

Chapter 6: A GROWTH POINT POLICY AND RURAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT MODEL

In this chapter, the researcher will present the model that this study came up with. The model shows how the growth point policy can be applied for rural women empowerment outcomes. The chapter further, summarises what was heard, observed and documented to qualify ‘locating rural women’s empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy’. It will cover the following: model, empirical and theoretical contributions, contributions, summary of the research and recommendations.

The major findings of this study are summarised in this model. It is based on four concepts that explain how rural women empowerment can be achieved through the growth point policy shown in the figure below.

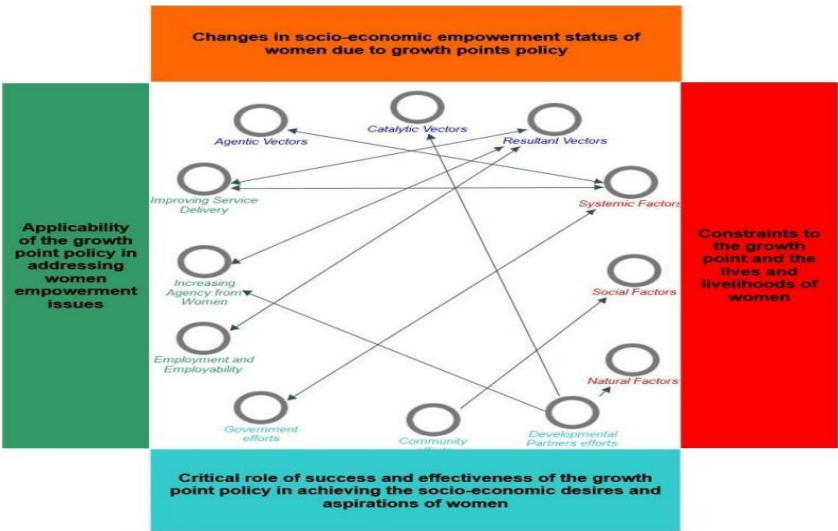


Figure 6.1- The Growth Point Policy and Rural Women's Empowerment Model (Researcher)

The aim of the Growth Point Policy and Rural Women's Empowerment Model is to apply it to establish rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. It has four main concepts that firstly explores the socio-economic changes that have come about because of the growth point policy, secondly, it demonstrates how the growth point policy has been applied for rural women's empowerment. Thirdly, it summarises the constraints of the growth point policy and their impact on women's rural empowerment outcomes and lastly it shows how the growth point policy can be improved to meet the desired outcomes for rural women.

The model takes note of the socio-economic changes that are experienced by rural women due to the growth point policy. These are traced from before and after the implementation of the growth point policy. The changes are based on the strategies that are aligned to the objectives of the growth point policy. The model acknowledges that the changes are the driving force intended to bring about change. Rural women's socio-economic empowerment and changes are underpinned by the factors that push for socio-economic change. These give impetus for the changes to occur.

The model recognises that the relevance of the growth point policy should be interpreted according to what it has created, that benefits women. The applicability context must be regarded in terms of outputs that impact women, in terms of structures, services and systems that develop at the growth point. The model shows how the application of the growth point policy can increase rural women's socio-economic activities based on the provisions thereof. These are the outputs or enablers of rural women empowerment meant to improve their livelihoods. The interventions in place and applicable to women should create sustainable livelihoods supported by infrastructural development, financial resources, habitable business spaces and access to important services like land and water, among others. In the absence of these key factors, the growth point policy's relevance to women's empowerment is considered null.

The model outlines the constraining factors that have the potential of impeding rural women's empowerment outcomes. These are identified within three factors that is: systemic, social and natural factors. These factors help explain how addressing them can be used to quell the constraints. They are inherent and attendant in any life changing situation. The manner and sincerity with which such constraints are tackled and overcome determine the success of the policy interventions. The constraints include the factors that have caused the stagnation and ineffectiveness of the growth point in meeting the socio-economic empowerment of women. When the growth point suffers, women do too. The constraining factors must be addressed to avoid spill-over to women.

The goal for women's empowerment through the growth point is to ensure that women's needs within the rural economy are met. The model collects the critical success factors that are essential to overcome the resistance to the desired changes. This explains how the efforts of government, community and development partners are reducing the systemic factors. The model also recognises women empowerment/gender dynamics within the rural sector and advocates to lobby and express their views through the designated PPDs. Government, community and development partners' efforts should be channelled in ensuring that the growth point itself is sensitive to women's issues. For this reason, the growth point should move away from homogeneity and recognise the issues of gender inequalities.

Government and its partners should incorporate and be guided by the Sustainable Livelihood Approach and the WET in their efforts. The model therefore acknowledges that the success of rural projects depends on all the combined efforts.

The study came up with several empirical and theoretical contributions in the subject of locating women empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. These include the strides and changes that have been

initiated through the growth point policy assumed to have an impact on women's empowerment outcomes. The challenges confronting growth points in meeting the empowerment of women and what women desire for a growth point that meets their needs are included as well.

This study revealed some important insights on the socio-economic status of women and indicated the changes that have taken root since the ushering in of the growth point policy. It contributed in understanding the socio-economic status of women through the growth point policy. The study reflected on the enabling factors that have directly contributed to the changes. Empirical findings documented in Chapter 4 of this study show the change in the socio-economic status of women as being attributed to the various strategies that the growth point policy put in place. Literature alludes to the same policies for development to have had an impact on economic changes within the rural economy. Even though the discussions in literature do not mention women empowerment through the growth point policy. Regardless, women's status according to literature shows they were economically active before development policies came into effect but, were not in positions to claim the proceeds of their labour or have them formally accounted for. The research findings also show that the implementation of the growth point policy brought in the transformation that women are aligned to. For instance, the migration of women from the villages to the growth point was viewed as women taking charge of their lives and livelihoods. There is a strong perception that women's socio-economic status improved and gave impetus for empowerment. The study also considered women's move to the growth point being underpinned on the ability to participate and have access to the resources availed through the growth point policy.

It was also shown that the growth point policy, though not directly vocal to women empowerment, has the potential to improve women's lives and livelihoods. The study findings show that some strategies supporting the growth point policy must to an extent downplayed patriarchy. This is evidenced by women being socially and economically independent amid a myriad of inequalities. Literature has not made this connection where

women have found socio-economic enhancement through the growth point policy. As such the empirical findings of this study suggest that the main driving force of the socio-economic activities that have given rise to women's status women at Tsholotsho Growth Point are what the researcher terms 'driving force towards change'.

The study showed that the applicability of the growth point policy to establish rural women's socio-economic empowerment outcomes lies in the results and factors that are believed to be provisions of the growth point itself referred to in Chapter 4. Documented evidence further shows that factors such as decentralisation of key services, entrepreneurial projects and increased participation by women is believed to be relevant to the growth point policy and women empowerment. Literature also indicate that economic opportunities have been increased for women owing to the presence of the growth point. The study findings show that there is a sprout of women led businesses, denoting improved participation.

Moreover, this study discovered that the relevance of the growth point to women's empowerment lies in the increased participation in all dimensions of the rural economy. This means that empowerment itself has been enabled by the opportunities available for women at the growth point. It has also been revealed that there are fewer opportunities for women in the periphery whose livelihood is mainly farm-based. This is an indication that the trickle-down effect has not been achieved.

Notwithstanding the strides made by the growth point policy towards economic development, at Tsholotsho Growth Point, there are threats to women's economic activities. From the findings, indicators are that the threats range from poor implementation of the policy, thin funding and the resultant stagnation of the policy itself. Notably, the constraints have also contributed to the challenges that women have in running their businesses. Literature indicates that the underperformance of the growth point policy has resulted in it resembling a service centre that is into

service provision. Yet empirical findings show that the policy had grown in terms of residential buildings and that have no significance to economic development, and this has negative impacts on women's economic activities. Interestingly, the policy has not been revised to be guided by gender policies such as Zimbabwe National Gender Policy neither are the strategies supporting the growth point policy been cognisant of the bottom-up approach. Literature has shown that lack of women participation (as prescribed in the WET and SLA) in development policies results in policies not being successful because they lack women's input. To this end, the constraints have resulted in the mounting challenges that women face on a socio-economic basis.

Improving rural women's empowerment is anchored on what the growth point can do to improve the livelihoods of women. Empirical evidence from the study findings already show that women are benefitting from the growth point policy. While literature has also shown that the growth point policy is important for rural development, the socio-economic benefits to the population is obscure. Thus, given such a picture, the research findings show what women desire comes from the efforts of the government, community and development partners. Most importantly findings show that gender sensitive programmes that are participative in nature are more desirable for sustainable livelihoods. Programmes that are imposed like the Tsotso stove were regarded as unsustainable since it was non participatory in nature. Literature shows that excluding women in programmes for development is a recipe for non-performance.

Both findings and literature also show that women's lack of capital assets (SLA) is a barrier for positive outcomes. As such developmental partners (NGOs) should be assertive of the challenges facing women and lobby for pro-women empowerment policies and institute programmes according to what women need.

The growth point policy formulation and implementation in the developing world and in Zimbabwe, in particular, was always perceived to be a general

socio-economic intervention by governments. It intended to kick start pods of economic activity and development in rural and far-flung areas to stop rural-to-urban migration. Not much research has been conducted about women's empowerment, thereby contributing a new perspective to the already existing body of knowledge.

Women's issues have been addressed by policies that are directly linked to them. This study has proven that even though the growth point policy was not promulgated for women but for the general rural populace, it is critical in addressing women's socio-economic empowerment issues and improving their participation in the rural economy. The model that this study developed can be used to guide socio-economic interventions to better explain the relevance of the growth point policy to rural women.

This study made the researcher reflect on the challenges that women are confronted with in rural areas. It also raised questions on the effectiveness of the development policies and strategies for rural development and women empowerment. Does this mean women in the rural economy are permanently confined to the quagmires of poverty? Their efforts, as shown in this study for empowerment are short-lived. Their reality is the everyday struggle for livelihoods. It could also be questioned if policymakers were aware that rural women's dependency on natural resources and petty trade do not amount to sustainability. The efforts by the government and its partners have largely resulted in minute and piecemeal development due to lack of gender mainstreaming and lack of recognition of the gender dynamics within the rural sector.

The key observations of the outcomes of the study were as follows:

- All participants concurred that the ushering in of the growth point policy had a positive impact on women. Women have managed to migrate to the growth point where they are engaged in various economic activities.
- Women are aware of the growth point policy and how it has been applied to rural development and therefore women empowerment

but only on a minuscule level.

- Some, but not all the women empowerment issues in Tsholotsho heeded to the growth point for instance the creation of women SMEs/entrepreneurs that is moving from natural resource base livelihoods to more lucrative business ownership.
- The poor implementation of the growth point policy is a standpoint and barrier to women's economic efforts.
- Lack of livelihoods diversification attributed to poor strategies, and therefore outcomes particularly for women in the villages.
- Poor service delivery is a cause-and-effect factor cascading to all areas that women depend on.
- The growth point has the potential for women's socio-economic empowerment only if the challenges confronting the growth point are addressed such as industrialisation, promoting the resources found in the district and most importantly recognising the gender dynamics in the rural economy.
- The growth point policy was not gender inclusive at implementation and more than four decades later, the policy has not been revised to integrate and be guided by gender policies that call for emancipation of women.
- The lack of the trickle-down effect is a barrier affecting women in the periphery.
- Generally, socio-economic growth is in its infancy.

The study proved that rural women were lagging in terms of socio-economic development. Having a major policy such as the growth point policy is a step in the right direction because of the proven potential it has in addressing women's issues. However, the policy was promulgated without the input of women hence it is not gender inclusive and did not incorporate the gender dynamics in the rural economy. The policy also failed to recognise the rights of women's access to key resources that they depend on. This would have resulted in a policy that is cognisant of the importance of women to participate in development policies. In light of this, women's groups should firstly lobby for the growth point policy

interventions that are gender sensitive. Secondly, to improve facilities that women make use of and benefit from. The study found out that the struggle for women to have sustainable businesses in this context was, among other things resulting from poor working spaces compounded by favouritism from the local council who prioritised *Injiva* more than the locals. Poor service delivery increases women's burdens, such as acquiring water and electricity. Apart from the work conditions, the groups should also advocate for women in the villages need to have more non-farm economic activities.

Research findings show that Non state actors are major partners of government. Key informants all alluded to the fact that every government department at the Growth Point has an NGO as a partner. It is the mandate of the Rural District Council to sign MoUs with every NGO wishing to carry out some work in the district. Their projects are guided by respective departments and their work is monitored for compliance and fair execution. The recognition of NGO work by government departments is commendable and with diminishing funding from the government's fiscus, it is mainly these NGOs that are at the forefront of development initiatives. However, most women acknowledged the role played by NGOs in the district for different projects making a difference in their lives but they also noted that most of the interventions were imposed on them. There was lack of consultation and participation, rendering most of the projects unsustainable. It is recommended that NGO projects be participatory in nature, and include women who are the receivers of development initiatives to be a part of the development process.

It is also recommended that NGOs and other partners of the government implement projects that are congruent with the needs of women. They should be guided by the SLA and WET in conceptualising the socio-economic strengths and weaknesses of rural women. This will allow them as receivers of development initiatives to take ownership and be part of the projects. As such, this will also encourage women to outline their desires. It is further recommended that non-state actors' work be inclusive to cater to women from the villages and the centre.

The study findings and literature revealed that the major limitations of the growth point policy was poor policy formulation and implementation. Policy formulation in terms of treating women's issues in tandem with gender policies is one aspect of the growth point policy that was formulated independent of gender policies. Literature recognises that the growth point policy in Zimbabwe was implemented in 1980 before the National Gender Policy or the Zimbabwe Gender Commission. However, four decades later, the policy has not been revised or amended to be aligned with these policies and other gender equality strategies. The study findings show that most small businesses are owned by women, but the stagnation of the growth point as well as other constraining factors have resulted in the businesses being not able to grow to the required levels.

It is therefore appropriate for this study to recommend that the growth point policy be revisited since the study proved that it has the potential and applies to rural women's empowerment. There is evidence that the implementation was not done the way it was meant to, hence the results have not been encouraging. Key issues such as infrastructural development must be re-engineered to attract investors. With the absence of industries, livelihoods will remain weak and vulnerable. It is therefore recommended that issues such as resource exploitation be encouraged at both private and public sector levels. The potential of the growth point policy to empower women has been proved to be at minute development. It is therefore recommended that policymakers be gender inclusive in order that the supporting interventions are gender specific.

Decentralisation has been noted by the research findings of this study and literature to be a critical factor of the growth point policy. Key government departments are a part of decentralisation that aims to bring essential services closer to the community. Proponents of the growth point policy acknowledge the importance of having key services such as government administration offices and manufacturing companies at the growth point. Research findings show that the presence of these facilities have helped women to access services and markets nearer to the communities thereby eliminating transport costs.

The study findings show that the Rural District Council is the custodian of the development process. It deals with NGOs and other partners in developing the growth point. The RDC dictates the pace of service provision, investments and other development processes. Even though findings from key informants show that there is no discrimination on issues like allocation of resources, women decried this. The study recommends that the department adopts gender main streaming mechanisms in their interventions considering that women and men's capabilities are different. It is also recommended that constraints by the growth point policy be addressed so that issues such as service provision can be met. Reliance on government funding should be supported by initiatives of government departments made to attract investors. Issues that are discouraging investors should be addressed particularly the road network. It is also recommended that there be an investor drive, whereby the responsible departments should find a way to lure investors. The issue of industrialisation should be revisited since it holds the key to the growth of the district. It is further recommended that women's issues be considered independently that is ensuring that all policies/projects for development are gendered and that inequalities in the rural areas are contextualised at planning level. Improvement of service delivery both at the central growth point and the villages is recommended. It has been shown that poor services are a barrier to women's livelihoods. It is also recommended that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) be signed for NGO work that takes into context the sustainability of project intervention and incorporates women. Councilors in the Ward should encourage PPDs so that the wishes and desires of women are registered.

The study established that this department is instrumental in attending to issues of women empowerment, gender equality through awareness campaigns, sensitising women to know their rights within their households and communities. It also partners with NGOs for skills development, Sexual Reproductive Health concerns and inheritance laws. However, lack of capacity is hampering the efforts of this department to efficiently carryout its duties. It is therefore recommended that there be

improvement in terms of capacitation of this department seeing that it directly deals with women's concerns. It is also recommended that the department, through its parent ministry lobby for policies and projects that are pro-women. This will ensure that the benefits are the same for men and women. Additionally, through gender sensitisation programmes women are in a better position to deal with oppressions such as patriarchal legacies that tend to marginalise women.

The findings of this study show that women in the villages are still much dependent on rain fed agriculture and that there is lack of diversification. Women in the villages noted that they cannot all be at the central growth point because they still need to be in attendance to their farming activities. So, farming forms a greater part of their livelihoods. ARDAS (former Agritex) is a department under the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. ARDAS deals mainly with farmers in terms of extension services, projects to promote farming livelihoods and imparting knowledge particularly on smart agriculture where people are encouraged to grow climate resistant grains. The department homogenises its interventions, there is lack of gender sensitivity and mainstreaming when it comes to the services offered. Projects have been applied homogenously and even though most farmers are women, their interventions are not gender specific. It is therefore recommended that the department be guided by gender norms within the rural economy. There is also the issue of lack of capacity that has resulted in extension services not reaching the villages or women in this context. It is recommended that government prioritises and increases funding to this department, to alleviate poverty and safeguard agricultural dependant livelihoods.

Chapter 10 of this study stated that the aim was to locate rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy, by establishing its applicability to women. This was also considering that the policy was not specifically formulated for women but with the knowledge that all economic development policies are important for women.

Literature is silent on the direct impact of the growth point policy to rural women but empirical evidence from lived experiences of women at Tsholotsho Growth Point show how the policy has been applied and benefited women. But the interventions by the growth point policy are not directed at women but the general rural population. This is affirmation to undertake future studies that focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the interventions in promoting the socio-economic empowerment of rural women.

Further research on why the growth point policy has not been reviewed over the last 4 decades yet it has not been replaced by another policy might serve as a stepping stone to assimilate why it has not been gender-inclusive beside the country having a National Gender Policy. This would show the importance of having rural development policies that are gender sensitive. The researcher is therefore of the view that there is a need to conduct a comprehensive research study that will include follow up studies in future on the relevance of having the growth point policy reviewed for the emancipation of rural women.

This study was carried out at Tsholotsho Growth Point, hence there is need to carry out a similar study in another growth point, and to research more on the relevance of the policy to women's socio-economic empowerment. Issues that have not been addressed in this study should be studied further so that there is a better understanding that can proffer better interventions.

Since this was a qualitative study, future studies can adopt other methods to cross check outcomes. Furthermore, this could help apply the results of the study to cover the whole country.

In this chapter, the model for the empowerment of women through the growth point policy was presented. The model shows how the growth point policy is applicable to rural women empowerment, and how the possible inclusion of appropriate gender sensitive frameworks can enable it to yield better outcomes. The study also

presented the empirical and theoretical contributions to the study. Lastly, the study came up with a range of recommendations for interested parties including women empowerment groups, government departments, non-state actors and for future research.