this might be, because Zimbabwe in 1980 had just gained its independence and women's issues were not yet prioritised. However, it is also concerning that besides the growth point policy being a critical policy for rural development, it has not been reviewed to make it gender inclusive. However, to date such a study has not been carried out yet and this study sought to articulate that.

The WET regards access and control as critical levels for women empowerment. The theory gives emphasis to access denoting to what extent women's access to factors of production is and if they control the resources that they depend on. It also gives rise to the importance of achieving economic development and women empowerment if women's access to and control and distribution of key resources are upgraded to the same level as men's. Proponents of the WET have noted that women, particularly in the Third World's rural sector are marginalised due to lack of access to and control of resources that include natural resources; water, land and forestry. Consequently, key resources supporting the natural include credit, markets, education among others. These, according to Duflo (2007) are critical for women empowerment. They recognised that women were benefitting from small business enterprises but were also struggling with finance to fund these businesses due to poor collateral.

Accordingly, the WET recognises that increasing women's access to and control of resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information is important (Duflo, 2007). For example, a study carried out in Uganda shows that access to income helped women acquire property such as livestock and land. This further strengthened their decision-making power concerning their lives and livelihoods (Liberata, 2012). Consequently, access and control are key contributors to women empowerment as alluded to in the theory. The gender gap that exists between men and women is acknowledged with regards to access and control of all resources (Kimani, 2016). They further observe that lack of access and control are closely linked to women's poverty and segregation. Kimani (2016) show that gender inequalities and inequities are major issues in most of the developing nations of Africa, Asia and part of Latin America. This is despite of the interventions such as the SGDs and other platforms calling for nations to distribute resources equally. So, gendered access to resources such as land where most of the rural population rely on agriculture as the main source of livelihoods is referenced and discussed within the spectrum of women in agriculture. Reference is made to Ethiopia by Mayoux & Mackie (2007) that the government has advocated for gender mainstreaming policies in agriculture considering that women are mostly represented in this sector but lack ownership and control to the resource.

In the Zimbabwean context, most of the land is owned and controlled by men at both small-scale and large scale (Shumba, 2011). The Fast Track Land Reform Programme embarked on by the government to redistribute land emphasised on women getting access but to this day, only a few women own and control land (Mutopo, 2014). Accordingly, Shumba (2011) asserts that women's relationship with land, water and forestry affects the political economy of their lives. Their exclusion from owning and controlling of access to such resources together with their exclusion in decision-making perpetuates poverty and puts them in a state of dependency. In essence, weak agricultural policies including poor extension services further negates on livelihoods outcomes.

Overall, the WET puts emphasis on the factors that become the building blocks of women empowerment. Since empowerment is a process of transitioning from a state of being powerless to one of being empowered, the levels of empowerment in the WET indicate how at each level inequalities are addressed, in order that women's empowerment can occur. In this context, the growth point policy serves as a tool/policy for empowerment because it is taking the rural population from a place of disempowerment to one of empowerment through the various interventions provided within the policy, for example decentralisation, urbanisation, infrastructural development and industrialisation. These have a bearing on women's issues and challenges in the rural sector. But, because the policy is not gender sensitive, it failed to differentiate between men and women's positions in the rural society.

In addition to the Women Empowerment Theory (WET), this study is also premised on the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) to come up with a nuanced understanding of rural women's socio-economic empowerment outcomes based on the growth point policy. The Sustainable Livelihood Approach is relevant to this study since it focuses on the way the development intervention policies and projects for the poor and vulnerable can be understood and implemented. It assists in establishing the socio-economic status of the receivers of development interventions and, how to undertake projects for sustainable livelihoods which in this study are the outcomes. Furthermore, the SLA has been perceived as an empowerment tool or framework that guides development interventions such as the growth point policy relevant to women. Why women? Women are a vulnerable group that lack access to capital assets outlined in the SLA for their socio-economic development. Therefore, the defining factors of the SLA are discussed through the women empowerment/gender lenses. Additionally, the theory is centred on the promotion of the development of the poor by engaging and working with what they have as opposed to what they do not have. This thinking resonates with the growth point policy as it also seeks to promote rural communities through interventions for economic development. In doing so, the SLA acts as a guide to how

such interventions should be carried out. As a participatory-based approach, it goes beyond capital assets but tries to establish the vulnerabilities, processes, livelihood strategies and outcomes of receivers of development and in this context, women in rural communities (Mensah, 2011). The SLA framework has therefore been detected by this study as most suited to guide the efforts of the growth point policy in determining and shaping the rural women's livelihoods. However, for the purposes of this study, the capital assets will form the discussion of the SLA and rural women empowerment.

The SLA has been described by Chambers & Conway (1992) as a way of understanding the livelihoods of local people. It is centred on development and environment studies as a new way to think about the work of vulnerable populations (Serrat, 2017). The approach improves the understanding of the livelihoods of the poor by coming up with factors that constrain or promote livelihood opportunities and shows how they relate. It is also based on the ever-changing strategies on howthe poor and vulnerable live their lives and the importance of institutions and policies. In short, this theory affirms that policies for rural development and rural women empowerment must adopt the SLA framework to guide their aims and objectives. Conversely, it is assumed that rural women empowerment, through the growth point policy, can only happen if the issues challenging women are considered such as participation, access, and control as outlined in the WET. It is therefore critical to ensure that access to capital assets is promoted for sustainable livelihoods. Vercillo (2016) defined sustainability as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In this context, the SLA assists in explaining and understanding the applicability of the growth point policy and rural women empowerment outcomes.

Scoones (2009) describes a livelihood as one comprising capital assets, both material and social resources and activities for a means of living. A livelihood is sustained when it can cope and recover from stresses and shocks and still maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now

and in the future without undermining the natural resource base. In other words, the use of resources should be undertaken with future generations in mind. However, this study focuses on the dichotomy of capital assets as enablers of rural women empowerment through the growth point policy.

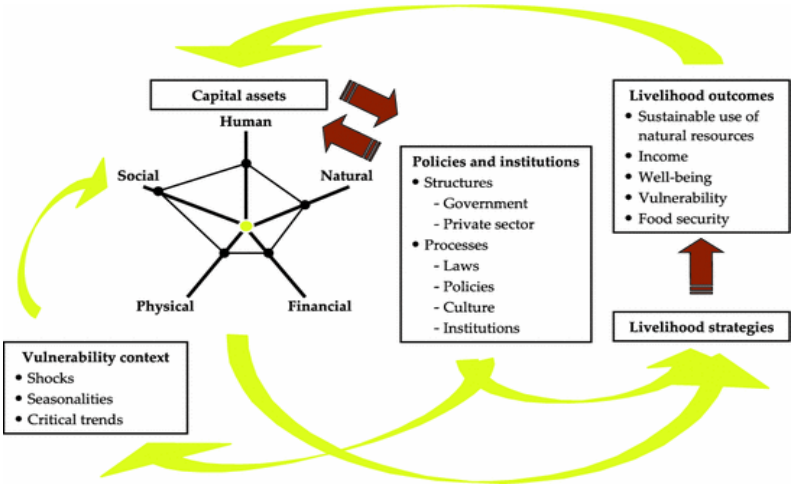

Figure 2.3 *The SLA Framework (Scoones, 1998)*

With regards to the first capital asset (human), Campbell & Sayer (2003) describe the human capital within the SLA context as representing the skills, knowledge, good health and the ability to work that enable people to pursue different livelihood strategies and achieve their livelihood outcomes. Human capital is particularly critical to women citing their vulnerabilities and poverty. It is essential to the rural community since it enables them to make choices that affect their lives and livelihoods. Human capital must be seen as a keys tone of the SLA as other capitals depend on it (Joachim, 2013). In addition, skills and knowledge are critical as one needs to be aware of supply and demand and market information. As noted by Bhat (2015) and Cornwall (2016), the education of women is the most powerful tool to change their position in society. It is the foundation for the empowerment of women (Bhat, 2015). The same

sentiments are shared by Duflo (2012), who argues that there is a two-way relationship between economic development and women empowerment. The latter involves the improvement of women to access the factors of development that includes participation, education, the capacity to earn, and health. Barnajee & Ghosh (2012) agree with this assertion as they describe the situation in India as similar when it comes to women's lack of access to human capital capabilities. This, alone, shows that women in rural communities are unable to sustain their livelihoods considering their lack of access to human capital assets. The Women Empowerment Theory also emphasises the level of access as critical for achieving equality in resource allocation between men and women. There is evidence that there is a huge gender gap in education in the third world.

Studies carried out in Mali, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Senegal show that education is a powerful tool and women in these countries face challenges in gaining access to education because of socio-cultural norms that give low priority to education (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). It has been noted over and above skills development, the human asset regards health as a critical asset for development. Health challenges affect the ability of people to perform production duties. Women, in particular, are affected by poor health. Women's contribution to the agricultural sector is anchored on their health status. Smith (2003) argues that improving women's health can ameliorate their performanceand has the potential to increase agricultural production by becoming more efficient. Even Agenda 2030 has out rightly shown that women's right to education and health is a major concern and propels government to make efforts to fulfil this right.

In Zimbabwe, rural women are faced with the same predicament of low human development in terms of skills development and health. A study by Benhura & Mhariwa (2021) revealed that asset deprivation is a challenge and a contributor to poverty at household levels in rural areas. As such, this study assumes that policies such as the growth point policy need to re-look into these issues in view of gender roles and responsibilities in order that positive outcomes can be achieved.

Beyond the human asset, the SLA also considers the social asset, that is the resources upon which people draw in pursuit of their livelihoods (Vorsah, 2015). It shows the social relations that bind individuals together at household and community levels by bringing activities that bring about coordinated actions to promote livelihoods. Within the social capital asset is the political capital that refers to the position held within the public arena by people in a community (for example belonging to an organisation that fosters agricultural growth). The importance of social capital for community development and sustainable livelihoods is based on the productive benefits of socialising. Yet, social capital is hinged on shared values, norms, trust and belonging, that enable social exchange. Zhao *et al.* (2012) observe that the affiliation of one to a certain organisation is based on factors such as culture and customs. It is further argued that first and foremost, social capital is traditionally rooted in family ties. But it works within an economic framework and is considered an asset since it facilitates economic changes. Additionally, women tend to make greater use of their social networks as a source of social capital (Kabir *et al.,* 2012).

Kabir (2012) also posits that social capital in rural communities is affected by a lack of knowledge and the absence of structures enabling participation. For example, in rural Europe, poverty and social exclusion are widespread. In Russia, the social capital is centred on creating territorial unity in rural communities, sharing and having access to information. However, the level of access is regarded as significantly inferior compared to the urban areas (Kabir, 2012). Consequently, social capital also assumes the removal of barriers to participation. As such, the lack of knowledge experienced in most rural economies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa is a barrier to the socio- economic progress of women in the rural sector. Therefore, the social capital of rural areas is centred on human capital, social networks, institutions, and cultural norms within the rural economy.

Osei & Zhuang (2020), in a study carried out in Ghana confirm that women who utilise social networks both informal and formal, had a better chance

of positive livelihood outcomes. They recommend that policymakers and development practitioners empower rural women to promote rural poverty alleviation. In Malaysia, owing to the active role by women in the rural communities, it was shown that there is a positive influence of social capital dimensions on the economic activities they undertake (Adom & Asare-Yeboa, 2016). Similarly, Mbiba *et al.* (2019) opine that women in rural areas of South Africa consider social capital to be an agent of reducing vulnerabilities and shock in rural livelihoods. Corroborating this view is Kairiza *et al.* (2021) that in Zimbabwe, the gender gap on the adoption of social capital asset is vivid yet it is considered as contributing to household food security. In the same vein, Weinberger & Jutting (2001) have indicated that there is improved outcomes due to social capital such as participation in community clubs, information dissemination, gender inclusive interventions that strengthens women's livelihoods. Of interest to this study is that the discussion show that gender considerations are key in policy and project planning. However, it shows that women have been left out of policy and project planning (Weignbeger & Jutting, 2001). In this context the growth point policy's lack of gender consideration and participation becomes questionable for rural women empowerment outcomes.

A central point in the SLA is that different individuals, communities and households have different access to livelihood assets and choices. Contextually, natural resource capital is important in trying to establish how it can form the basis for sustainable development that encompasses socio-economic empowerment. The natural resource base comprises land, forests, wildlife, water and general environmental services (Serrat, 2017). The importance of the natural resource base cannot be over-emphasised enough, mainly because without it, there is no livelihood to talk about. It is the wealth of the nations that determine their economic status. Worldwide, poor and vulnerable people depend on natural resources for their livelihoods (Serrat, 2017). It is particularly true for rural women who derive most of their livelihoods from natural resources. But, because they lack access to most of the capital assets to fully benefit, they continue to

live in poverty. In the same vein policies and institutions that govern access and use of natural resources are mostly prohibitive. Such restrictions include traditional leaders' views and beliefs where they are seen sanctifying forests, water and other areas as restricted (UNDP, 2012).

UNDP (2012) further argues that access to natural resources by the poor is essential for sustainable poverty reduction. However, this is unattainable in most cases. As such, the livelihoods of rural people, and to this end, women are vulnerable as they have limited access to natural resources hence their inability in obtaining food, accumulate other assets and recover from shocks and stresses. Poor people in low-income countries are particularly dependent on national resources and ecosystems for their livelihoods. They live in areas of high ecological vulnerability hence, access to resources is closely linked to vulnerability and that is one of the key concerns of poor people. Additionally, resource degradation contributes to the livelihood insecurity of the rural poor as they have the least resources to cope with and recover from losses (Mbiba *et al.,* 2019).

The SLA is central to the role played by natural resources in the livelihood strategies of the rural poor. Mapping out such strategies calls for access and control over natural resources, particularly in agriculture and food production. In contemporary times, natural resource management is increasingly under scrutiny as structures and processes seek to regulate the terms on which people access them (UNDP, 2012). These trends contribute to the uncertainty with that poor people derive their livelihood strategies thereby fuelling local insecurity.

In this case, the assumption is that the growth point policy has the provisions and potential of improving the lives and livelihoods of the rural population by promoting the agricultural sector (through infrastructural development and improved markets) since it is the main natural resource base for rural communities. The recognition and promotion of the resource would naturally place the rural folk/women at the centre of the development interventions.

It is further noted that women's reliance on natural resources, particularly agriculture, therefore, poses the question of ownership, control and access. The restrictions based on natural resources access and use are a limitation to livelihood diversification strategies. The ownership of land is critical, however, land tenure in countries like Zimbabwe has remained skewed because of policies that are not pro-poor. Women are especially affected since they have weaker land rights and tenure security than men (Gaidzanwa, 2011).

Men and women use natural resources differently, evidence from several countries shows that the inclusion of women in natural capital governance has significant positive effects on conservation and development outcomes (Mwangi *et al.,* 2011). Argawal (2009) asserts that in some parts of Asia, an increase in women's participation improved resource conservation and forest regeneration citing their knowledge of the forest. There is also evidence that in a Zambian project of wildlife management, women's participation was noted to be low, the project was not gender-responsive as women's involvement faced challenges in what is termed 'male-dominated' structures. Women'sparticipation, in this case, was undermined (Harrison *et al.*, 2015).

In Zimbabwe, the CAMPFIRE project uses economic benefits as an entry point to getting communities interested in natural resource management. The livelihoods approach allows analysis of CAMPFIRE's success against its aim to promote rural livelihoods. This shows that there cannot be rural development without natural resource exploitation hence the growth point policy at formulation, omitted the fact that men and women often use and benefit from natural resources in accordance with their gender roles (Moyo & Francis, 2010).

Funding has been widely discussed by various scholars on rural women empowerment and it has been concluded that it is the main factor resulting in the disempowerment of women. Financial capital refers to the financial resources that populations employ to achieve their objectives

regarding livelihoods (UNDP, 2017). The importance of financial capital within the SLA is based on the availability of cash equivalent that enables people to adopt different livelihood strategies. One of the main sources of financial capital is available stocks. UNDP (2017) posits that savings are the preferred type of financial capital because they do not have liabilities attached and usually do not entail reliance on others. They can be in the form of cash, bank, deposits, livestock and grains among others. Financial resources can also be obtained through credit institutions or regular inflows that include pensions and remittances. Furthermore, financial capital can be used to promote other components of the SLA to acquire other livelihood outcomes. Needless to say, finance capital is one of the least available capital to the poor and vulnerable populations. Consequently, other forms tend to take precedence (ILO, 2019).

Interestingly, despite inroads made for women empowerment for financial inclusion, Zukang (2009) posits that deeply entrenched inequalities persist. Studies carried out in most developing nations show that financial inclusion for women have not been made an integral part of policies as well as the planning processes. For example, in Nepal studies show that micro-finance helps to increase women's access to financial resources and in some cases, female credit also tended to increase higher impact on empowerment (Sharma, 2007). However, it is argued that women remain poor and marginalised because Nepal is generally characterised by patriarchy where men enjoy disproportionate power, prestige and influence (*ibid).* Evidence from Pakistan on women's access to financial resources is measured by their level of education and is anchored on their access to economic activities (Khan & Noreen, 2012).

As mentioned by Zukang (2009), policy formulation needs to be gender sensitive to the needs and circumstance of women within patriarchy (Gaidzanwa, 2009). A call made by the G20 leaders for financial inclusion for women empowerment has not yielded positive outcomes. Adewale (2009) has noted that women's access to financial resources in Nigeria has been regarded as essential by the Nigerian government and

henceforth has called for prioritising of women financial inclusion as a vehicle for promoting gender equality. In Zimbabwe, it has been noted by scholars such as Gumbo *et al.* (2021) that women trail behind men in access to financial services and resources due to factors such as lack of knowledge, low collateral and patriarchy. They further assert that for the gender gap to be reduced, increase to and access to and use of financial products need to be policy driven. As such this study postulates that the growth point policy would have considered the financial circumstances of men and women in order that it aligns with the gender dynamics in the rural economy. This view is corroborated by Sahay & Cihak (2018) that closing the gender gap can lead to economic development.

From the above, it can be deduced that women continue to suffer long standing inequalities in terms of access to financial resources. Equal access to and control over economic and financial resources is critical for gender equality.

The SLA and the growth point strategy too, emphasise the importance of physical capital for rural development and sustainable livelihoods. It is defined as a measure of the existence of physical requirements needed to support livelihoods (Joachim, 2013). Transport, roads, rail, dams, health, and educational facilities comprise the physical capital that enables people to pursue their various means of survival. Most rural communities in the developing world are largely faced with poor infrastructural development. Kodero (2005) observes that the absence of physical investment constrains the poor from using appropriate input and accessing market opportunities. Furthermore, road, rail, telecommunication and electrification are also necessary for the development of both on-farm and non-farm activities.

Physical capital as a tool for rural empowerment also focuses on the possession of homes, and access to clean water, electricity, and agricultural machinery as indicators of the socio-economic status of a household (Joachim, 2013; Israr & Khan, 2010). Considering this assertion,

the importance of physical capital lies within two dimensions, as a driver for human development and a tool for enhanced productivity. Israr & Khan (2010) asserts that restricted access to means of production impacts on time, particularly for women who undertake different roles. Infrastructure investments have the potential for positive outcomes if designed in a gender sensitive manner. Well-designed infrastructure such as water and sanitation, roads, electricity, housing and ICT are enablers for women empowerment. It is argued that women's access to the physical capital asset as outlined in the SLA can enhance productivity for positive outcomes. For example, productivity through new agricultural technologies reduce drudgery. In the same vein improved road networks enables access to markets.

Rural roads development, according to Nandwani & Roy-Chowdhury (2023) was enacted as a policy in India using women empowerment indicators. The government had realised that poor road network was limiting women's mobility thereby constraining their socio-economic participation. Nandwani & Roy-Chowdhury (2023) agree that restricted travel has more stringent gender norms and lower female participation. Moreover, Israr & Khan (2010) concede that women in poor countries travel long distances for water and firewood. The time wasted for travel can be used for other productive work. The gender disparities characterising the physical capital asset suggest that women are less likely than men to have access to modern transport options hence the advantages of improved roads are likely to be enjoyed by men (Salon & Gulyani, 2010; Taylor, 2018).

One study carried out in Kenya show that the position taken by the Kenyan government recognises that rural women's reliance on agriculture needs to be improved through adoption of modern technologies (Mwathi, 2012). This shows that the provision of physical asset has been a core priority of government to improve the welfare of women. According to Chazovachii & Chigwenya (2013), the aspect of infrastructural development is at the heart of rural development in Zimbabwe too and that gender equity is also

key. Evidence shows that there is unequal opportunities to participate in decision-making for the choice of infrastructure. In this regard, even though the growth point policy in Zimbabwe has infrastructural development as one of its major tenets, it is assumed that this provision was not gender specific hence lack of priority to establish which applies to men and to women differently. Clarke (2016) therefore posits that gender equitable rural infrastructure programmes illustrates the significance of integrating gender equity for sustainable rural infrastructural development. Additionally, recognition of gender in the formulation and implementation of rural infrastructure projects is important in poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods.

Finally, the capital assets discussed above show that participation, access to and control of them is vital for women empowerment. In several cases, they have not been formulated and implemented with gender equity in mind yet the livelihoods that men and women have access to differ. The importance of participation, access and control has also been emphasised in the WET as key levels for women empowerment and the use and effectiveness of these assets are interceded by social, economic and policy processes.

From the literature reviewed on the SLA, WET and the Growth Point Policy, the study observes that there is an interconnectedness to the three based on past studies carried out for women empowerment, economic development and gender equality. The study came up with a conceptual framework showing the relationship of the three concepts as shown below.

The framework below shows how the SLA, WET and the Growth Point Policy can be used to improve rural women's empowerment through the growth point policy.

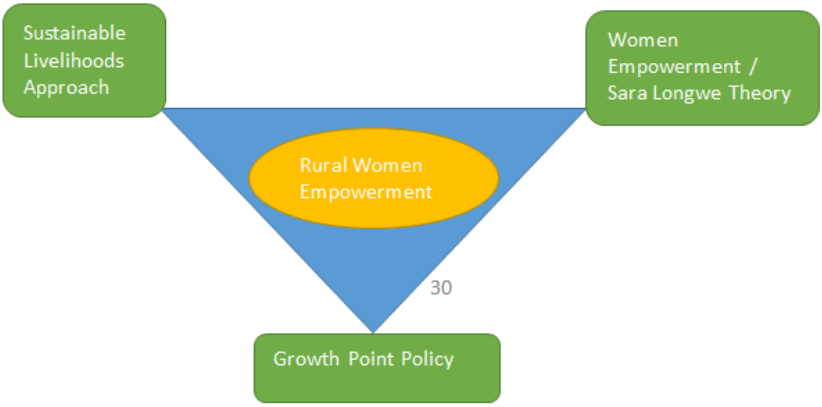

Figure 4 *– Approaches for Rural Women Empowerment Outcomes (Researcher)*

At the centre of the framework are the rural women who need to be empowered by the growth point policy. The women are poor and the livelihoods they depend on are weak and fragile due to lack of access to and control of key factors of production. The threads running through the SLA, Growth Point Policy and WET are carrying the factors that are all converging for women empowerment. In this regard, the SLA and WET are critical in facilitating the processes and prerequisites for rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy.

The WET helps to understand the critical levels of empowerment that apply to rural women and can improve their livelihoods taking into consideration the gender dynamics in the rural economy. It further emphasises the importance of gender mainstreaming when it comes to policies for economic development such as the growth point policy (Boserup *et al.*, 2013). Participation of women at policy formulation is key as it will further on identify who has access to resources and who controls them. That on its own is participatory development that is bottom up in nature and it gives women a voice to articulate their desires out of economic development policies and projects (ILO, 2019). The SLA helps to

guide the interventions by making it explicit that women need to have access to the key capital assets to enable them to be a part of the development process. It will differentiate how men and women control access to the assets. Rural women's empowerment outcomes rely on the access that women must capital assets (UNDP, 2012).

The concept of the growth point is anchored on its provisions that in part address rural women's empowerment issues. However, its weakness lies in the fact that it was not incorporative of gender specifics thereby downplaying the important recognition of women in the rural economy. This study cannot ignore gendered differences in access and control to resources that determine outcomes. It can be noted that these frameworks helped to understand why some policies and projects for rural development have not been effective for rural women empowerment (non-participatory, not recognising rural women's access to and control of major resources that they need for positive outcomes). The diagrammatic illustration shows the following:

- women empowerment is at the heart of rural development
- the growth point policy has all the provisions that speak to women's issues in the rural economy
- the WET recognises the importance of adopting the three levels (participation, control and access) for women empowerment
- the SLA is instrumental in acknowledging the participatory development discourse and outlining the key capital assets that women need to have access to as well as establish the control of each asset.

The growth point policy can be guided by the two frameworks in order that there is better comprehension of women's needs and desires, and much better outcomes after implementation.

In this section literature on the application of the growth point strategy as a policy across the globe and in Zimbabwe in particular was reviewed. The view examines the growth point policy as an enabler for rural

development that has an impact on rural women's empowerment outcomes in Tsholotsho, Matabeleland North Province. Those who view the policy as not effective and successful include scholars such as; Wekwete (1988, 1999); Mapuva (2005); Manyanhaire *et al.* (2009, 2011); Nhede (2013); Ganstho (2008),;Nyandoro & Muzorewa (2017) among others. Critics of the growth point policy believe that the failure is attributed to poor planning and implementation.

Europe and Latin America adopted the concept of the growth pole policy in the 1960s but later abandoned it citing unattainable results (Bradford & Kent, 1987; Conyers, 2001). An illustrative case example, includes the USA that implemented the policy in the 1950s but abandoned it later as it failed to achieve the desired results since investment was spread too thinly to a lot of centres (Manyanhaire *et al.,* 2009). In the USA, Bradford & Kent (1987) argue that the reason why the growth pole policy failed is that the government focused on investing in the worst-developed areas thereby leading to the continual absorption of investment without achieving sustained growth anddevelopment as targeted. The same was experienced in countries like France, Brazil, Portugal, Romania among others. Poor resource identification and reliance on government funding are some of the reasons leading to abandoning of the growth point policy for other policies (Eikland, 2014). For example, in Norway's Hammersfest region, the country failed to achieve growth citing funding challenges. In the same vein Benedek *et al.* (2019) and Benedek (2016) posits that in Romania, adopting the growth pole strategy perpetuated regional inequalities (polarisation), most investment was focused on the already established areas. This validated that the core-periphery approach is situational because of polarisation.

However, literature does not mention the human development in each region where the growth point policy was adopted. Reference is only made in terms of economic growth within a specified area. In the same vein there is no reference to improved lives and livelihoods of the receiving populations (including women), the studies are quiet in this regard.

To this end, failure to institute proper supportive planning strategies and government policies largely contributed to the failure of the programme in many countries across the globe (Mushuku & Takuva, 2013). Conversely, even though the concept was adopted by many African governments at their independence, it has remained at the back of rural development policies hence there is a need to explore the reasons for the failure and continual adoption of this policy in African countries.

In Africa, countries like Tanzania, Kenya, Cameroon, Nigeria and Libya followed suit and also adopted it but later dropped it due to failure to achieve tangible results. Tanzania abandoned it for its socialist policy Ujamaa, that was viewed as having more benefits than the growth point strategy. In South Africa, the growth points in the then Ciskei, Bophutatswana and Transkei failed to make significant contribution to the improvement of conditions in the periphery those state (Manyanhaire *et al.,* 2011). Hence, Gantsho (2008) questioned whether the concept had a favourable impact on the welfare of rural areas and Africa in particular. Conyers, (2001) cited in Manyanhaire *et al.* (2009) concede that for the concept to have a positive impact on rural communities, necessary conditions should be in place, that is the right mix, comprising of planning, formulation, and resource base identification. Generally, the growth point policy was not successful in these and other countries since they failed to avail the conditions in question and naturally compromised the socio-economic status of the receiving population including women.

Zimbabwe adopted the growth point policy at its independence in 1980 as a way of bringing economic development to the rural sector and addressing regional imbalances that had been instituted by the colonial government (Wekwete, 1997). It is important to observe that the concept was initially conceived in Zimbabwe before independence through the Integrated Plan for Rural Development in 1978 by the colonial government and resulted in 10 growth points being identified for development (Conyers, 2001). The adoption of the designated areas for development, after independence, was done to ensure the reduction of regional

inequalities. Overall, the strategy was to create socio-economic development for the general rural inhabitants through decentralisation. Chirisa *et al.* (2013), assert that while growth points were anticipated to grow the economies of rural areas as intended, they have otherwise grown and continued to grow demographically, amid the urbanisation craze in the country. The re-engineering or modification of the policy is, therefore seen as a necessity for achieving economic growth, (Manyanhaire *et al.,* 2011). Scholars therefore call for the re-engineering of the policy, an indication that it is a good policy that can be made to produce positive outcomes.

However, based on the above views, Chirisa *et al.* (2013) question the narrative behind the future of the growth points as evidence shows that they have largely failed. A study carried out by Manyanhaire *et al.* (2009) on growth points or declining points, points to resource constraints as limiting the success of the growth point policy in Zimbabwe. Manyanhaire *et al.,* (2011)'s study aimed to assess constraints and recommend how the growth points can be re-engineered to achieve its objectives using Magunje Growth Point as a case study. The study found that lack of funding, lack of participation, poor planning and low investments were some of the factors crippling the policy. In this case the lack of participation is placed on the general population without the acknowledgement of the gender dynamics in participation in policies for rural development.

This study brings to the fore such perceptions with the aim of contributing to the existing literature and also going a step further in singling out women and recognising them as a special group in the rural sector and a backbone of rural development. The World Conference in 1975 in Mexico marked the beginning of global examination of women's roles in the economic, political and social life for their right to participate fully and equally in all aspects of society (Nelson, 2013). However, rural women's situations particularly in the Third World have only slightly changed.

In this context, for economic growth to occur that will benefit rural women, there is a need for development and agricultural policies and projects to be pro-women, citing women's positions in the rural sector. Of interest to this study is that the promotion of rural industries is dependent on small-scale producers as statistics show that women constitute more than 70% of small- scale farmers in rural communities (Mutanana & Bukaliya, 2015). Accordingly, this study believes that women should be placed at the forefront of rural development by promoting their socio-economic statuses based on the assumptions and contexts of the SLA and the WET's participatory factor. This study, therefore, argues that the acknowledgement and participation of rural women within the growth pole policy context in Zimbabwe can be a catalyst for positive rural women empowerment outcomes.

Consequently, the implementation of the growth point policy in Zimbabwe has been met with some negative outcomes for rural communities considering that the policy has been in existence for over four decades. Rural communities have largely remained underdeveloped. Nelson (2013) revealed that women are a neglected group who live in harsh conditions and their lives and livelihoods are distinguished by a lack of access to the capital assets that have a relevance to their lives. Most studies have discussed rural development issues in Zimbabwe, treating rural areas as inhabited by homogenous groups whereas women should be seen as a distinctive group. Mandinyenya (2014) also argued that most projects by NGOs are applied homogenously, underplaying the gender perspective. There was therefore a need to explore rural women empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy in line with how it has been applied.

Socio-economic empowerment of rural women is well documented, in general. However, there is a dearth in literature focusing on rural women empowerment through the growth point policy. The two subjects have largely been discussed separately, and it was intended for this study of locating rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy of Tsholotsho Growth Point, Matabeleland North, to bring to

the fore the rural women's economic empowerment outcomes within the growth point policy context.

Literature on the socio-economic status of women during and after the implementation of the growth point policy is reviewed from a sub-Saharan Africa point of view. Several these countries then were coming out of colonisation and were addressing the economic issues in underdeveloped regions. In the same vein, policies for gender/women empowerment or women's rights were not yet popularised even though scholars such as Ester Boserup had come up with gender frameworks (WID). Thus, the pioneering work of Ester Boresup and Walt Rodney in the 70s recognised that the colonial era considerably increased African gender inequalities, with men being cash crop farmers and wage labourers while women were relegated to household chores. Consequently, women's rights disappeared during that time. Basically, during the colonial era matrilineal systems and land and property rights denoted elevating of women's socio –economic status (Henderson & Whatley, 2014). There was also a lack of female markets thereby limiting them from the ability to achieve reasonable prices for their goods. This means that the challenges they faced rendered them disempowered. Again, the World Bank (2012) claims that in sub-Saharan Africa, women's economic marginalisation existed since time immemorial and was largely underplayed by patriarchy. Women were economically active, but they were mostly, not in positions to claim the proceeds of their labour or have them formally accounted for.

A study by Moagi & Mtombeni (2020) concurs with this claim; they argue that the oppression of women by men in Southern Africa depicted them as minors to the extent that their economic contribution remained obscure. Consequently, this study recognises the issues of patriarchy, religion and traditional cultures were and still exist, particularly in rural communities. Gaidzanwa (2011) has described patriarchy as one of the main contributors to the disempowerment of women and gender inequality. This means that patriarchy is seen as the root of women's disempowerment since several of women's issues are patriarchy-based. Patriarchy is an inhibitor to

women's participation in the economic platform. On the other hand religion has also been intricately linked to women oppression with religious texts and interpretations often being used to justify gender based discrimination while reinforcing patriarchal norms (Hackett *et al.,* 2016). Nonetheless, as already indicated in the early 1970s, although gender perspectives were already in place however in the third world, they were still downplayed. In Africa most of the countries were still under colonial rule hence there was no recognition of gender or women empowerment (Henderson & Whatley, 2014). Moreover, the development policies favoured the colonialist and the majority blacks were only regarded as workers. As indicated in the political economy of Zimbabwe discussion, the rights of women only came into recognition post -colonial era. This is when the socio-economic status of women began to change gradually with countries gaining independence with recognition of women's rights and ratifying global, regional gender equality platforms.

Active participation of women in issues linked to their empowerment, has over the years been regarded as crucial. For example, in South Africa, the socio-economic status of women and men during the apartheid era was characterised by discrimination and violation of rights. However, as noted by Moyo & Francis (2010), considerable progress has been made in creating an enabling environment for women empowerment but more still needs to be done. Although many initiatives have been introduced post 1994, to address women's plights, the case of their empowerment continues to occupy space, particularly for rural women. A study carried out in Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda show that decades after colonial rule, women still hold low social status than men and often control low revenue commodities. Additionally, assets differentials reflect gender power relations (Njuki *et al.,* 2011). Generally sub-Saharan African countries' issues of customary law land tenure system exclude women from owning and controlling land (Mhembwe, 2019).

On the other hand, Zimbabwean cases of women discrimination and gender inequalities are still prevalent in rural societies besides

interventions that have been put in place (Mhembwe, 2019). Women are excluded from the economic realms of the economy. However, after independence post 1980, the government came up with notable gender equality policies and projects. But, the major drawback was that most policies for economic development including the growth point policy did not acknowledge the gender dynamics in the rural economy. This is alluded to by Boserup &Whatley (2014) that although economic progress can improve the status of women, however a country cannot sustainably develop if its women are left out. This view could be the reason why the growth point policy in Zimbabwe has failed to be a catalyst for rural women empowerment.

As noted above, gender inequalities continue to be a major challenge in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular amid a myriad of women empowerment and development policies. Wekwete (2014) posits that progress has been made, but gender inequality is still prevalent in all sectors of the economy including the labour market. As such, rural women's socio-economic status is pronounced by their presence in the informal sector or working on small pieces of land. As such, these issues can be addressed by reinforcing policies that improve rural women's socio-economic status. For this to be achieved, policies such as the growth point policy can be made to be gender inclusive since it has provisions that can popularise women's empowerment outcomes.

It therefore follows that in as much as the socio-economic status of rural women has evolved over the years, more emphasis is being put forward for their recognition it largely remains unchanged compared to men. This is noted by Gaidzanwa (2011); men are better placed in rural communities while women's lives and livelihoods are hinged on the dictates of patriarchy. Previous studies such as the one by Moagi & Mtombeni (2020) lack qualitative data explaining the views of women in their discussion. The proponents of women empowerment, in their arguments, have raised many questions as to why, after many interventions such as the Beijing Convention, CEDAW, Agenda 2030 and 2063, women remain at the

bottom of the economic ladder. Firstly, the assumption that various policies and interventions that are directed at women's development and those that are indirectly posed for them such as the growth point policy have not been effective in pushing them forward to equality and development. It, therefore, applies that the growth point policy has failed both men and women due to the top-down approach. Evidence points to what Moagi & Mtombeni (2020) refer to as unchanged status, meaning that the current socio-economic status of rural women is largely that of being minors and subordinates to men. It therefore, became the mandate of this study to dig deeper to try and establish why, in the context of the growth point policy women's socio-economic status in the rural sector is still at peripheral level.

Stemming from the discussion above, the strategies by the growth point for rural development are considered relevant to women's socio-economic uplifting. The researcher argues that the successful implementation of growth points has a chance of positive development for women. To this end, Mushuku & Takuva (2013) posit that local industries and other enterprises located in the growth point created employment opportunities for the local communities that is precisely what women are aching for. Likewise, various benefits to local communities were envisaged to accrue from the growth point policy. It is of interest to this study that the successes recorded for growth points are not measured economically nor are there any statistics showing relevance to the Gross Domestic Product. Instead, the successes have been been largely generalised. Furthermore, the studies are silent on the economic growth created by the policy to measure women's participation and status as a result. Similarly, Manyanhaire *et al.* (2011) describe the success of the growth point strategy as limited and temporary owing to poor implementation of the policy. The description by Manyanhaire contrasts with what Chigonda (2010) alluded to as the improvement of livelihoods resulting from broadening incomes coming from economic activities such as vending and other small business enterprises. Unfortunately, the author does not say to what extent livelihoods have been promoted and what measurement was used for

what he termed "reduced poverty levels". The policy itself, failed to recognise that since Zimbabwe is agro- based, it is critical to promote the periphery where the natural resources are and further establish aggro-oriented processing industries. In this regard, the recorded limitations meant that the socio-economic status of women in rural communities remain static.

Women's socio-economic empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy are discussed under the policy's main tenets/provisions that is employment creation (through industrialisation and promoting of resource base; agriculture), access to markets and infrastructural development. To fully comprehend the issues of rural women empowerment, it is important to acknowledge the full diversity of their experiences in the context of the changing rural economy. Women and rural development issues in contemporary times are continuously gaining momentum because of the changing rural development discourse, FAO and World Bank (2009). Similarly, it is important to view policies for development as key enablers for rural women's empowerment. The introduction of the growth point policy was therefore set to improve the quality of life of the rural inhabitants through the tenets outlined above.

Literature, particularly in the Asian and sub-Saharan Africa context shows that in some cases there has been improvement of livelihoods for rural women through the growth point policy based on the policy's provisions. However, most of it has been limited by access to key factors of production and general policies for development that are not gender sensitive. For example, the aspect of employment creation is anchored on agricultural production which is the backbone of women's livelihoods (Bukaliya & Mutanana, 2015; Gaidzanwa, 2012; Dzvimbo *et al.*, 2018). It stands to reason that the promotion of agricultural production is key for the growth point, in that raw materials for envisaged industrialisation are dependent on farming activities that women are in the majority. While it is recognised that rural women's work has changed over the years, it is still noted that they are still largely self-employed or employed as casual labour in the agricultural sector (Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010). Agriculture is the

mainstay of rural women's livelihoods. It has been described by Mutanana & Bukaliya (2015) that women constitute the majority of the poor due to weak livelihoods strategies and outcomes. Women farmers are not only held back by being women but because they lack land, technology, markets and credit, more than men. In this case women empowerment impacts positively on agricultural outcomes if the above factors are in place (Wambui, 2021).

In countries like Bangladesh and India, women empowerment through land borders on lack of title on the land they produce on together with lack of inputs and extension services. Wambui (2021) further asserts that more than two thirds of women in South Asia are employed in agriculture while in East Africa over half of farmers are women. She also acknowledges that women's labour market is associated with poverty reduction, rural development and women empowerment. In Kenya, the level of women participation in agricultural production is between 42% and 65% of the agricultural labour force (World Bank, 2000). However, women remain a critical force in the agricultural sector, they are transforming the rural sector but, their role in agricultural production is ignored like the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Dzvimbo *et al.* (2018) acknowledge that Zimbabwean women constitute 52% of the workforce in the agricultural sector where they derive most of their livelihoods from but their rights to access to resources such as credit, land and markets is low. This shows that women's dependency on agriculture is not supported for sustainable livelihoods. In this regard employment creation through the growth point policy was not achieved as evidence show that women's work is still in farming. Manyanhaire *et al.* (2011) also agree that the only economic activities at growth points is petty trade, this, because industrialisation by the growth point was not achieved to create employment opportunities outside of farming activities.

Interestingly, the lack of acknowledgement of gender differentials in agriculture by the growth point policy, is assumed to be behind the demise in industrialisation and employment creation. Mushuku & Takuva (2013) in

their study on Nemamwa Growth Point in Masvingo established that there is no relationship between economic activities at the central growth point and the periphery where farming takes place. As evidence to this, growth points are characterised by small industries that have no significance on economic growth.

Malinga *et al.* (2017) have referred to decentralisation as empowering rural communities and assumed that it was a panacea for rural development. In this context, decentralisation by manufacturing companies, for instance, the establishment of Cotton and Grain Marketing Depots in Zimbabwe was considered a bold move to lessen the burden of transport and markets to cotton and maize growers (Chigonda, 2010). The motive was to do away with traveling long distances to access markets. According to Kapungu (2013), women's access to markets has seen some improvement due to decentralisation by the growth point policy. However, without addressing gender specific issues that rural women famers face in assessing markets, access for sustainable development cannot be achieved. Rural women still encounter the lack of access to competitive markets, and this has a bearing on the strategies that they employ.

In this regard, the implementation of the growth points in Zimbabwe has presumably recorded two growth points (Sanyati and Gokwe) as having been successful in implementation (Manyanhaire *et al.,* 2001). Sanyati and Gokwe's resource base is cotton which, at the time of implementation was expanding rapidly. The two poles have made strides as far as infrastructural development is concerned in terms of housing and small-scale industries among others. However, it is important to observe that with the abundance of cotton in the areas, no cotton ginnery has been established in line with the concept's propulsive industry. Moreover, according to Mazhazha-Nyandoro & Sambureni (2022), women contribute immensely to cotton production, but the benefits are enjoyed only by male farmers. Besides women cotton farmers do more work, their efforts are barely recognised. So despite recorded success for the two growth points women's contributions are not documented.

As already mentioned elsewhere in this study, the growth point policy's other major objective was to promote infrastructural development such as roads, skills development centres, health facilities, housing, water, and sanitation facilities among others. The provision of such facilities would naturally promote the health and skills development of women in addition to bringing markets closer to them. SDG numbers 3 and 4 encourage member nations to ensure the health, well-being and education mandates are met by year 2030. SDGs also acknowledge that women and children are crucial contributors and implementers of sustainable development to end health and education injustices and have a catalytic effect in achieving women empowerment and gender equality (Kaltenborn *et al.*, 2020).

By urbanising rural communities, it was envisaged that the facilities found in urban centres would also be availed to rural communities as women in urban areas are better placed than rural-based women. The achievement, therefore, of the growth point policy would put them at the same level ((Manyanhaire *et al.,* 2011). It is further noted that though the studies are silent on the growth point's impact on women's economic development, the inference made by Manyanhaire *et al.,* (2011) on the Sanyati and Gokwe growth point is an indication of development that is not well explained as applicable to the growth point concept.

Studies by Chowdhury (2011) have shown that unemployment among women is linked to limited access to infrastructure and yet it is necessary for productive agricultural activities. Rural transportation infrastructure constrains women's labour market activities too. The effect of road access on non-farm work for women has a stronger positive outcome in communities with more egalitarian gender norms. However, where inequalities exist like Bangladesh, Chowdhury (2011) further asserts that women empowerment outcomes are relegated to the periphery. For example, water and sanitation as an intervention for empowering women in Ghana, there is evidence that unequal gender relations hamper the progress of women because the intervention is based on the top-down approach (lack of access to decision-making) yet water is an essential

element for both men and women. According to Shava & Jaka (2018) women's situation in Chivi, Zimbabwe is acknowledged through the limited access to technology that is critical to stimulate rural women livelihoods. To achieve rural women's empowerment, improvement in infrastructure is essential and should be supported by adequate funding. Besides, SDG number 6 has compelled member states to promote access to safe water and sanitation as the most basic human right for health and well –being by 2030. The growth point policy tenet of infrastructural development of necessity, needs revisiting to ensure this goal is met.

In locating rural women empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy thrust of Zimbabwe, it is important to review the constraints that have been registered and how they have impacted on women. Notably, the unchanging socio-economic status of women as already discussed is an indicator that what they desire to be is still not attained, yet the purpose of this study was to find out through their lived experiences, opinions and views why this has been so. This study assumed that the various rural development interventions that have been adopted over the years have, not largely succeeded to remove women out of the quagmires of poverty.

As already mentioned, rural women's lives and livelihoods are characterised by poverty, particularly in developing countries. Suttie (2019) observes that globally, extreme poverty continues to be a challenge in rural communities as an estimated 79% of those experiencing poverty live in rural areas. In essence, sub-Saharan Africa has remained the world's most rural region. In Asia, with structural transformation, rural people are benefitting from initiatives such as the Green Revolution which are an important aspect of sustainable livelihoods. This is in contrast with Africa where policies for rural development have not been effective in improving the lives and livelihoods of the rural population particularly women who are inherently vulnerable. In Latin America, only small pockets of rural poverty remain, as most societies have largely urbanised. Kau (2017) point out that, living in a rural area increases a person's probability of suffering from

poverty as they are most likely to be affected by what is termed 'rurality'. However, Suttie (2019) generalised the impacts of the socio-economic and political conditions of women in the rural sector. The discussion focused on the general rural dwellers and overlooked the gender divide. Lack of progress in rural areas and the prevailing rural-urban disparities are some of the reasons for poor rural livelihoods. These factors and others not mentioned are mainly constraints that have resulted in women not being able to have positive outcomes.

The growth point policy as a strategy for economic development across the globe has not been successful in promoting the socio-economic empowerment of the distressed regions because of factors such as poor planning and implementation, lack of funding, poor identification of the resource bases as well as lack of infrastructural development (Nyandoro, 2008; Nhede 2013; Mushuku & Takuva, 2013). Similarly, these constraints have also contributed to women's weak livelihoods and the inability to participate in the national economies. Besides, economic stability, competitive markets and public investment in physical and social infrastructure are recognised as important requirements for achieving rural development. However, distorted government policies for rural development, have not acknowledged the gender dynamics in the rural economy. For example, women in rural communities, in sub-Saharan Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, depend largely on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihoods. Constraining factors such as lack of agro based rural industries critical for women empowerment have not been achieved by the growth point policy besides having such provisions. In addition, gender inequality is dominant in this sector and this constitutes a bottleneck in development (Ogunlela & Mukthar, 2009). The position of women meeting the capabilities and the challenges inherent in the sector cannot be overemphasised. Thus, the concept of women empowerment is rooted on the basis that issues of policy formulation and implementation are interconnected (Makoni, 2014). Mehra (2021) suggests that several conditions must be in place to ensure the successful economic empowerment of women. Again, modern technology is also a factor and

constraint of the growth point rendering women's economic outcomes unsustainable.

Proponents of the growth point policy also argue that infrastructural development in most growth points has been affected by poor funding (Wekwete, 1998; Mushuku & Takuva, 2013). The impact of infrastructure has a revolving cycle on rural women. It borders on accessibility to markets, housing, skills development and health facilities among others. As articulated in the SLA, the physical asset is a key component of rural development since it enables productivity and better outcomes for the rural population (Nalley *et al.,* 2018). Overally, the challenges associated with infrastructure in relation to rural women empowerment is that it retards women's ability to contribute in the rural economy (Dodzo & Mhloyi, 2017). A study carried out in Paraguay show that the poor road systems have resulted in rural women having to walk an average of 7.5 to 10km to access markets, education and health facilities. There is therefore much dependence on animal traction. Yet, such distances eat into production time. For example, in Kenya, time saved due to improved water systems allowed women to attend literacy classes (IFAD, 2009). Moreover, SDG number 9 propels governments; to build and improve resilient infrastructure and promote sustainable industrialisation that fosters innovation. This goal shows the importance of infrastructure development in economic development. It has been noted that infrastructure and gender equity are interlinked. An action plan by the World Bank recognises infrastructure as essential for increasing women's access to the key capital assets as outlined in the SLA that is human, finance, physical, natural and social. As a result, IFAD (2009), shows that the contribution of infrastructure is focused on potential savings on women's time, time that they can allocate to market economic activities, knowledge and skills acquisition. Lack of infrastructure generally hampers economic growth (Chinyamakobvu *et al.,* 2018).

Chinyamakobvu *et al.* (2018) further assert that most growth points in Zimbabwe do not have the pre-requisites needed to ignite the process of

cumulative causation (the process of self -sustaining economic growth) which has resulted in stagnation of the growth points. This has caused dependency on governments to continue funding activities in the growth points. This lack of capital investment resulted in insignificant small industries and petty trading that are a common feature of the growth points in Zimbabwe (Mushuku & Takuva, 2013; Manyanhaire, 2009). The impact, therefore on women has generally been lack of employment opportunities as already pointed out. Jaka & Shava (2018) describe women's employment opportunities in the rural economy as limited due to factors such as poorly resourced agricultural sector, use of traditional methods of farming compounded by other multiple and diverse constraints such as climate change and economic crises. FAO (2011) claims that even though livelihood diversification has been highly supported, agriculture has remained the main livelihood earner for women. Women's economic empowerment through livelihood diversification is therefore not feasible since the growth point policy has failed to promote the same through its concept of industrialisation and employment creation.

The growth point centres were targeted at addressing some of the challenges that women encounter, by bringing opportunities for business and emancipation closer to their doorstep (Nhede, 2013). Chikwanha-Dzenga (1999) posits that the growth centres developed into bottomless pits that consumed national resources without any returns. Although the growth point policy had some significant gains as far as development is concerned, it largely failed to uplift the socio-economic conditions, not only of women but of the general rural population. The failure of this policy as already explained is additionally attributed to the lack of a participatory approach that would ensure the inclusion of all stakeholders. Participation has been described both in the WET and the SLA as critical for receivers of a development initiative to take part in the process. The SLA is regarded as a participatory approach that encourages involvement of the people from the bottom up. Again, the WET also acknowledges the participation of women to be critical for gender equality and women

empowerment. Nevertheless, the growth point policy was applied homogeneously and did not contextualise the gender dynamics in the rural economy.

To facilitate the discussion on improving rural women outcomes through the provisions of the growth point policy, the SLA and WET guidelines are better placed in assessing development interventions as relevant, efficient, effective and sustainable. The focus is on various factors that are critical in ensuring sustainable livelihoods through participation, access and control.

Chambers (1983) observes thatimproving livelihood outcomes is linked to participatory development that is important but still lacking for women. It encompasses access to essential capital assets. In 1980, the growth point policy enacted by the new government (Zimbabwe) sought to promote rural development by ensuring that the rural population's socio-economic situation is improved. Livingstone (2010) argues that expanding the socio-economic capabilities of women increases their opportunities to influence and hold accountable the institutions that provide for them.

Rural women remain the most vulnerable group due to their inability to engage fully in socio-economic activities (Nyathi *et al.*, 2017). From a gender point of view, efforts to improve rural women empowerment outcomes is underpinned on the ability of women to access capital assets (Oxfam Novib, 2008:2). However, for this to happen, unequal power relations within institutions and communities should be addressed. Moreover, policies should recognise gender inequalities with regards to resource allocation, control and access. Zuma *et al.* (2011) argue that understanding the receivers of a development intervention is important to establish their problems and needs. Consequently, policy makers must design and implement them in recognition of the same. Emphasis in this case is on participation that according to Mchunu & Theron (2016), confirm development as something that people do and is not done for them. There is also a sense of ownership and full engagement when people are included in interventions that concern

them. In this context, the outcomes for rural women empowerment through the growth point policy would be more amenable if the policy was amenable to gender stereotypes in rural communities.

In this regard, literature shows that women's participation in development initiatives is only at preliminary stages and are excluded at crucial stages of the development process such as planning and conceptualisation. According to Mayoux (2014), without the full participation of all receivers of development, rural projects are bound to fail and impact negatively on women's livelihoods strategies and outcomes. This implies that women should have a say in the development process.

Accordingly, the study assumes that both the SLA and WET act as guides for strategies in improving rural women's empowerment outcomes. Conversely, the WET's levels of recognition as alluded to by Soharwardi & Ahmed (2020) are focused on negative, neutral and positive levels of recognition. In this context, the negative levels is more applicable to the growth point policy in the sense that it makes no mention of women's issues nor the gender issues within the rural sector. This confirms that the growth point policy used a blanket approach in its application hence, though the tenets speak to women's issues, they are however not specifically directed at women but the general population. The nexus between rural women empowerment and the growth point policy is therefore applicable but in an indirect manner that has not resulted in desired outcomes. Kongolo & Bamgose (2022) suggest that strengthening policies for women empowerment to encourage women's participation in the process of national development by putting more emphasis on the reality and status of rural women. The empowerment of rural women is crucial for sustainable livelihoods.

Some proponents of rural women empowerment through development policies such as the growth point are mostly interested in the positive level of recognition. They are concerned with the recognition of women's issues and with improving their position compared to men (Cornwall & Edwards,

2018). As such, the positive level is anchored on the key levels of access, control and participation. Guided by the SLA, in this case rural women's empowerment outcomes lie on their participation at decision-making level, that is giving them greater autonomy and control over the circumstances that influence their lives. Generally, the assumption is that the growth point policy be revisited to include rural women's concerns by establishing their level of access to and control of key factors of production as outlined in the SLA and WET. For example, improved implementation of programmes that are participatory in nature and are in line with what women desire on the access, control of the resources (Kongolo & Bamgose, 2022).

Notably, policies for rural development have largely side-lined women Duflo (2012). For rural people, being put first is critical since they are the last to get developmental initiatives (Dixon-Mueller, 2013). It is further noted that a real development policy is one where there is a relationship between the policymakers and the policy receivers, as the latter are the main consumers of it. Therefore, improving rural women empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy must be driven by what works for them, their desires and as shown in the literature, the WET and SLA guidelines are in line with this view.

The reviewed literature exposed several issues that are missing in the broader intellectual corpus about rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe. The need to establish growth poles/centres as a strategy to address regional inequalities was and remains essential for the Zimbabwean rural development discourse. Most proponents of the growth point strategy agree with what makes a growth pole successful but differ as views from the first world seem to highlight that the implementation and management of the strategy have a bearing on performance while those from developing economies assume that the strategy is Eurocentric and does not address the issues of economic development in poorly resourced nations. Moreover, the importance of resource exploitation in designated areas such as agriculture, has not been discussed extensively yet it is critical in making

the connections of women empowerment outcomes through the growth point strategy.

All these views are debatable given that neither measured the extent to which the growth point strategy has failed worldwide and where it has been successful, what the impact on women has been taking into cognisance the gendered perspectives and dynamics in the rural sector. Most scholars focus on economic growth with no mention of the impact on human development. Moreover, women as the backbone of rural economies are not recognised and addressed, particularly in developing economies where their socio-economic statuses are characterised by poverty and vulnerability. This study, therefore, sheds more light through the Sustainable Livelihood Approach and the WET on the importance of participation of rural women in development policies that impact on their lives and livelihoods. The proponents of the growth point policy in Zimbabwe have called for its re-engineering without pointing out the necessary adjustments that need to be done besides funding (Wekwete, 1998; Manyanhaire, 2009; Nhede, 2013; Chirisa & Dumba, 2014; Mushuku & Takuva, 2013). Scholars have also overlooked the fact that the policy has not been reviewed since 1980 to incorporate current issues such as gender equality which is critical for any development policy. The proponents of women empowerment and gender equality have noted that even though several conventions have been ratified and also incorporated gender perspectives in their constitutions women still face discrimination and marginalisation. Scholars and proponents of growth poles have failed to single out gender inequalities that make women a special group that is more impacted by the negative impact of lack of development and poor policing. Men and women have both been addressed homogenously with regards to development policies. Scholars such as Boserup articulate the importance of recognising women's standing in development, while the WET emphasises on key levels of women empowerment and in this case participation, access and control. This shows that women empowerment outcomes can be achieved if the three are in place, hence the importance of development policies to be cognisant of these levels at policy

formulation and implementation. To this end, studies undertaken so far have not made the connection of growth point policy to women empowerment guided by the SLA and the WET, yet both are concerned with rural development and empowerment. The gap was, thus used as confirmation of the need to establish the applicability of the growth point policy in facilitating rural women's empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point.

This chapter presented reviewed literature based on the conceptual and theoretical frameworks guiding this study. In addition, empirical studies on the application and performance of the growth point policy and rural women's empowerment were reviewed guided by the study research questions. The next chapter presents the research methodology that was used to explore the experiences of women at Tsholotsho Growth Point in locating their socio-economic outcomes.