

Chapter 5: A SYNTHESIS

In this chapter, the discussion of the research findings is presented. This is where the researcher brings out the applicability of the growth point policy to rural women's empowerment outcomes. This was achieved through the development of my interpretation, deriving the meaning of the phenomenon supported by relevant literature. In the discussion, the researcher will refer to the growth point policy, the Women Empowerment Theory and the Sustainable Livelihood Approach as the approaches relevant to apply to the subject of rural women's socio-economic empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. The researcher believed that all those who participated in the study gave, to the best of their ability, information based on their knowledge and life experiences and the views and perceptions they have on the growth point policy and women empowerment as they lived it. The chapter further submits that women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy have only been achieved to a certain extent, hence women are still poor, marginalised and distanced from the national economy.

Empirical evidence shows that women's socio-economic statuses can be traced back to the period before the promulgation of the growth point policy in Zimbabwe. Before that, women's socio-economic standing was steeped in a lack of socio-economic facilities and activities such as roads, communication, markets, services, transport, electricity, water and sanitation, and health and educational facilities. This view is corroborated by Nhede (2013) who concurs that before the introduction of the growth point policy the rural space was characterised by traditional structures and there was much reliance on small-scale farming activities. Women from the FGD (V) agreed that facilities and services then, were not within their reach. The same was alluded to by key informants who noted that the Tsholotsho growth point transitioned from a farm service centre to the present growth point. The study also found out that after the introduction of the growth point, at first, the settlement was a mere service centre that grew into a fully-fledged economic hub in terms of key service provision, improved infrastructure and urbanisation. Wekwete (1999) points to the intention of the growth point as aiming to bring the rural population into

close contact with services and markets. Generally, it was agreed that these provisions supported and changed the lives and livelihoods of the rural population including women.

Of interest to this study is that, during this period issues of women empowerment were also not yet recognised. Patriarchy, as described by Gaidzanwa (2011), was rife within communities. Women's socio-economic activities were carried out within the jurisdiction of the household where the male members owned and controlled all factors of production. However, frameworks such as the Women in Development were coming into effect, but recognition was still at infancy stage. Moreover, economic development policies were largely top down in the absence of the SLA that emphasised the bottom-up approach. Notably, the socio-economic changes brought about by the growth point policy were not gender inclusive but homogenous in nature.

The rationale identified with the changes in the socio-economic status of women due to the growthpoint was described through agentic, catalytic and resultant vectors. These were regarded as key factors changing the status of women in Tsholotsho. It was noted that changes that had occurred and have been experienced were all in the context of the various interventions by the growth point policy. Policies and strategies were taken to give agency to women for socio-economic change. Ministerial departments such as Women's Affairs are instrumental in creating a platform for change for women through awareness, skills development and encouraging participation at PPD levels. It is also noted that the presence of the Women Affairs department does not take away the fact that the growth point itself was formulated without acknowledging the gender dynamics in the rural economy. These are underpinned on the lack of participation, control and access to resources as articulated by the WET. Musasa *et al.* (2022) concur that lack of participation by women in development policies is a barrier to women empowerment or gender equality.

Komte (2012), further asserts that lack of women's participation hinders economic development. The study findings established that efforts by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and others are contributing to women's socio-economic development by encouraging women to participate in issues of

development. It was also evident that women were aware of the policies and strategies for their socio-economic emancipation. For instance, participating in the Zimbabwe Constitution making in 2013. Accordingly, section 17(1) of the constitution argues that the state must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of life. As a matter of course, women in the study agreed that they were consulted but there was no feedback nor change to show that their desires had been heard. As noted by Liberata (2022), participation as outlined in the WET strengthens women's decision-making power concerning their lives and livelihoods. As such the growth point policy is classified at the negative level of WET where there is no mention of women's issues, meaning that they are left out of the development process. The growth point policy is then classified as a gender-blind policy. It applied a top-down approach, was not participatory in nature and lacked the guidance of the SLA that encourages receivers of development to be included in policy/project formulation for they know what they want out of an intervention. Kapur (2019) observes that some aspects of rural livelihoods lie within the frameworks of institutions and processes that govern the sustainability of rural livelihoods based on participatory decision-making. Musasa *et al.* (2022) also posit that women in Zimbabwe are excluded from the mainstream development policies.

The above implies that from a service centre level, (microcosmic) to a growth point stage, (macrocosmic), something big has come out of the policy. The development of the growth point has been traced this way by the study and supported by Mapuva (2015); that the Zimbabwean rural development followed a trajectory that was spelt out by the dictates of the growth point policy. Thus, the rural development discourse is anchored on the growth point policy. Moreover, the implementation of the growth point policy has resulted in several socio-economic activities that have a bearing on women's empowerment. Decentralisation, for example, was regarded as a key factor in the evolution of the centres. Participants and literature acknowledged the benefits of having essential services closer (Manyanhai *et al.*, 2009). The study established that the decentralisation of key services eliminated the trips to nearby Bulawayo and Plumtree.

As pointed out by FAO (2018), rural services supported by infrastructure have the potential of increasing women's participation in the rural and national economies. The presence of government departments did also attract non-state actors for the betterment of the growth of the district. Women's activities have been incremental and cascading as a result. In addition, the study noted that the outward male migration to neighbouring countries was seen as having created some form of indirect empowerment for women. Becoming de facto heads of households has seen women migrating from the villages to seek economic opportunities so that they provide for their families. This does not mean that women were abandoning their homes and duties, but that the growth point has created a window for them to seek better livelihoods. Afsar (2002) argues that migration contributes to the alleviation of poverty. It offers better livelihoods, greater income and improved life chances. But the potential of reaping these rewards varies according to capital assets that women have access to.

The narratives emerging from study findings reveal that the presence of the growth point due to the urbanisation faze was an attraction for industrialisation that had the prospects of improving livelihoods. As such being at the growth point was seen as a better option. So, the rationale above implied that:

- The ushering in of the growth point positively transformed the lives and livelihoods of women in Tsholotsho District with initiatives such as service provision.
- Decentralisation was key to cascading development.
- Better opportunities at the growth point served as the agent for women seeking better opportunities.
- The policies and strategies by the government were an enabler for the growth point to have provisions for women's socio-economic empowerment.
- The interventions instituted by the growth pole strategy served as a stepping stone to improved access to socio-economic capabilities that are key to women in the rural sector.

The rationale above shows that the growth point policy has been an enabler for the socio-economic changes that women are experiencing. Furthermore, they serve as a certification that the growth point has the potential for women's empowerment.

The question: to what extent has the growth point policy improved rural women empowerment's outcomes was answered by the themes: improving service delivery, SMEs, development Aid, increased agency from women, skills development and employment creation. The evaluation sought to locate rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy.

Ushering in of the growth point policy improved service delivery such as health and access to other key services that women depend on or benefit from. As noted by Ellis (2000), women's empowerment is dependent on the increase in their economic activities. It was evident that there was increased participation in economic activities by women from both the centre and the villages. This was evidenced by the increase in the number of women taking the initiative to becoming entrepreneurs, considering that women have long been denied such freedoms due to patriarchy and general gender inequalities. Joachim (2013) regards a lack of freedoms as stemming from a lack of access to key assets resultantly being unable to have stable livelihoods. Access to key assets is enshrined in both the WET and SLA. The WET recognises the concept of access for women being able to have access to assets that can improve their livelihoods while the SLA questions the extent to which these assets are available. Khan et al. (2001) argue that capital assets and activities that rural people require for a means of living are often compromised. They further assert that livelihoods of women are often at risk owing to changes in the climate, education, health, and markets.

However, the study also revealed that the presence of the growth point has witnessed an increase in the number of women SMEs operating at the growth point. The ability for women to be business owner stems for the

agency. Alkire (2008) recognises agency to be a vital factor for women empowerment provided the resources are attainable that will result in desirable outcomes. To this end, women still decried lack of expansion of their business entities due to poor resource allocation and limited access to capital assets. Additionally, the lack of industries at the growth point was a trigger for small businesses and petty trade (informal trade) in which women form the majority. Nhede (2013) asserts that, according to the concept of the growth points, local industries and other enterprises located at the growth point were envisaged to create employment opportunities. However, this has not been achieved hence, petty trade/informal businesses forms a greater part of economic activities at Tsholotsho growth point. The also study noted that even though the returns from petty trade/small businesses were recognised as not enough by women participants, they took pride in ownership and decision-making. Some women in the FGDs even acknowledged that owning their businesses not only helps provide for the family but that they are also able to make their own decisions concerning their lives and livelihoods. It was assumed that this was a way of women taking charge and moving away from subordination. The view is described by Alkire (2008) and UN Women (2017)) as one of the critical elements that helps to comprehend women empowerment since development interventions have continued to be based on the idea that women are dependents and not breadwinners.

Findings also show that women are mainly concentrated in the villages hence with the growth point, they have been given a new lease of life in the informal sector. Ahmed (2016) posits that the promotion of rural enterprises has fetched notable outcomes for rural women. But the challenge was that several issues resulted in their efforts and outcomes not being effective. They cited poor working conditions/premises, lack of financial resources and poor infrastructural development. This is alluded to in the SLA that lack of key capital assets is a barrier to development and sustainable livelihoods. In the same vein, the WET is more concerned with women's access and control to such assets since they are regarded as the building blocks for women empowerment. Mushuku & Takuva (2013)

additionally observe that small shops around the growth point do not generate enough income and have not created viable opportunities. Women agreed that their incomes were very low, citing a lack of capacity. Their businesses lack growth and are therefore considered to be a hand-to-mouth situation.

Development aid and skills development were perceived to go hand in hand. The growth point has served as an attraction for non-state actors who are also partners of the government to operate in the district. All key informants agreed that most of their departments have NGOs as partners. The participation of non-state actors has promoted skills development. This is important since there are no tertiary institutions in the district. In the same vein, women also reiterated that some of the skills they have acquired over the years have been self-taught (self-training). In effect, even though skills development by non-state actors were appreciated, there was a gap of acknowledged deficiencies that are the result of training by NGOs being project specific and not available all the time. Mandinyenya & Nyandoro (2017) agree that NGOs mainly focus on impacting practical entrepreneurial skills and technical knowledge that are specific to an intervention. Generally, the study learnt that the lack of skills is contributing to poor livelihood strategies and outcomes that are important for women at Tsholotsho growth point.

The same is acknowledged by Lashgarara *et al.* (2011) that lack of access to information has inherently disabled rural women to increase production and use their potential capacities and opportunities. In the study, there was an outcry from women at the centre that they wish to be taught basic book-keeping to enable them to run their businesses efficiently. Yet, Bhat (2015) observes that the education of women is a powerful tool to change their position in society, it is the foundation of the empowerment of women. Even the SDGs number 3 and 4 call for member states to promote the education and health for women by 2030 while the Constitution of Zimbabwe also has a provision in section 75 mandating the government to ensure that every citizen has access to affordable quality education. In this

vein, Kaltenborn (2020) also posits that education injustices have had a catalytic effect in achieving women empowerment and gender equality. On the other hand, the SLA encourages access to the human capital asset as an enabler for women empowerment since there is a realisation that being poor is not just about low income but having less access to skills. The WET also emphasises on the access to education as a tool needed for empowerment.

Employment creation based on industrialisation has not been achieved hence women have been creating their own employment. It was further noted that in their small establishments, they have been able to employ other women as assistants. The study revealed that the absence of industries in the district has created several small businesses that women are affiliated with. There was consensus from key informants that the growth point has created a platform for women to own and run businesses. This is supported by Gasper (2008) who observes that the role of growth points in rural development should not only focus on farming but to come up with ideas for industrial development. Opportunities have been created for women coming from the villages to seek employment at the centre. The notion of women supporting other women was therefore clearly acknowledged.

Similarly, it was noticed that women in the villages only had one major livelihood that is farming. There has not been much in terms of promoting off-farm activities. This shows that the trickle-down effect has not been achieved by the growth point policy. Klimczuk & Kochanska (2019) observe that peripheral regions are set to benefit from the growth at the growth centre as it grows. However, since this pattern of growth has not happened, the economic activities at the centre are largely confined to the centre while at the periphery/village level there is no diversification, economic activities remain traditional. So, this means that women's livelihoods in the villages are fragile owing to dependence on rain-fed agriculture. As cited by ILO (2018), women in rural communities are less likely to be wage earners and when they are, they earn less than men.

Serrat (2017) adds on to say that the natural resource base cannot be over-emphasised, for without it there are no livelihoods to talk about. Serrat (2017)'s view is in line with the concept of the 'resource base' that, according to the strategy of the growth point, is key in designing or coming up with a growth point. Essentially, the implications of having failed to promote the main resource base that in this case, is agriculture could be the main reason contributing to the demise of the growth point policy. To this end, dependence on rain-fed farming as confirmed by FGD-V, indicates that in poor seasons, there is not enough harvest for consumption and excess to sell to support household needs. So the remaining option would be to migrate to the centre to seek employment opportunities. But not everyone could do this, hence women in the villages expressed that more was needed in terms of off-farm work, to guard against fragile livelihoods. Van den Broeck & Kilic (2019) therefore consent to the view that off-farm work is important for rural women since it increases their income at household level.

The sentiments of FGDs and key informants show that the growth point is indeed applicable to women's empowerment. There is a consensus that without the growth point, the opportunities that women have managed to take would not be accessed or availed to them.

CONSTRAINTS OF THE GROWTH POINT POLICY AND THE IMPACT ON THE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS OF WOMEN

Empirical findings show that the growth point faces several constraints, and these have had an impact on women's socio-economic development. The following explained the constraints stemming from research question 4: systemic, social and natural factors. This rationale implied that the above were inter-twined in describing the constraints by the growth point that have affected women's lives and livelihoods.

These were regarded to be localised factors that related to the performance of the growth point with the outcomes translated to women empowerment. They ranged from limited resource exploitation to political intrusion and corruption at the local level (Chapter 4; 4.4). The study found

that the identified and observed factors have been instrumental in the failure to achieve women's empowerment. The efforts by the growth point are instituted against a backdrop of challenges that are inherently embedded in the implementation of the growth point policy itself to contemporary times where the devolution of government funds to support such efforts has diminished. Lipton (1982) posited that living in a rural area increases one's probability of poverty. To this end, the perpetuation of poverty among women in Tsholotsho was assumed to be attributed to the poor functioning of the growth point. Scholars like Chikwanha-Dzenga (2005) have described the growth points in Zimbabwe as centres that have developed into bottomless pits that consumed national resources without any returns. The relation to what the author is saying and the situation in Tsholotsho are hand-gloved. The assumption of the policy was to lift the rural population out of the quagmires of poverty through different interventions but fundamentally guided by what Perroux (1958) projected to be the pattern of achieving economic growth. Mapuva (2015) has already indicated that rural development hinges on the dictates of the growth point policy meaning that this policy is highly regarded as a panacea for rural development and therefore improving the lives and livelihoods of the local population.

The study noted that decentralisation increases access to key essential services. These include markets and work opportunities, due to companies relocating to the growth point. Essentially, decentralisation has been achieved for administration services but to a lesser extent for manufacturing companies and markets. What is on the ground in Tsholotsho is the Grain Marketing Board to which the study participants gave praise, but also noted the shortcomings as rooted in poor service delivery. To this end, Chigonda (2010) sees decentralisation by manufacturing companies such as Cotton and Grain Marketing Boards as essential in lessening the burden of transport. However, market for other commodities is available considering that most people in the district converge at the growth point for different provisions. The absence of industry is a major drawback for the growth point because the economic

growth of a designated region is promoted through industrialisation birthing other inter-leading economic activities. Growth, according to Kimengisi & Fombe (2015), was stimulated but short-lived owing to the absence of processing industries. In the same vein, the study revealed that the setting up of the growth point was in essence, a noble intervention for rural development but is now regarded as stagnant owing to lack of growth.

LACK OF DEVOLUTION OF FUNDS

Devolution of funds from the government to rural councils was noted to be a restraint. Participants were aware that development has been stalled due to poor funding from the government. The framework for devolution is enshrined in section 264 of the Zimbabwean Constitution and in the National Development Strategy 1 of 2020 and other rural and urban councils Act to transfer power from the central government to councils. However, Wekwete (1988) posited that growth points have been left to their own devices by the government. There is much reliance on non-state actors to carry out developmental projects initiated by government departments. The study observed that this could be the reason why NGO projects are regarded piecemeal, unsustainable and created dependency. Mandinyenya (2014) and Mandinyenya & Nyandoro (2017) attests to some NGOs not having addressed what they would have set out to with some interventions creating dependency and imposing projects. This is further noted in the SLA approach, it specifies that the poor who are the receivers of development policies and projects know their situation and need to be involved in project formulation. To this end, women in the village gave an example of the Tsotso stove project that was not consultative in nature hence it proved not to be aligned with the needs of women.

Most participants acknowledged the importance of having the growth point but further indicated that the challenges such as poor infrastructural development were stalling the progress of growth in the district. This is alluded to by Nhede (2013) and Chinyamakobvu *et al.* (2018) that growth points have been crippled by diminishing budgets among other factors. To

this end, stalled growth means mounting challenges for women who see themselves thriving socially and economically through the provisions of the growth point.

SERVICE CENTRE VERSUS INDUSTRIAL CENTRE

From the findings, it was evident that growth at the Tsholotsho Growth Point was not economic but leaned towards the sprouting of townships without meaningful growth. Most key informants concurred that the growth point was growing in terms of the number of general dealer shops, however, there was the aspect of overlooking what growth the growth point strategy is envisaged to create. Manyanhaire *et al.* (2011) described the state of the growth points in Zimbabwe as service centres with no meaningful growth. This was evidenced by the fact that the fundamentals for a growth point that meets all the tenets enshrined in the policy were not met. Service provision has been regarded to be key in the growth point. Wekwete's (1988) view on the growth point being left to their own devices is therefore a factor based on the situation on the ground. The government has turned a blind eye to what is happening and instead is more interested in other policies.

As a matter of course, the study shows that ignoring the growth point policy is a disservice to the rural population/women who still have high expectations based on what can be changed within the policy. But, the growth point under discussion resembles a service centre that is mainly into service provision, rather than an industrialising hub.

It was noted that most of the resources in the district have not been exploited and these include tourism, agriculture, minerals and timber. Key informants agreed that the district had failed to attract investors to tap into these resources. It was also an observation of this study that this could be the reason why industrialisation has not been achieved. According to Nyandoro & Muzorewa (2017), local industries were set to create employment opportunities. Even though there is a reference to the locals not having to seek employment in other districts, what was

perceived as employment opportunities by participants was based on informal trading. Mandinyenya (2014) observes that empowerment initiatives for rural women lack sustainability. This was seen as a contributing factor to women's efforts not increasing and giving them the empowerment for socio-economic development considering that employment opportunities within the rural economy are critical for poverty reduction as well as for enhancing livelihoods (Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010; Ahmed, 2016).

Women at the centre complained of poor service delivery by the local council citing poor water and sanitation constraints and lack of business premises to conduct their businesses among others. The study participants lamented that women conducted businesses in the open in a flea market designated area. There are no facilities and there is no coherence in the activities being carried out. It was noted that most people relieved themselves in the bush because there are no ablution facilities at the centre. Supporting this view is Tshuma *et al.* (2023), they contend that, of all people who practise open defecation, 90% of them are in rural areas. A key informant felt that this was a major problem judging by the number of people who visit the growth point for varying reasons. It seemed that the growth point was expanding only in terms of housing construction but not economically. Chinyamakobvu *et al.* (2018) shares the same sentiments that the promotion of socio-economic activities in a designated rural growth point requires understanding the economic and social factors important for rural development. In this regard, women expressed their disgruntlement at the local council for failing to drill more boreholes for them and building public facilities. They confirmed that most of their time is spent on unproductive chores, and this affects their businesses. However, it was noted that this was an almost helpless situation where the service providers themselves were underfunded (government funding has diminished).

Participants in the villages acknowledged the role of the growth points but noted that the benefits were experienced by those at the centre. For them,

they had hopes that the growth points would grow so that they would get the same facilities such as electrification, tap water, services and improved communication. What the study revealed was that women in the villages were wishing for services at the centre to be availed to them. This was what the proponents of the growth pole strategy (Boudeville *et al.*, 1957) perceived as the trickle-down effect. It is to be perceived as growth that starts from the centre and cascades to the outer areas. The study noted that this had only been achieved as a minute development. Women still faced with poverty, low access, and control to resources (Mungwini, 2007 & Gaidzanwa, 2011). Notably, women in this instance did not have a big wish list but projects promoting off-farming activities, electricity, water, and health facilities nearer to them.

From the views of women in the study, there is a general feeling that development has been politicised. Even though women were encouraged and still participated in PPDs (public-private dialogues), they felt that their pleas were not heard. There is an acknowledgement that the government through the local leadership tries to reach out to them, but no positive outcomes have been noted. Bayai (2013) observes that to foster economic growth, there is a need to promote private-public dialogues. In the same vein, women's participation in policy formulation is hindering their participation in economic development and should be pursued (Kurebwa, 2013). The same is alluded to by Golla *et al.* (2011) that for successful women empowerment, there are conditions that must be in place, such as being able to make their own decision in matters that concern them. Through the lenses of the SLA and WET, empowering women can be improved through participation. Furthermore, policies for economic development have been regarded as gender blind and lack of gender mainstreaming has led to adverse outcomes (Musasa *et al.*, 2022).

The study findings show that corruption by officials in high offices was cited as hindering women's progress. They noted that they work from open spaces yet there is land around the growth point that they have applied for but has not been acknowledged. The general feeling was, there was

favouritism within Council as most land was owned by the diasporans (*Injivas*). Key informants acknowledged the efforts of *Injivas* to support the development of the district. There was however the question of whether priority to key economic factors such as land was given only to those who were seen as financially stable. Taking their complaints to the ward councillor had hitherto not yielded any good results. Corruption and racketeering were alleged to be rife at the district offices. This view brings in the aspect of what access do women must these resources and who controls them. This is regarded critical in the WET as participation, access and control are seen as fundamental in achieving women empowerment and gender equality in terms of resource allocation. Gender imbalances have been attributed to women not being able to be a part of the development process as shown in this study.

As indicated above, women's businesses have been enabled by the presence of the growth point. However, their lack of growth and sustainability was attributed to piecemeal support and provisions by the growth point system. Women at the Centre noted that they experience a high cost of running businesses. The profits that they make are marginal and are largely hand-to-mouth. Women lacked the skills to efficiently run their businesses, they had no access to business stands, premises and financial support. This rendered the livelihoods fragile. Mandinyenya (2014) cites the empowerment of women as one lacking sustainability. It was noted that there were no banking facilities in the District and women must rely on informal lenders who in turn charged exorbitant interest rates. Some confirmed that they borrow from each other to eliminate interests. It was also noted that lack of education/skills was attributed to the absence of vocational colleges in the district hence women relied on the training and skills development by non-state actors. Bhat (2015) and Cornwall (2016) have described the education of women as a powerful tool to change their position in society, it is the foundation of their empowerment. Others confirmed that they need bookkeeping skills meaning that they do not have any training at all. Running a business without the requisite skills is risky as alluded to by Campbell & Sayer

(2003). They further postulate that human capital represents the skills, knowledge and good health that ensure people pursue different livelihood outcomes. In the same vein, Claridge (2004) concurs that social capital in rural communities is affected by a lack of knowledge and the absence of structures enabling participation. The absence of tertiary institutions, therefore, detracts from the ability of women to have sustainable livelihoods.

Overall, the constraints facing growth points based on the systemic factors outlined above have a bearing on women's socio-economic activities hence they have been assumed as stagnating both the growth points and women's empowerment. The perception of social factors constraining the growth point and transferring the constraints to women's empowerment was based on the following outcomes: women's roles and skills limitation.

The study revealed that women's roles both at the Centre and in the villages comprised household chores and economic activities. Women at the centre have higher expectations since they live in an urban setting. However, they noted poor service delivery denoting them to resemble those in the villages. Key services such as electricity and tap water were said to be accessible to only a few. They noted that most of the houses they reside in were built outside of council approval. This was justified by the mere fact that Council had not been able to build low-income houses for them. It was also noted that most of the houses particularly in the high-density areas were out of normal building specifications. Some women confirmed that the houses they rented and lived in were where they also conducted their businesses, to cut down on expenses. It was however surprising that the council had let this be, posing the risk of disease outbreaks considering the use of the bush as ablutions. Women confirmed that their roles were made difficult by the lack of access to amenities that have the potential of easing their burden.

At the village level, the pattern is the same. The study observed that it was worse for village women who had to consider the distance between the home and water points, where they got firewood and their plots. Farming activities in the villages were characterised by drudgery. They use traditional methods of farming that are very laborious. Serrat (2017) explains that the promotion of livelihoods through technological advancement and industrialisation is key to rural development. This is regarded as the reason why there has not been much improvement in the agricultural sector where women are the majority. Chikwanha-Dzenga (1999) describes the rural folk as a neglected group who live in harsh conditions. In the same vein, women wish for better conditions and improved facilities.

NATURAL FACTORS

The study found that natural factors are a major constraint to rural development and women are affected too. Climate change or changing weather patterns or poor seasons as women in the FGD referred to them are a bona-fide phenomenon in the district. It was noted that the district was prone to floods as indicated by KII3. As a result, the safety of the locals is not guaranteed. The same is alluded to by Matunhu *et al.* (2017) that issues such as floods have been occurring frequently in Tsholotsho thereby disrupting the lives and livelihoods of the locals. The researcher's perception was that women are more affected by the displacement that comes with flooding and in the process lose their livelihoods. Additionally, poor harvest (bad season) has rendered women vulnerable in that they have no excess to sell to cater for other needs.

Issues of health were classified under natural factors. It was learnt that with the growth point health facilities had been made available around the district. The district even boasts of a big hospital meaning that most get immediate help and only complicated cases got to be referred to Mpilo General Hospital in Bulawayo. The major constraint noted was the issue of HIV&AIDS that was highly prevalent in the district. Key informant 113 attributed the prevalence to *injivas*/diasporans. *Injivas* are away from home

for long periods and others only manage to come back home once a year. Migration tends to result in different behavioural consequences, and it was understood that women are mostly affected (Hunter, 2007).

From the above discussion, the challenges that affect the growth point also affect women. The lack of growth due to financial incapacitation has also resulted in women not being able to thrive in their businesses and other activities.

In this study, it was noted that women have certain desires and aspirations based on the provisions of the growth point policy. The study noted that the efforts of the government, community and development partners were critical in meeting the socio-economic desires of women. Evidence produced by this study show that the three have been a result of current efforts and those not achieved. Government efforts are based on what the government the government has provided in terms of strategies for development. Community efforts were those perceived changes in attitudes and behaviours and community-based activities linked to the socio-economic upliftment of women while developmental partners' efforts are mostly related to rural development projects linked to the work of NGOs and other partners. The level and efficiency of the three have a bearing on women's socio-economic empowerment.

The three key factors further show that the effectiveness and success of the growth point in meeting women's desires and aspirations are centred on all three. Government efforts are central and therefore link with the other two in establishing the role that each play in ensuring that women's empowerment through the growth point policy is achieved. According to UN Women (2019), investing in women's socio- economic empowerment sets a direct path toward equality.

The study, therefore, established that women desire the following:

- Sustainable livelihoods based on big industries (industrialisation)
- Access to financial resources

- Consultations by NGOs before the implementation of a project
- Housing
- Water
- Improved facilities
- Infrastructure development

All in all, the evidence from this study show that all participants acknowledge that the growth point has the potential of changing the lives and livelihoods of women. They all noted that the growth realised is still at the infancy stage hence women want more out of the initiative. The study confirmed that most participants knew what the growth point stands for in terms of rural development and the expected outcomes on the population. Even though they believed that the growth point would have changed the socio-economic status for the better, they still had expectations of more development that would continue to better their lives and their livelihoods through what was offered. The study also argues that women from both the villages and the centre had knowledge that the developmental efforts that had been achieved thus far in the district were based on having a central place from which activities could be coordinated.

In this chapter, research findings were discussed based on the analysis in Chapter 4. Relevant literature was used to explain the findings as well as the perceptions of the researcher. The main findings of this study were that there has been a transformation of women's socio-economic status resulting from the implementation of the growth point policy. Secondly, the women's socio-economic empowerment has been improved judging by what women have achieved through the provisions of the Policy. Thirdly, it was proved that the constraints of the growth point have a transferring effect on women's socio-economic efforts. Lastly, the study established that what women desired and aspired for, through the growth point policy, was based on the overall factors of the growth points and that of women's empowerment. The next chapter summarises the study including conclusions, contributions and recommendations.