

RURAL *W*OMEN

**EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES
AND THE GROWTH POINT
POLICY THRUST OF**

**ZIMBABWE
SINCE 1980**



Susan Lusinga-Machikicho

Rural Women Empowerment Outcomes and the Growth Point Policy Thrust of Zimbabwe Since 1980

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DEDICATION

I warmly dedicate this book to my late father, **Timothy Ngunda Lusinga** who always believed in my dreams. May his dear soul rest in eternal peace.

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I am grateful to God for making my dream come true. My gratitude goes to Professor Tichaona Mapolisa and Dr. Ngonidzashe Mutanana for their assistance, advice, guidance and inspiration. You motivated me to persevere, you encouraged me not to give up. Thank you for believing in my abilities and for your contributions to the success of this project. God bless you! I also express my gratitude to my husband, Munetsi Primo Machikicho and our children; Gugulethu Wendy Mathe, Mark Munashe and Thabo Timothy Machikicho for their love and support throughout this journey. My sincere gratitude also goes to my mother Caginah Lusinga for the encouragement and to my sister Gillian Manhando, my nieces Ruvarashe and Tariro Manhando for believing in my abilities and my nephew Mthabisi Mhlophe for the generous support.

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Globally, issues of rural women empowerment and women's agency, have been directly and indirectly addressed through various development and gender policies that include the growth point strategy. However, most countries abandoned the growth point strategy to pursue other approaches that appeared to be better citing its ineffectiveness. In Africa, it was largely adopted by several countries in trying to redress the rural-urban divide created by the colonial government's residual legacy of unequal development along racial lines. Zimbabwe adopted and implemented the policy in 1980, however, the growth points face stagnation hence the impact has been adverse for women in the rural economy. This study critically explored rural women's socio-economic empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe, at Tsholotsho Growth Point. The study adopted the qualitative research paradigm and data were generated using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The target population comprised of women living in the central growth point and from the hinterlands (villages) while key informants represented government departments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) located in the district and an independent analyst of the growth point policy in Zimbabwe. A sample of 30 made up of 20 women and 10 key informants was purposively identified. Data were analysed thematically, and the study found out that women empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy had been witnessed and experienced since it was implemented. The study also found that the outcomes were based on the interventions by the growth point policy that included improved service delivery that benefits women. It further revealed that through the growth point, women have been empowered to participate more in matters that concern them through Public Private Dialogue (PPD) platforms. It was also noted that the constraints of the growth point had negative impacts thereby rendering women's livelihoods unsustainable. The study concluded that women empowerment outcomes through the growth point were weak due to gender inequalities, lack of participation and patriarchal tendencies. The study, therefore called for the re-engineering of the growth point policy

that differentiates between women and men. In the same vein, the study recommended the need for incorporating the issues that confront women in the rural economy. It is also recommended that future research be undertaken to investigate more on how best the growth point can promote women's empowerment guided by the Women Empowerment Theory (Sarah Longwe Framework), the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach and other Gender and Development frameworks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IV	Dedication
V	Acknowledgements
VI	Book Synopsis
IX	Acronyms and Abbreviations
1	<i>Chapter 1: Zimbabwe's Economic and Developmental Trajectory and the Women Empowerment Agenda Since 1980</i>
18	<i>Chapter 2: Study Theoretical Underpinnings</i>
86	<i>Chapter 3: Methodological Underpinnings of the Study</i>
109	<i>Chapter 4: The Case Development of Women Around Tsholotsho Growth Point</i>
169	<i>Chapter 5: A Synthesis</i>
188	<i>Chapter 6: A Growth Point Policy and Rural Women's Empowerment Model</i>
202	References

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
AIDS	Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome
NGO	Non- Governmental Organisations
PPD	Public-Private Dialogues
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ISALS	Internal Savings and Lending Association
VSLA	Village Savings and Lending Association
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
SMEs	Small Medium Enterprises
GMB	Grain Marketing Board
PAC	Problematic Animal Control
DDF	District Development Fund
RTGS	Real Time Gross Settlement
WET	Women Empowerment Theory
SLA	Sustainable Livelihoods Approach
WID	Women in Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ZNGP	Zimbabwe National Gender Policy

WOZA	Women of Zimbabwe Arise
GAD	Gender and Development
ZLWA	Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association
NDS1	National Development Strategy 1

Chapter 1: ZIMBABWE'S ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORY AND THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AGENDA SINCE 1980

In this chapter, the study presents the subject of women empowerment outcomes in the growth point thrust of Zimbabwe's economic and developmental trajectory since 1980. Most importantly, rural women empowerment outcomes within the context of the growth point policy are critically explored with a view to ascertaining research gaps established based on reviewed literature, therefore, grounding and justifying the intellectual cogency of this study. This chapter also presents the background to the study and discusses the statement of the problem, research questions, significance, delimitation and limitation thereof with a view to anchor the study.

Rural women empowerment and the growth point policy are issues that are well documented and gaining global traction owing to their critical importance to the rural development trajectory, particularly in the Global South. Globally, women are affected by the state of not being recognised in a substantial manner by developmental policies that are not gender inclusive and gender sensitive. In essence, women constitute 70% of the poor and are discriminated in most spheres of life (Mutanana & Bukaliya, 2015). Rural women have the potential of bringing about change if they are empowered. However, studies have shown that they have limited access than men to key economic capabilities, they also lack a voice to be able to participate in policies and projects for development due to patriarchy. As claimed by Zimbizi (2007), women empowerment in patriarchal societies has achieved less progress than expected because it is more defined in rural communities. Rural women are often overlooked because the majority of them are not included in the mainstream decision-making and hardly participate in governance structures and processes, yet successful development initiatives call for women participation (Mutanana & Bukaliya, 2015).

Duflo (2012) posits that there is a two-way relationship between women empowerment and socio-economic development. Development can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women while empowering women will benefit development. As indicated by Sen (2000), empowerment can accelerate development. This two-way relationship therefore spells out the need for policy makers to focus on creating an enabling environment for both men and women with strategies of improving the conditions of women. Such policy stimulation should progress to further development.

Empowerment has been described by Malhorta & Schuler (2005) as the ability for women to make choices, while Ranasinghe *et al.* (2020) define it as a multi-dimensional process of improving an individual's capacity and capability to make choices and to change those choices to wanted actions and outcomes. In this vein women empowerment is anchored on agency, resources and outcomes and these are crucial in the empowerment process (Alkire, 2008). In other words, agency gives one the ability to perform the action, while resources should be availed to perform a certain action and the outcomes is the result of agency and resources. So, for women empowerment to be achieved, there is need for resources and capacity for them to choose and pursue their goals.

Regardless, it has been noted that the causes and experiences of disempowerment are based on the premise that women lack access to inputs and infrastructure key for agricultural development (Mhembwe, 2019; Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020; Vengesai, 2019; Jaji & Kleibl, 2019). This is among other intersectional factors or variables heightening their vulnerability and exclusion in social and economic spheres in many polities especially within developing worlds' contexts. Additionally, Mutanana & Bukaliya (2015) observe that patriarchal systems within rural societies are anchored on the socio-economic empowerment of rural women. Kabeer (2015) also argues that gender inequalities are more experienced by women than men, women are normally excluded in most high decision-making processes. Therefore, in contemporary times, women

empowerment is a mainstream development concern because the development discourse has largely focused on what women can do for development rather than what development can do for women (Cornwall, 2016).

Stewart *et al.* (2005) mention two forms of inequalities; horizontal and vertical and are assumed to have the power to contributing to poverty. Vertical inequalities are generally confined to economic factors, such as consumption, income and assets. On the other hand, horizontal ones are between groups (social classes). It is further confirmed that women, particularly in the rural areas, are affected by vertical inequalities on the basis that they lack access to assets that are critical for them to earn an income. Men's access to assets is more pronounced hence persistent inequalities and poverty confront women by virtue of gender. Moreover, horizontal inequalities are more focused on gender (Canelas & Gisselquist, 2018). Mancini *et al.* (2005) assume that it is critical to address and reduce vertical inequalities, since they work well in addressing the horizontal. Goswami (2013) further contends that these inequalities explain why women poverty and discrimination persist.

Mandal (2013) therefore posits that women are victims of social, political, environmental and economic deprivation hence empowerment can only occur when their freedoms are increased based on control over resources and decisions. To this end, women's choices, particularly in the third world remain obscure and tilted towards men's causes. However, efforts have been undertaken by countries across the globe to address such anomalies. A myriad of gender frameworks have been adopted and implemented as policies by governments globally. Platforms and approaches such as the Beijing Platform, Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs/Agenda 2030), Agenda 2063, Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) have been borne out of the need to address such disparities. These encompass global, regional and local platforms that nations including

Zimbabwe have found necessary to ratify and adopt. The aim of the platforms and conferences are in recognition of world-wide gender inequalities. The assumption was that women and men would benefit equally from development initiatives, particularly in the third world (Odera & Mulusa, 2020). However, in contemporary times, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs or Agenda 2030) replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000 to focus more on issues confronting women at global level hence they are considered a bottom-up approach with emphasis on the third world (Solomon *et al.*, 2021). The SDG number 5 is specifically on achieving gender equality by 2030. Instead of the top-down approach imposed by the MDGs, SDG5 aims at engaging more women's voices in addressing gender issues. It has been regarded as a rights-based approach (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Such an approach will enable deeper understanding of gendered inequalities embedded in many development policies such as the growth point policy. The growth point strategy/policy as conceptualised by Francoise Perroux is not a gender-neutral economic development strategy since it's not specific or have any regard for gender or any other social category. The strategy/policy's focus on economic growth overlook gender specific needs and concerns such as access to healthcare, education and other social factors. As such, the growth point policy was initiated when the SGDs were not yet in place, however, there is still no indication that the policy has been revised to integrate SDG 5.

Additionally, at regional level, the African Union is promoting Agenda 2063 for the same purposes. It serves as a stepping stone to regional development. Sparks (2016) posits that Agenda 2063 reinforces issues in the African context by calling for a more united and stronger Africa in promoting sustainable development, cultural, human rights and other African priorities. Through aspiration 6, the promotion of women's rights is at the epicentre of Agenda 2063. It sets to achieve empowerment of women in the next 50 years. In this regard, Lefton (2013) applauds the efforts of nations in ensuring gender equality and equity. Regardless of protocol, disparities continue to increase with high poverty levels among

women. Harmful practices render women, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa helpless due to patriarchy and other harmful traditional practices (Wadesango *et al.*, 2011).

At the local level, the Zimbabwe National Gender Policy is anchored on the dictates of the global and regional frameworks. The country has shown its dedication of promoting gender equity by ratifying to these protocols. Furthermore, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act No. 20 of 2013 is widely recognised for its firm commitment to gender equality. The constitution provides for equality and non-discrimination for women in all areas. Direct and indirect discrimination is prohibited, providing women an equal participation in all spheres of life (Chinomona, 2013). These policies and legislature frameworks provide a firm basis to pursue gender equality and equity defined in the National Gender Policy (NGP). To this end, there have been efforts by law and policy makers to align old policies and laws to the constitution to ensure that they are gender sensitive, however, the growth point policy of the 1980s has not been revisited to integrate gender and women empowerment issues. Furthermore, the government of Zimbabwe came up with the National Development Strategy (NDS1) in 2020 in accordance with Vision 2030. Sections 741 of the NDS1 gives rise to gender mainstreaming through visible initiatives that confer equal opportunities to women under the theme ‘leaving no one and no place behind’. The NDS1 is guided by the Constitution, SADC Protocol on gender and development, SDG5 and the African Charter on Human and People’s rights and the rights of women in Africa. The NDS1 acknowledges that women still face challenges in accessing factors of production such as finance, land and property rights and limited opportunities to influence policy due to patriarchal barriers (Choruma, 2021). Interestingly, even the NDS1 is silent on policies such as the growth point policy besides having mentioning decentralisation and devolution.

That being the case, researchers such as Chingarande *et al.* (2020) and Mutopo (2014) all agree that amid the policies and frameworks, gender discrepancies continue to have negative bearing on the participation of

women as well as their access to sustainable livelihoods activities and dynamics. Moreover, Zvokuomba *et al.* (2021) also posit that lack of women empowerment is a reality in Zimbabwe while Musasa *et al.* (2022) argue that women in Zimbabwe, particularly in rural areas are excluded from mainstream development activities besides being at the forefront of development.

It therefore applies that rural development policies and interventions such as the growth point policy have not been inclusive citing the gender disparities between men and women. Furthermore, the political economy of Zimbabwe has been volatile in promoting rural women empowerment (Mhembwe, 2022). Factors such as the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), the adoption of the multi-currency banking/dollarisation, migration, hyper-inflation and the 1991/92 droughts are some of the issues impacting negatively on the empowerment of women since 1980 thereby resulting in weak livelihoods as well as negatively impacting on the efforts of the growth point policy.

The growth point/pole/centre strategy is the brainchild of French Economist, Francoise Perroux, defined as centres of economic activities created in disadvantaged regions with the intention that, eventually, these economic centres or locations, would become centres of economic growth (Nyandoro & Muzorewa, 2017; Christofakis & Papadaskalopoulos, 2011; Ke & Feser, 2008; Nhede, 2013; Manyanhai *et al.*, 2009). As a strategy to uplift underdeveloped regions, the growth point strategy was first popularised in selected countries in Asia, Latin America and Europe in the 1960s (Conyers, 2001). Europe and Latin America adopted the growth point strategy mainly to address economic growth in depressed regions. It was a success in Venezuela and some parts of Italy but was later abandoned as the anticipated results were not fully achieved (Bradford & Kent, 1987; Conyers, 2001). The USA adopted the policy in the late 1950s but later abandoned it in favour of other policies due to thin investment spread over too many growth points. (Manyanhai *et al.*, 2009). In Chile, Bolivia and Columbia, the strategy was taken up with much enthusiasm, but failed

due to what was regarded as poor economic planning (Conyers, 2001). Moreover, studies conducted in most of Latin America reveal that women's socio-economic empowerment in the depressed regions was not achieved with the implementation of growth poles. Instead, women have, over the years been calling for recognition, particularly in the agricultural sector where they play a major role in the reduction of hunger and poverty (FAO, 2018). In this vein, the success of the growth point strategy is fitting for women's empowerment as it is aimed at addressing regional inequalities (rural/depressed regions) that would resultantly improve the socio-economic development of women. However, earlier studies have not focused on the socio-economic impact of women through the growth point policy nor has the classification of women as a special group been linked to the benefits arising from the policy.

Wekwete (1998) believes that sub-Saharan African countries failed to learn from the experiences of the Western countries as they carried out a wholesale adoption of the strategy without any modifications. Naturally, countries coming out of colonialism viewed the growth point policy as critical in addressing the regional disparities that were enacted by colonial governments. Contextually, the socio-economic status of women and (men) had changed during the colonial era, as they lost autonomy to several rights, particularly land rights (Gaidzanwa, 2011, Thobejane & Nyathi, 2018). To redress this anomaly, countries like Tanzania adopted the growth point strategy and later abandoned it for the Ujamaa concept (Hwang, 1975). Nigeria, Cameroon and South Africa had similar experiences, as they cited a lack of diversification and proper coordination of economic activities. The strategy, therefore, was not successful in improving the lives and livelihoods of the populations of the implementing regions, including women. To this end, Fonjong (2004)'s views on women empowerment in Cameroon, Nigeria and South Africa revealed that the lack of women empowerment is currently an issue of concern and has produced mixed results in Cameroon while economic activities that women in rural Nigeria rely on, do not have positive outcomes, such as stable incomes for poverty alleviation (Aluko & Mbada, 2020). However, as noted by Musampa (2006), South Africa recorded some success in regions that were identified for economic growth through the growth point strategy. The results were recorded in infrastructural development and

employment creation but is not clear to what extent women benefitted. Even so, a study by Kongolo & Bamgose (2002) revealed that most women in rural South Africa are still marginalised and isolated.

In Zimbabwe, the growth point strategy was adopted at independence in 1980 under the Growth with Equity policy and the Agricultural Rural Development Act of 1981. Nhede (2013) avers that the aims and objectives of the policy were to; promote industrial growth that would, in turn, create employment opportunities and thereby minimise rural-urban migration. Additionally, the decentralisation of administration functions and reversing inequalities enacted by the colonial government were some of the aims of the growth point policy. However, Zimbabwe's growth point policy resulted in the development of 55 growth point and was well received by the once-marginalised rural communities of Zimbabwe (Nhede, 2013). Tsholotsho Growth Point is one of the main growth points in Matabeleland North province that was instituted to stimulate economic development. However, despite the growth of this centre into a semi-urban area, it is noted that economic development has been very slow-paced for all (Mushuku & Takuva, 2013). Poverty remains very high in the area, especially among women as observed by (Viceisza, 2020). Additionally, while the formation of the Tsholotsho growth point brought about service improvements such as electricity, water and better connectivity to urban centres, the conditions of women remain mostly unchanged as most have failed to lift themselves out of poverty (Sibanda & Khumalo, 2019).

This also raises the question of decentralisation (devolution) as a supporting policy for growth points. These are current and being spearheaded by the government through the 2013 Constitution and the 2020 NDS1's Vision 2030 which envisions the attainment of an empowered and prosperous upper middle-class economy by 2030. The policy instruments propel government to transfer and devolve power from the central government to lower levels of administration and governance (Choruma, 2021). Thus, decentralisation and devolution are still regarded as critical strategies for inclusive participation of communities in Zimbabwe (Moyo & Ncube, 2014). The implementation of the NDS1, according to Choruma (2021), based on the theme; 'leaving no one and no place behind' is the force driving the policy guided by SDGs and the Constitution. Musekiwa (2020) argues that, even though decentralisation

has evolved since 1980, transfer of power is limited. The government and its partners have continuously failed to consult the communities, therefore making it difficult to empower the local people to oversee their own development. Scholars such as Musekiwa (2020) and Moyo & Ncube (2014), have noted that decentralisation in most African countries including Zimbabwe have largely been about political (devolution) more than socio-economic. This could explain why both instruments (NDS1 and the Constitution) have not integrated the growth point policy to support the decentralisation strategy.

From the foregoing, Rodriguez-Pose (2011) argues that despite the introduction of growth points in low-income countries, the conditions and quality of life of the population have largely not improved as expected. The rural space is still regarded as an area of stagnation and backwardness with the poorest of the poor (ILO, 2019). It was against this background that this study sought to understand the applicability of rural women's empowerment through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe.

Even though Zimbabwe has taken strides to promote gender equality and women empowerment, rural women still find themselves far behind, and at the periphery of such equality and empowerment. A myriad of policies, covering both gender and rural development as well as projects formulated for development, seem to have failed to be catalysts for inclusive and participatory rural women empowerment. Rural womenfolk have therefore remained at the margins of socio-economic development and governance and have been unable to meaningfully participate in the economy due to patriarchal ideologies compounded by lack of gender mainstreaming in development policies (Bissewar, 2005).

The growth point policy is a rural development intervention formulated to address rural underdevelopment. It was envisaged to improve the lives and livelihoods of the rural population, including women. As such, the tenets enshrined in the growth point policy are important in addressing the key issues confronting rural women. However, contrary to a one size fits all approach (Wekwete, 1998), the policy failed to integrate the

gendered specific needs of women at both design and implementation. Although the growth point policy was not specifically formulated for women, of interest to this study is that the policy is regarded as critical for rural women empowerment outcomes based on the physical and socio-economic outcomes it was meant to produce. It is clear that the larger part of development policies, (including the growth point policy), have failed to be gender inclusive and have therefore lacked on equitable participation of women (Mhembwe, 2019). In an effort to rectify this worrisome trend, Zimbabwe has ratified quite several conventions and platforms at global and regional levels. These conventions seek to highlight women's poverty and to outline and direct the corrective measures required. The National Gender Policy of Zimbabwe guides the efforts of the government and its partners in addressing inequalities that have resulted in women being left out in the development process. To this end, despite women being the majority in the rural sector and agriculture (Mutanana & Bukaliya, 2015), they remain obscure to the development processes hence the promotion of rural women empowerment outcomes cannot be successful without involving women and women's issues in key policies for development such as the growth point policy.

The main research question premising this study is: How applicable is the growth point policy in promoting rural women empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point?

The following specific questions guided the study:

- How has the socio-economic status of rural women changed since the introduction of the growth point policy?
- To what extent has the growth point policy influenced rural women empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point?
- To what extent are factors constraining the growth point policy impacting on rural women empowerment outcomes?
- How can rural women empowerment outcomes be improved in the context of the growth point policy?

This study was informed by several assumptions during its course. Assumptions are beliefs, circumstances and ideas that are true on the part of the researcher (Simon, 2011). Firstly, the researcher assumed that the methodology selected for this study was suitable and would be able to produce the information and findings that the researcher solicited in trying to explore the rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. It also captured the feelings, opinions and views of the participants using the qualitative/exploratory method underpinned by the interpretivist research paradigm.

The researcher also assumed that the population participating in the study possessed the experience and knowledge on the link of the growth point policy and rural women's empowerment outcomes. Thirdly, it was also assumed that women's poverty is perpetuated by inequalities underpinned by patriarchy, non-participation in rural policy formulation and implementation and that the exacerbation of poverty experienced by women could be alleviated if the growth point policy was effective and successful. It was further assumed that women were marginalised and poorly placed than men in the rural sector due to factors such as lack of access to key capital assets. Additionally, that the success of the growth point policy can be applied for rural women empowerment and has the potential to improve rural livelihoods that women depend on. The study also assumed that the Sustainable Livelihood Approach and the Women Empowerment Theory were complimentary frameworks to support rural women empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy of Zimbabwe.

The nexus between women empowerment, women's substantive and equal participation in socio-economic activities, processes and governance and the growth point policy is a dimension that has received less scholarly attention. Studies carried out by scholars such as Mungwini (2011), Kabeer (2015), and Mandinyenya (2014) have focused on women empowerment independent of the growth point policy while those carried out by Mupuva (2015), Manyanhaire *et al.*, (2009) and Chirisa & Dumba (2013) among

others have focused on the growth point policy's economic contribution to the general rural population without regard for rural women who constitute the majority in the rural sector. The connection of rural women's empowerment through the growth point policy has therefore not been made yet.

This study is so pertinent and will therefore contribute to a broader body of empirical knowledge in the field of development studies through unveiling the gendered empowerment issues in relation to the growth point policy. Mainstreaming gender issues in the growth point policy could make it effective for rural women's empowerment and ensure that women and men equally benefit from the rural development policy interventions. Poverty cannot be alleviated without the participation of women given their large representation among the poor (Mayoux, 2014).

Gendering development policies could make for a growth point policy that is effective for rural women's empowerment outcomes. The promotion of gender equality at policy formulation noting the roles women play in the rural sector as well as the livelihoods they rely on. From a gendered perspective, this would ensure that men and women equally benefit from the rural development interventions as postulated by Ester Boserup. The problem confronting this study is that there is lack of recognition of rural women empowerment issues by development policies such as the growth point policy. At the very least, there is a lack of pronouncement of the need to recognise that rural womenfolk are in dire need of upliftment and empowerment, within the growth point policy context and the various others pertinent to rural development.

In essence, understanding the importance of the socio-economic empowerment of rural women was crucial to have local studies establish the applicability of the growth point policy in locating rural women empowerment outcomes. The need to comprehend women's views and perceptions from a local point of view was significant for both growth points and women empowerment studies. This study, therefore, aimed to

contribute to the knowledge gap in this regard. An investigation was carried out to explore rural women empowerment outcomes in the growth point policy thrust of Zimbabwe. The study was carried out at Tsholotsho Growth Point, in Tsholotsho District, Matabeleland North Province. There are more than 55 growth points in Zimbabwe, data was generated from one growth point (Tsholotsho) that has, over the years experienced stunted growth. It focused on key informants from various government and non-government departments, community leaders and women participants who had extensive personal lived experience and knowledge on growth points, rural development, and women empowerment issues.



Figure 1.1 - Site of the Study (CSO, 2012)

Tsholotsho Growth Point is found in Tsholotsho District in Matabeleland North Province and was of interest to the researcher because it is in one of the poorest provinces in Zimbabwe (Matunhu *et al.*, 2017). It is characterised by low levels of natural capital and is agro-ecologically (region 4) not suited to cropping since it is prone to droughts and flooding. The district receives an annual average rainfall of 560mm (Ncube

et al., 2007). Additionally, the poor rainfall pattern in most parts of the district has affected agricultural production which is the main livelihood for women. The district has few water sources like dams and perennial rivers. Its reliance on rain-fed agriculture is a major natural weakness and drawback that compromises food security. Additionally, diaspora remittances have proven to be the primary means of livelihood. Nzima et al. (2016) posit that remittances generally form a major part of the household income in the district.

On the other hand, infrastructural development lags hence the number of educational and health facilities are few, and under-equipped. The road network is very poor and has caused transporters and potential investors to shun the district over the years. Kodero (2005) describes tourism as one of the economic activities in addition to mining of mineral deposits like limestone that have been found in the area. However, resource exploitation is low owing to lack of investment and because of these limitations, poverty levels are high; there is over-reliance on donor hand-outs that in some cases have been politicised leading to early withdrawal and therefore vulnerability of those who depend on them.

The population of Matabeleland North province shows more females than males with 360 776 males and 388 241 females, adding up to a total of 749 017 people. It is noted that 12% of women have never been to school (CSO, 2012). The language spoken is mostly IsiNdebele. The presence of a growth point in the district has not eased the socio-economic burdens that the communities are faced with. The growth point under study (Tsholotsho) was introduced decades ago but has largely remained a service centre and is characterised by low investment and not much economic development (Nhede, 2013).

Ross & Zaidi (2019) describe limitations of the study as those characteristics of design or methodology that influence the interpretation of the findings from a research study. These are conditions that cannot be controlled by the researcher. They place restrictions on the methodology

and the conclusions of a research study. In this study, the limitations envisaged by the researcher were mainly methodological. The qualitative research approach on which this study was underpinned relied a lot on the messages, views, opinions and experiences of people (Bryman, 2011). To overcome this limitation, the researcher made use of triangulation to confirm data generated from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Using these methods improved the trustworthiness of the study as a comparison of the findings was made. Another potential limitation was bias that according to Polit & Beck (2004), is any influence that provides a distortion in the results of a study. Since qualitative research relies more on the experience and judgement of the researcher, the data generated might be subjective to the investigation or situation. To manage bias in this instance, the researcher made use of peer review. Galdas (2017) describes peer review as a process where the reviewer might see things that the author might have missed. Peer review was therefore considered necessary to ensure the trustworthiness and originality of the study. It involved scrutiny by colleagues with the same competencies as the researcher. The reviewing included identifying gaps and arguments that needed to be addressed. In addition, they also provided affirmation that the conclusions drawn were sound and reasonable, given the nature of the data. Moreover, carrying out the study in one growth point with a sample size of 30, which is regarded small, was the other limitation. However, this study did not seek to generalise the research findings to the wider population, but to understand in-depth rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy (Hennik & Hutter, 2011).

Empowerment means having agency over one's life and equal opportunities to participate in society. Women empowerment is, therefore, the process by which women gain influence and equal opportunities to pursue personal, social and economic endeavours by engaging in all parts of society on the same basis as men (Kabeer, 2005).

Mushuku & Takuva (2013) describe growth points/poles as centres that have economic potential created to catalyse development in underdeveloped regions. It is characterised by growth that starts from the pole/centre and trickles down to the periphery fostering the decentralisation of economic activities and services (Manyanhaire *et al.*, 2011). Serrat (2017) postulates that rural development is a strategy that aims to improve the socio- economic living conditions of poor people in rural areas. It assists the poorest group living in rural areas to benefit from development.

Morse & McNamara (2016) define sustainable livelihoods as the nature of one possessing assets and capabilities enabling participation in economic activities on a continuous basis without harming the environment.

Review of literature was mainly conducted and written from a level of abstraction tracing the rural women empowerment outcomes within the context of the growth point policy. It further on engages scholarly work demonstrating the views of how development interventions have been applied for women empowerment. The chapter also dwells on the concept, theories as well as the empirical evidence showing the applicability of the growth point policy to rural women empowerment outcomes. Furthermore, the chapter identifies gaps within literature and the justification of carrying out this study. In chapter 2 the researcher gives an overview of the theoretical, conceptual frameworks and the empirical evidence to further explain women's economic empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy.

In Chapter 3 –Research Methodology focus was placed on the methodology adopted for this study. This is where the process starts with identification of the research philosophy up to the ethics adopted in this study. Even though the chapter dwells much on the methodology, the whole research process is explained in detail showing and justifying the instrument used in sync with the research questions.

Chapter 4 focuses on data presentation and findings, based on the views

and opinions of the study participants. It also discusses empirical findings from data generated at Tsholotsho Growth Point. The findings are based on the views, opinions and experiences of the participants' views, about rural women empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy.

Chapter 5 discusses the study findings on women's empowerment through the growth point policy. The chapter focuses on the development of the findings in relation to literature identified during the analysis process.

Chapter 6 concludes the study; it discusses the attainment of aims and objectives set out in the study, concerning key findings and compiles the conclusions derived therefrom. It also discusses the model that this study came up with. Recommendations for the growth point policy and women empowerment concerning theories and policy for further research are also discussed. This chapter provides an overview of the study in terms of the background to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, definition of key terms and the structure of the thesis.

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 theories 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 the 1950s, 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 idea over 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's analysis, it is noticeable that development does not occur everywhere at once but appears in spurts or development 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 pattern is shown in the illustration below.

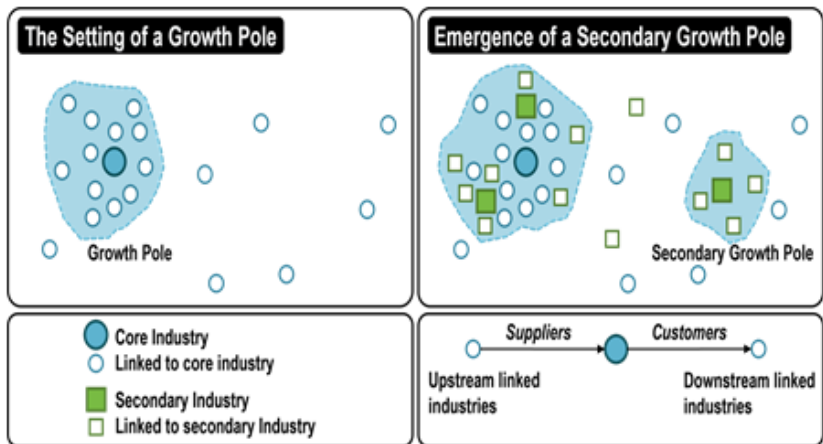


Figure 2.1- Regional Economic Growth (geographyclass.com)

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 will be 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, Manyanhai *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 homogeneously 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 underdevelopment 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 underdeveloped/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); Manyanhai 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. Manyanhai 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 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 initiatives 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 how the 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.

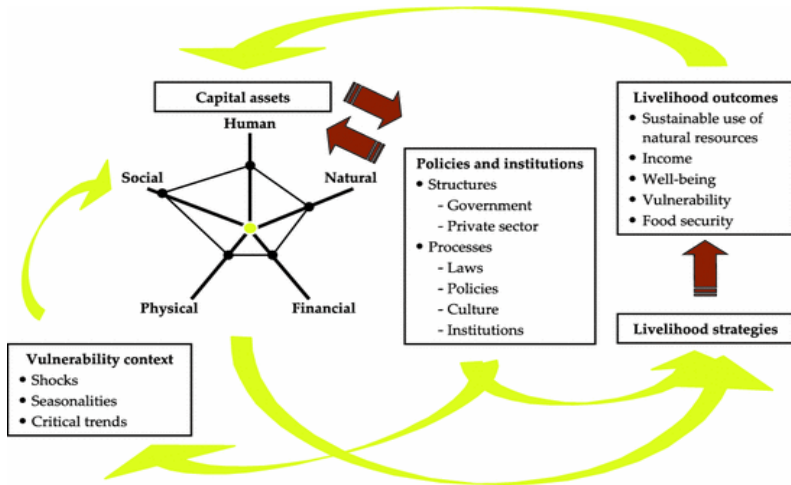


Figure 2.3 The SLA Framework (Scoones, 1998)

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 key 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 performance and has the potential to increase agricultural production by becoming more efficient. Even Agenda 2030 has 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-Yeboah, 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 (Weinberger & 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 natural 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's participation, 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. Koderö (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.

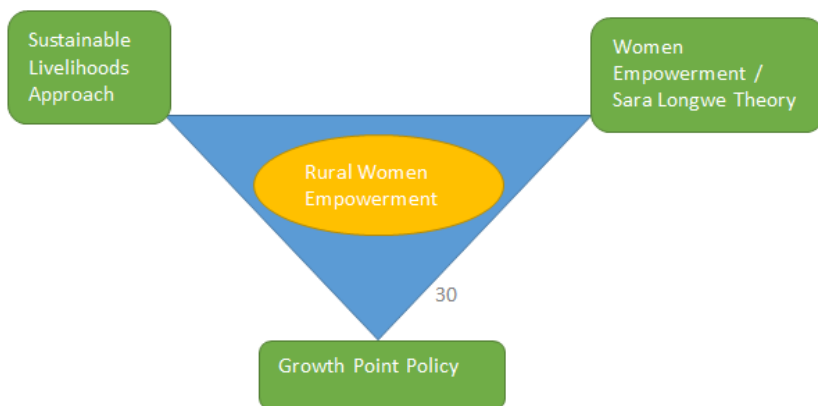


Figure 4 – Approaches for Rural Women Empowerment Outcomes (Researcher)

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 and development 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 (Manyanhai 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 Manyanhai 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. Mandinyanya (2014) also argued that most projects by NGOs are applied homogeneously, 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 Boserup 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 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. Manyanhai *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 farmers face in accessing 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). Overall, 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 that improving 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.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion on the methodology adopted for this study. More specifically, it outlines, explains as well as justifies the research philosophy, approach, design applied in this study. Additionally, the sampling techniques, data generation procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study and the ethical and legal considerations form the discussion of this chapter.

Fleetwood (2005) describes the way the world is perceived to be (ontology), it influences what one thinks can be known about an issue (epistemology). How one thinks can be investigated using a methodology, research techniques and the kind of theories that one thinks can be constructed. The ontological and epistemological foundations underpinning this study were based on what the social world entails and how it could be studied (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013). The use of a particular ontological position will lead to a particular epistemological position. In this context, ontology is about the nature of reality as well as what constitutes reality and what there is to know about reality (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). It questions whether there is a social reality that exists independently from human views and interpretations, the reality can therefore be reduced to subjective understanding. Onwuegbuzie & Frels (2013) contend that if the social world constitutes things that exist independently of human conceptions and constructions then a positivist approach is adopted. However, this study was focused on the epistemological and ontological foundations of the interpretivism philosophy to try and understand the ontological/reality of rural women's economic empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe.

The reason for selecting the interpretivist research paradigm was based on its philosophy rooted in the fact that seeking to understand knowledge related to human and social sciences cannot be the same as its usage in

physical sciences because humans interpret their world and then act based on the interpretation (Hammersley, 2013). Adopting the interpretive approach was not merely to interpret what the research participants told the researcher or what she observed and had reviewed in literature, but rather the researcher made her own analysis based on the findings of the study, describing the situations as she had witnessed as well as what had been told by the participants, interpreting the data in line with the concept (growth point) and theories (SLA and WET) on rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. Data were therefore broadly and extensively interpreted on what the participants opined on what constitutes rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. This is why interpretivism adapts a relativist ontology in which a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations rather than a truth that can be determined by a process of measurement. Relativist ontology is the belief that reality is a finite subjective experience (Denzin *et al.*, 2005). The truth depends on the individuals and groups' holding it. In this context, it was the women under investigation who held the knowledge on what qualifies as rural women's economic empowerment through the growth point policy which is perceived as their truth. Based on their experiences, views and opinions, knowledge was sought from them since they are the people in the growth point. There are many truths embedded in such a study and not one as in the positivist who believe that there is only one reality and is objective while the interpretivist believes that there are multiple realities that are subjective and are socially constructed. It tends to focus on how people have different opinions about an issue. In this context, the researcher considered the various and differing views and opinions that were expressed by the participants based on their personal experiences to come up with what constituted as the truth. This is what Hancock *et al.* (2009) call understanding the way the social world is and the way things happen the way they do. It was therefore important for me as the researcher to understand the way the participants understood their own situation and coming up with their own understanding of the phenomenon that the researcher was able to interpret from.

Creswell *et al.* (2007) contend that, with interpretation, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context instead of trying to generalise the base of understanding for the whole population because the results are within a context. To this end, the researcher's approach to this study from an interpretivist standpoint, was based on its values that include epistemology and ontology. It involved the researcher interpreting elements of the study by bringing the human interest into it (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The study aimed to establish, through women's lived experiences, views and opinions how the growth point policy has been applied for rural women's empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point. Consequently, the interpretivist's view that knowledge and science of investigation cannot be separated from people's views and opinions, aligned well with this study as already explained.

The research approach adopted for this study was selected to acquire in-depth information and reach a conclusion on how the growth point policy has been applied for rural women's empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point, Matabeleland North Province. Naturally, the qualitative method underpinned on the interpretivist paradigm was adopted for this study. As described by Creswell & Garrett (2008), qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad questions, generates data consisting of words/texts from participants, describes and analyses these words for themes while conducting the investigation in a subjective manner. A qualitative method was suited to this research as it aimed at understanding the lived experiences of women within the growth point policy of Tsholotsho. This allowed the researcher to identify patterns and behaviours that may have been difficult to identify in a descriptive method. So the investigation was carried out in its natural setting where the researcher did not manipulate the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Additionally, the qualitative research method develops theories, uses small sample sizes and does not generalise results to the wider population, instead, generalises from one setting to another

(Leeming, 2018). The method therefore enabled the researcher to enter the settings of Tsholotsho Growth Point and conduct FGDs with women as well as carry out interviews with key informants to understand issues related to the situation under investigation.

In addition, the qualitative method provided me as the researcher with the opportunity to develop insights into the feelings of women on the applicability of the growth point policy in relation to the socio-economic outcomes. The main aim was to get an in-depth understanding and insights into the views of the women under study, based on their experiences. The qualitative method, therefore, made provisions for such an interrogation as it allowed the researcher to observe and listen one to one to various discussions and conversations on the subject. Since the qualitative method required the researcher to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon (rural women empowerment through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe) the questions that kept arising and needed careful scrutiny were:

- How has the socio-economic status of women changed since the ushering in of the growth point policy?
- To what extent has the Growth Point Policy influenced rural women empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point?
- How are the constraints of the growth point policy impacting on rural women economic outcomes?
- How can rural women's economic outcomes be improved through the growth point policy?

These questions needed the views and opinions of women themselves and other stakeholders to answer, hence the qualitative method allowed for such questions to be explored and the opinions coming out of these questions noted down. It was therefore important for the researcher to ensure that every detail was captured and noted by taking down, noting/recording all that the participants said to ensure the trustworthiness of the study which, according to Connelly (2016), is crucial to the usefulness and integrity of the findings of a study. It refers to the

degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of a study demonstrates that a true picture of the phenomenon is being presented. To achieve this, the study made use of triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing.

Moreover, the use of audio recordings and field notes captured each verbal sound and the feelings being inter-twined particularly during focus group discussions. Body language, according to White & Gardener (2013) is the use of non-verbal signals that one uses to communicate one's feelings and intentions. These include posture, facial expression, it helped to pick up on unspoken issues and negative feelings that the participants were trying to suppress but that naturally enriched the study. It was therefore very important for me as the researcher to pay great attention to detail so as not to miss out on these important moments. So, in combination, verbal and non-verbal communication helped me to understand the true feelings of the participants throughout the research period. Thus, the interpretivist design/qualitative approach, helped to uncover much more information over and above of what the researcher had envisaged getting. This information was then analysed thematically. In this study, it is assumed that the growth point policy is applicable to women's empowerment and that the ineffectiveness of the growth point policy has contributed to rural poverty (unsustainable livelihoods) which was affecting women more than men because of gender dynamics within the rural sector. This assumption was used throughout as data was generated and analysed. General conclusions were drawn from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

However, there are several weaknesses and limitations of using this method. Because interaction is at the heart of the qualitative data generation effort, there is much reliance on the participants to agree to give their time and interaction. In this case several communications were made prior to the actual interviews. Additionally, the process is time consuming because of face-to-face interactions. This is alluded to by Driessnack (2005) that with qualitative method, more time is consumed

and needed to generate data as compared to quantitative method. Another drawback of this method is the issue of bias. The research may be influenced by the researcher's personal bias and idiosyncrasies. However, in this study, the use of multiple data collection methods (in-depth interviews and FGDs) were used to manage bias.

For this study, the researcher selected the exploratory research design. According to Creswell *et al.* (2007) a research design is the plan for executing a research study. An exploratory research design is used when there is not enough known about a phenomenon (Saunders, 2007). It does not aim to provide a conclusive answer but mainly explores the phenomenon to gain a better understanding. In this study the exploratory research design was selected because the subject of rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy has not been carried out before. It allowed me as the researcher to explore the phenomenon and interpret the emerging issues as they unfolded. The study did not aim to provide the final and conclusive answers to the research questions but merely explored the research topic with varying levels of depth answering the how and why questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

Moreover, the issues were not simply described and narrated as given by the participants but were also based on what had been reviewed in journals and books. The aim was to gain richness, depth and the uniqueness of the reality of the experience (Munhall, 2001). Since it was conducted to discover new ideas, new insights and increase knowledge on women empowerment through the growth point policy, the study therefore explored the experiences of women at Tsholotsho Growth Point, taking into context, what they experienced and observed since the implementation of the growth point policy. This was more to do with the outcomes anchored on the growth point policy that were applicable to women. Additionally, this was important noting that the subject of women empowerment through the growth point policy was a new phenomenon that had not been done before.

The benefits of using the exploratory research design were that; there was the provision of insight into real-life situations of the study participants. There is also a belief that people are experts of their own experiences, hence in this study women were held to have the experience and knowledge regarding rural women's empowerment through the growth point policy. This was relevant to women's responses in comparison to what the researcher had observed. However, the major drawback of this design was that the findings of the research were not conclusive as only a better understanding of the phenomenon was reached. Moreover, it is more based on relevance rather than rigour, something that the positivists regard as a weakness of the method as rigour adds to the trustworthiness of a study (Cardano, 2020).

In social sciences, research cannot include all community members when undertaking an investigation. It was therefore important for this study to draw a sample from the population of Tsholotsho Growth Point. Neuman (2014) posits that a study population is a subset of the target population. Khotari (2004) also describes the population of interest as the study's target population that it intends to investigate. It is made up of groups or individuals with one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher. In this study, the target population included key informants comprising the local community leaders, government officials from various Government Ministries at the Growth Point, Community Leadership, local NGOs, Growth Point Policy specialist and participants made up of women in and around Tsholotsho Growth Point.

As argued by Ritchie *et al.* (2013), after establishing the population for the study, the researcher goes on to identify an appropriate sample frame from which the sample can be selected. This study adopted purposive sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling technique. It focuses on when the sample is selected based on non-random criteria and without every member of the population having a chance of being included. Patton (2002) describes it as a technique widely used in qualitative research for

the identification and selection of key informants and participants for the most effective use of limited resources. It involves identifying and selecting individuals that are known to the researcher and are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2011). In this study, the importance of availability, willingness to participate and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive and reflective manner was considered. The advantage of purposive sampling is that it is cost and time-effective while the drawback is that it is highly prone to bias. The researcher targeted only those people who she thought would be in a position to supply reliable information on the growth point policy and women empowerment. Owing to the qualitative nature of the study, a small sample size was adopted. According to Ritchie *et al.* (2003), samples for qualitative studies are generally smaller because they attract a lot of data and more data does not mean more information. Moreover, qualitative research is more concerned with meaning than making generalised assumptions. Crouch & Mackenzie (2006) also argue that qualitative research is very labour intensive and analysing can be time consuming hence the concept of saturation is used when additional data does not give new information.

In this study, the sample comprised of a total of 30 participants made up of 20 women (participants) and 10 key informants chosen through non-probability purposive sampling technique as shown in the table below.

Department	Number of Participants
NGO	1
Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises	1
Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, Climate and Rural Development -ARDAS (former Agritex)	1
Growth Point Expert	1
District Administrator	1
Councillor	1

Chief	1
Environmental Management Agency	1
Rural District Council	2
FGD – Centre	10
FGD –Village	10
Total	30

Figure 3.1 – *The study participants (Researcher)*

Women participants were selected on the basis of having resided in and around Tsholotsho growth point for 10 years or more. The number of years spent at the Growth Point was assumed to be the minimum period to have experienced the economic growth of the Growth Point as well as the effects of the intended interventions of the policy. The selection was based on the longevity of their stay at the growth point and was done with the assistance of the community leaders as they were better positioned to match the prospective sample. The selection criteria was also based on the economic activities that women engage in, that is small-scale farming for women participants in the villages and informal trading for those at the central growth point.

In addition, 10 key informants were selected for the study and these comprised of officials from the Ministry of Local Government, Women's Affairs and Community Development, Rural District Administrator, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (ARDAS), Environmental Management Agency of Zimbabwe, Non-Governmental Organisations, Growth Point Expert and traditional community leaders all with knowledge of growth points participated in the study. Moreover, the key informants were chosen based on their ability to provide both the theoretical and practical side of the growth point policy performance and women's issues. Additionally, the selection criteria was in view of the need to ensure dependability of the research study. The key informants were a group of people assumed to have the potential of providing rich explanations and descriptions on rural women's empowerment outcomes through the

growth point policy at Tsholotsho Growth Point. It was also assumed that they possessed the experience of working with women in improving their livelihoods based on the provisions of the growth point policy.

The study made use of hierarchical influence in the different departments selected. Help of senior personnel in the various departments was sought to assist in identifying key people they thought would be knowledgeable in the study. Generally, the targeted key informants were those that would supply/avail rich information sincerely and reliably on rural women's empowerment through the growth point policy. However, there were challenges met and these had to do with the technique itself. Since purposive sampling is based on the judgement of the researcher in selecting participants, the use of this sampling method can be subjective resulting in the researcher leaving out participants critical to this study unintentionally or unknowingly being biased in their selection (Gibbs, 2018).

A total of 30 participants were engaged in the study, 20 of these were female participants in two FGDs and the other 10 were key informants (key informant interviewee - KII) conducted with 8 males and 2 females. While the selection of the FGD participants was more deliberate in attracting the female participants, selection of the KII was mostly based on the position held by the participant rather than the sex of the informants. Spontaneously, it was observed that most of the positions of influence in the district are occupied by men than women (8/10). This observation also raises concerns with regards to representation of women as well as their participation in various forums discussing their socio-economic concerns.

The two groups of participants, that is, key informants and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) were all given pseudo names to protect their identities as indicated in the ethical consideration section. Therefore, the key informants were classified as K11 (Key Informant Interviewees) and FGD from the Centre (referring to the central growth point) while (C) as C1- C10 and those from the periphery/village as V1-V10.

The ages of the FGD participants range from 30 to 82 years. Those from the FGD-C were relatively younger with most of them aged below 40 while those from the FGD-V were relatively older, with most of them above 55 years. This central-village (rural-urban) age distribution can be inferred to resonate with the estimated economic activity variations between the younger and older women.

While all the FGD-V participants regarded themselves as farmers, those from the centre reported being engaged in various non-farming economic activities. This showed that there is a lot of variety for those in the FGD-C, (1) was engaged in cobra making, (1) in detergent making, (2) catering, (1) chicken rearing, (1) farming, (1) cleaner and (3) buying and selling. The difference in economic activities from the centre and the village is attributed to more diverse opportunities available at the centre, unlike at the villages where the main activities are mainly farming that is largely rain fed. Exploring the activities characterising both the centre and the village was done with a view of establishing the trickle-down effect which recognises the growth point strategy of growth that starts at the centre and diffuses to the outer laying areas, the hinterlands. Therefore, carrying out the two focus group discussions in the two different locations helped the study to establish how women's livelihoods have been transformed through the growth point policy.

While all the FGD participants from the centre had reached the secondary level of education, some of the participants from the village (especially the elderly) have never been to school. All participants from FGD-C were of secondary school level and from FGD-V, 2 had never been to school, 5 had done primary school while the rest had secondary education.

Only two of the KIIs were female informants, one, an environmentalist from the Environmental Management Agency of Zimbabwe (EMA) and the other, a district coordinator for an NGO (MANA). All the other positions were filled by male participants, from the village-based positions (Chief and Councillor) to the whole district-based positions (CEO, DA, Agriculture

Specialist, Development Officer and District Treasurer). The Professor, a major critique of the growth point policy in Zimbabwe was also a part of the KIIs.

The majority of key informants are located at the Tsholotsho Centre at the main growth point. It is imperative to observe that most of these departments are state offices providing essential services in the district. However, there are non-state actors (NGOs) who are partners of the government like MANA who provide services in the district. The departments work hand in hand for the development of Tsholotsho District and in the socio-economic empowerment of women in their individual capacities. On the other hand, the consultant/professor was engaged based on his expertise on the concept of the growth point strategy and how it has been applied in Zimbabwe.

Myers (2009) observes that qualitative research is designed to help researchers to understand the lives of people through the social, political and cultural contexts they live to capture and gather in-depth information. Naturally, the qualitative research approach recognises that the researcher is the main instrument for data generation and gets to experience the phenomenon firsthand (Lincoln & Guba, 2001). To this end, as the main research instrument for this study, I used in-depth interviews and conducted focus group discussions as data generation methods. The data generation methods used in this study were selected to deeply understand the phenomenon under investigation which is the rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy.

Charmaz (2006) postulates that in-depth interviews with key informants are designed to elicit a vivid picture of the perspectives of the key informants on the investigation including perspectives, views and opinions. In-depth interviews were used to interrogate and obtain a clear understanding of the women's economic outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point, Tsholotsho District from the perspectives of the participants. Charmaz (2006) also adds that an in-depth interview is the one that takes

place when the researcher interviews the study population, individually or in groups so that ideas are freely expressed on the subject under study. This study used face-to-face conversations with the participants. The use of in-depth interviews helped me as the researcher get much more information by probing further since the questions asked focused on the how, why, to what extent. Such questions allowed me as researcher not to dwell on the initial answer but probed further, soliciting for more information that was relevant for this study. In-depth interviews are less formal and least structured since the wording and questions are not predetermined. Semi-structured questions were used for this study which comprised of questions that were flexible in a way that participants were able to explain and express themselves in-depth, as suggested by (Ritchie *et al.*, 2005). The reason for using semi-structured interviews was that they are regarded as not restrictive rather, they allowed participants in this study to respond to questions asked and also add more information that was considered relevant (Gibbs, 2018). In addition, the questions forming the interview guide were simple to understand, clear, short and in single parts and the main language used was English. Where participants were not well versed with the English language, the questions were translated to Ndebele. The study allowed them to express themselves in the language of their choice, however their responses were translated into English. Moreover, interviews gave background information on the participants since it was verbal, face-to-face conducted, hence, the researcher managed to interact with the participants physically. Furthermore, she managed to get information that she would not naturally get through observations, that is, feelings and intentions (Nyawaranda, 1998). The researcher made use of audio recorders and field notes to complement each other and to also ensure that there was a general correspondence of what was recorded and the notes. The advantage of having both was that where the recordings were inaudible, then it was handy to refer to the notes. For instance, in the FGDs there were times when several people would want to express themselves all at once. In this case she captured what each participant said as much as possible in the field notes.

Like any research gathering method, in-depth interviews have their own limitations. These include the time aspect. They are time-consuming and not cost-effective. They produce a lot of data that needs to be transcribed, organised, and carefully scrutinised. It is for these reasons that the qualitative method does not allow for big samples (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

As indicated above, the study also made use of focus group discussions in addition to in-depth interviews. Focus group discussions are a form of data generation method that involves small groups of people who come together to discuss a topic of interest (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). They should identify the purpose of the discussion, identify the participants and develop questions. One focus group should comprise 6-12 participants, a facilitator and a note-taker. Charmaz (2006) observes that focus group discussions are frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain in-depth understanding of social issues. Focus group discussions aim to obtain data from a purposely selected population. The focus group discussions for this study comprised women participants who had been purposively selected based on the criteria already mentioned above. For instance, FGD-V was selected based on the grounds that they derived their livelihoods from farming and because of their proximity from the central growth point, it was assumed that they benefitted from the growth point's concept of trickle down. As for the FGD-C, participants were selected on the basis that they resided at the central growth point and derived their livelihoods from trading (buying and selling).

The purpose of focus group discussions in this study was to stimulate an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of women on the growth point policy. They were able to provide a rich set of data based on their views, opinions, thoughts and experiences where the researcher was not only able to observe their interactions in a social setting but also could ask for further clarification to gain more in-depth insights into the phenomenon. By conducting two sets of FGDs, the study was able to compare findings between the groups to detect overall patterns and group variations (Malhorta & Grover, 2012).

Again, the design of the focus groups was based on the study's research questions in trying to locate rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy at Tsholotsho Growth Point, Matabeleland North Province. The community leaders assisted in the identification of women who were better suited for the profile and who I anticipated would be able to efficiently participate in the focus group discussions to provide the information that I was looking for. The focus group discussions required me as the researcher to remain focused as different views in a group on the same subject are collected (Gibbs, 2018). Babbie & Mouton (2001) argue that FGDs provide an environment where participants discuss, debate on issues in-depth, argue and reach a consensus. This helped with generating multiple data at the same time as women shared their experiences based on the women empowerment and growth points with proceedings recorded on audio.

The major benefit of using focus group discussions in this context was that like-minded people were brought together to discuss a subject that affects them all. This kind of discussion brought out vital and rich information and also led to additional and valuable information which was critical for this study. However, the drawbacks of the FGDs are that they can lead to a lack of authenticity on part of the participants in that they might give information they think the researcher wants to hear. Likewise, some members tended to dominate the discussion resulting in loss of information from the passive participants. Being the facilitator meant that the researcher had to pose the questions, control the proceedings, take down notes, this on its own was a tedious process that required her to have an assistant. It is worth noting that the researcher engaged an assistant that she personally trained for facilitation. As such, the whole process required the researcher to remain focused.

Data was analysed guided by the SLA and the growth point concept frameworks. Data analysis is an iterative process and requires reflexive interpretation since reflection is an important element of analysis (Carcary, 2009). Since this study was qualitative/exploratory, it comprised

processes and procedures whereby there is a move from the generated data into trying to explain and interpret the situations and the people under investigation putting emphasis on the narrative approach. Sandewolski (2010) posits that the narrative approach involves and recognises the extent to which the stories told provide insights into people's lived experiences. In this study, narratives were used from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to establish the relevance of the growth point policy to women in Tsholotsho Growth point.

A thematic analysis was therefore adopted to analyse data. It involved identifying, analysing and reporting the themes (patterns) within the data (Patton, 2002). It was based on the views of the participants in addition to the researcher's understanding and how she interpreted the views. It is flexible as it is not tied to any theory. A theme is a major recurring idea and judgment is important in establishing the theme since there is no telling what proportion of data constitutes a theme. It involves searching across a data set to find repeated patterns for meaning (Patton, 2002). This was achieved through the NVivo programme. According to Bazeley (2019), the programme merely takes over the making and sorting of data to maximise efficiency as well as speed up the process of grouping data according to category. However, the researcher still needs to create the categories, code, collate and identify patterns to derive meaning from the data. At this point, NVivo was very useful as it aided the processing of data from the case classifications and commented transcripts to the nesting of the themes and sub themes. The nesting facilitated the viewing of the data sources and references of each theme and sub themes. NVivo was used to create diagrammatical representations of my thoughts about the data sets which the researcher presented to illustrate the various themes and sub-themes discussed in the results and findings chapters. Creswell (2012) concludes by describing NVivo as a programme that helps with rapid coding, thorough exploration and rigorous management and analysis.

As already indicated, the qualitative method attracts a lot of data, so to manage this, the researcher started analysing data during data collection as main themes were emerging from it. This was done to verify with the participants if the analysis was a true reflection of what they had said in the interviews and focus group discussions. To verify if the researcher had interpreted their views correctly in what (Bailey, 2008) refer to as member checking to verify the trustworthiness of the study.

Data were therefore analysed by describing what was generated and interpreted to derive meaning from it based on growth points and rural women empowerment. This was achieved through incorporating the theories (Sustainable Livelihood Approach and Women Empowerment Theory) and concept (Growth Pole) that guided the study. The data generated from various stakeholders were based on what they perceived to be the relationship between the growth point policy and the socio-economic empowerment of rural women articulating it their way, knowledge and experiences.

The first step in analysing data in this study was to read through data several times, noting down interesting ideas. As already indicated, the process of analysing data started during generation, this is when the researcher took down notes and recorded proceedings and attached meaning to them. In this phase, the researcher repeatedly read and re-read the data corpus which comprised of field notes, audio recordings from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Data were then transcribed putting everything into words (verbatim). This process is highly interactive and the researcher had to go back to the field to check against original data that is field notes to compare occurrences as to identify specific issues that were applicable to women's empowerment issues within the growth point policy context. Additionally, the researcher used general observation and reflection to complement notes and recordings as it was critical in developing themes (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). The second step was to generate codes.

The generation of codes as explained by Saldana (2015) is a simple operation of identifying segments of meaning in data and labelling them with a code. In other words, coding is regarded as the process of categorising excerpts to find themes and patterns in the data generated. It included visiting all aspects of the data generated including that which the researcher noticed during the actual data generation. This assisted the researcher to recollect and reflect on some of the data generation activities that in turn triggered ideas important for the study. In this study,

while coding, the researcher was able to make judgments about each individual element in the data to decide its relevance (Strauss, 1987). Coding is therefore an important phase of data analysis as it moves raw data to the findings by also ensuring that the research questions imposed during interviews and focus group discussions were answered (Charmaz, 2014). The benefits of coding are that they give voice to the participants since they are created as a means to understand the phenomenon and the participants' views and perspectives. Charmaz (2014) further posits that through the development of codes, the researcher comes to understand the views of the participants and actions from their own perspectives.

After coding was completed, related data were then collated into specific codes to come up with meaningful themes, which were further collated into possible themes. Relevant data were grouped, reviewed and themes refined. The process involved an examination of the coded data extracts to look for potential themes of broader significance (Clark & Braun, 2006) in themes that did not emerge from the data but were constructed by the researcher through analysing, combining and comparing how codes relate to each other. In this study, themes were derived from the coded data and were linked more to the original data as the research reflected on the entire data set which was based on the study's research questions. To this end, themes should be independent and meaningful but also work together to form a coherent story (Clark & Braun, 2006). At this stage of analysis, the researcher took note of the themes that were of potential significance to check if they were directly related to the questions guiding the study. Important themes, therefore, answered the research questions guiding this study which were reviewed in phase 4.

In this phase, the research established whether each theme was supported by adequate data. This was achieved by checking on the coded data within each theme. The researcher also checked whether the data were coherent in supporting the theme and also checked if some themes were too large or diverse as indicated by Braun & Clarke (2006). If the answer to these questions was a no, data was re-sorted and themes

modified to reflect and capture coded data better. Notably, at this stage, in the study, themes were coded, combined, divided with some being discarded. When the researcher was satisfied that the themes had been adequately covered all the coded areas were included in the final analysis, thus, the first level of analysis was completed. In level 2, the researcher checked to see if individual themes were in line with the meanings in the data set and whether the thematic map accurately represented the entire body of data. The thematic map should demonstrate how re-reading and revising codes and themes are critical parts of the analysis process (King & Kitchener, 2004).

In this stage of data analysis, the researcher transcribed all the responses from the interviews and the focus group discussions. The identified themes made it easy for me to transcribe what was on audio recordings into the identified themes. In addition, field notes were also incorporated, typed out to identify the recurring themes emerging from the study. The researcher had to check what the themes in the study represented. This is what is referred to by Patton (2002) as the process of creating a synthesis that involves putting the perspectives or opinions to generate insight into the researcher's thinking. To this end, each group of participants in the study came up with the main categories of themes and subthemes linked to each other.

The final phase involved the writing of a thematic analysis report based on the themes emerging from the study. It was supported by evidence from participants using quoted responses on participants' lived experiences. Additionally, the themes were integrated into the theoretical frameworks and arguments from a review of related literature (Huberman, 1994). Likewise, gaps were also identified, questions posed and recommendations suggested.

The term validity has been questioned by qualitative researchers, instead, they have opted to use trustworthiness to validate the study. Lincoln & Guba (2001) refer to the trustworthiness of research as the accuracy of the data and findings. They proposed four tenets as meeting the

trustworthiness of the study that is credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The argument of moving from validity to trustworthiness for interpretivism was that terminology should not be transferred across research paradigms but rather agreed to have those suited to the qualitative approach as indicated above. Whittemore *et al.* (2014) have discovered that developing validity standards in qualitative research is challenging because of the necessity to incorporate rigor, subjectivity and creativity in the process.

However, Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) contend that rigour in the qualitative research approach is based on the overall planning and implementation of the whole research process to ensure its authenticity and trustworthiness in the process. This resulted in scholars such as Lincoln & Guba (1985) translating validity to credibility, reliability to transferability and objectivity to confirmability. There was therefore the need to demonstrate the true value of multiple perspectives that is the dependability of findings to broader contexts and the freedom of bias in the research process addressed as validity issues. The separation of validity to trustworthiness, therefore, dwells on the type of different knowledge that the positivist and interpretivist approaches generate. The interpretivist seeks depth of breadth and attempts, learn nuances of life experiences as opposed to the positivist's aggregate evidence which is generalisable and objective (Whittemore *et al.*, 2014).

Confirmability refers to the truth of the data and the participants' views, interpretation and representation of them by the researcher (Shufutinsky, 2020). Is the data representative of the participants and their experiences? In this study, it was the level to which real life experiences of the participants matched with what people said about them. Shufutinsky (2020) further argues that a qualitative study is considered credible if the description of human experiences is immediately recognised by individuals that share the same experiences. To support credibility when reporting a qualitative study, the researcher should demonstrate engagement, methods of observation and audit trails. In this study, the researcher kept

a journal, recorded events to reflect on the research ideas and anything else that could impact the objectives of the study. To ensure that the study was credible, the researcher recorded data intensively to link it to the interpretation. This was achieved through note-taking and regular discussions with participants.

Dependability is the constant of the data over a similar condition. This can be achieved when another researcher concurs with the decision trails at each stage of the research process. Janis (2022) describes dependability as the extent to which the same results can be obtained from the same participants should a repeat of the study be conducted. Thus, this study achieved this through triangulating the results from the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation and those from relevant documents that were used in the study. Furthermore, a data audit was also used to verify such information.

Transferability refers to the findings that can be applied to other groups. Sandelowski (2010) points out that a qualitative study will have met this criterion if the results have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and readers can associate the results with their own experiences. This study achieved transferability through the use of focus groups and key informant interviews. The study included key informants with knowledge of the growth point policy and rural development as well as women who have lived within the Tsholotsho growth point longer than 10 years. Purposive sampling was used to select the aforementioned participants. However, the criterion of transferability is dependent on the aim of the qualitative study and may only be relevant if the research intends to make generalisations about the subject or phenomenon.

Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data generated to represent the responses and views of the participants and not those of the researcher's point of view and biases. This was done by confirming how interpretations, conclusions were established and confirming that the findings came directly from the data achieved by show

of emerging themes from the participant's quotes (Sandelowski, 2010). In this study, an audit trail was conducted comprising of the actual data, field notes, recorded conversations to guard against bias.

During this study, the researcher ensured that the ethics guiding this study were upheld and sound principles underpinning academic integrity were observed and reported. Babbie & Mouton (2001) observe that in research, ethics are the general agreements shared by researchers on what is proper and what is not. It involves the protection and respect of participants under study and includes informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity among others. The effort was made to outline to the participants what the study was all about, why it was being conducted in addition to how it was going to be conducted. Firstly, participants were assured that pseudo names would be used instead of their real names. Secondly, they were made to freely participate in the audio recordings without any pressure. Those who were not comfortable with recordings were respected in that way. The researcher, created a platform where the participants were not coerced into doing anything they did not want to do or say. The researcher made assurances that they were safe and protected and were not obliged to give information they felt they did not want to give. So, there was a consensus on every aspect of the process. They were also assured that they would be shown the analysed data so that they could confirm that indeed that was the information they gave. Lastly, participants were assured that they were in a safe environment and that whenever they felt the need to withdraw from partaking in the study, were free to do so. The participants signed consent forms that the researcher had designed and they all consented to participate in the study.

Simelane-Mnisi (2018) asserts that ethics should be viewed as regulations as well as decision-making such as the 'do no harm' principle. In this regard, COVID 19 regulations were observed as per the country's guidelines. Furthermore, before the research process, the researcher assessed potential risks and outlined benefits for individuals and communities. Participants were made to understand on the process as well as on the research findings.

In the focus group discussions, there was a need to balance up the arguments by not showing that one response was better than the other. The researcher made sure that she respected every response and avoided being biased to one particular one. The researcher reiterated to the participants that the platform was for academic purposes and that she was learning from them. They were made to feel that they had more knowledge of the growth points and their impact on their socio-economic life since they experienced the phenomenon first hand. Ideally, the researcher avoided imposing and pushing for what she wanted to hear but took in responses as they were presented. To achieve this, the researcher incorporated every participant as to how they preferred the interviews and discussions to progress in a way that made them comfortable. Generally, several of them were worried about how the information was going to be used, however, they were assured that the information was for academic purposes only and that it will not directly be linked to them as individuals. Additionally, assurances were made that after data generation and analysis, it would be presented to those who were in doubt. After such assurances, all consented to how the process was going to be carried out.

This chapter presented the research methodology that was adopted for this study. It included the research paradigm, approach and design, sampling techniques, data generation and data analysis procedures, trustworthiness of the study and the ethical and legal consideration. Of significant to this study is the rationale for the choice of the methodology where the qualitative method was found to be relevant. It enabled the study to explore and interpret women's experiences to establish the applicability of the growth point policy to rural women empowerment. The next chapter focuses on data presentation and analysis achieved through the application of the method, design and techniques discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4: THE CASE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN AROUND TSHOLOTSO GROWTH POINT

In this chapter, emphasis is on the analysis and interpretation of the generated data, based on the research questions of the study. The objective is to present a picture of rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy at Tsholotsho Growth Point. The findings are presented according to the themes emerging from generated data from in depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Changes in the socio-economic empowerment status of women were contextualised as a constellation of various vectors whose interconnectedness has depicted variously improved statuses for women. At a higher level (superordinate), the change was abstracted as having three axiologically linked thematic findings designated as agentic, catalytic and resultant vectors. As shown in the model below, the said variables were found to be in a vicious cyclic relationship thus forming the wheel of change.

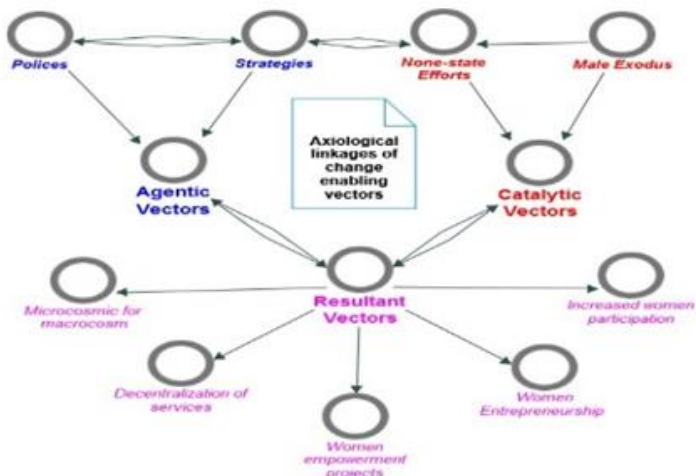


Figure 4.1 - Socio-Economic Status of Women (Researcher)

Both the agentic and catalytic vectors were abstracted as relatedly having a formative influence on the resultant vectors, with the latter also having enabling feedback to the former.

AGENTIC VECTORS

Agentic vectors were abstracted as the main driving force toward change, chiefly driven by government policies and strategies.

POLICIES PROMOTING RURAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES

The theme of policies was contextualised as all references to the government policies that were understood to be related to the socio-economic status of women within the growth point strategy. In this vein, the study discovered that despite the differences in views, all interviewees conceded and recognised that the growth point policy was indeed promulgated for rural development. This was evident from the following responses:

...the policy was about transforming the face of the rural sector... K116.

...it is a policy by government implemented to try and decongest urban centres to form urban within a rural set up... K113

... it started as a service centre with a few shops as it grew were grinding mills, more general dealer shops and service offices then it has grown further to what it is today... K111.

... the ushering in of the growth points managed to do away with traditional structures, it has changed the area from reserves to a developed centre...a policy to decentralise services from major towns and cities to the rural areas... K112

... I think that the growth point was created to have a place where there is access to essential provisions and centralising services for everyone, including women in the district... K1110

It was understood that the community members do have a social contract with the government in that the latter had made promises to improve the socio-economic status of women.

In an FGD at the centre, it was expressed that the district government stakeholders are fully aware that “women need land and financial assistance.” This understanding was also found among the village FGD members who also pinpointed the Women Affairs department as playing a pivotal role in advancing the welfare of women. KII10 also confirmed that as a growth point, they are anchoring on the various development policies more so directed by Vision 2030:

... there are various council initiatives towards development mainly headed by the health and the social department in terms of roads and dams, the engineering department and the finance department support these initiatives to support and avail budgeted funds as per the budgets to attain Vision 2030. We are also anchored on the various development policies. We disburse funds for example for clinics. Our funds come from the devolution grant, it is an intergovernmental fiscal transfer. The funds are administered through my office. For example, let us say we have 4 million dollars, we must decide that service it is going to be spent on which is ranked in terms of priority that is important for women too, that is health, social services, clinic or school repairs. So it is not just determined by the finance office but obviously in consultation with other departments. That is in time of budgeting and spending. So that is how in part, the growth point is enabling such functions...KII10

Growth points were particularly referenced as a cornerstone upon which women are especially benefitting from various government efforts on development. KII2 reiterated that because of the gender policy,

“women should be equal to men and the growth point gives them the opportunities to venture into business and other activities to put them at par with men.”

This categorically puts women in the limelight for socio-economic improvement. The process of change was also reported to be taking place to advance this. KII3 acknowledged that more still needs to be done and confirmed that whilst;

“like everywhere else [in the country] women are still confronted by various issues that render them poor, Tsholotsho district is no exception; women in Tsholotsho also suffer inequality, social economic inequality, but various departments and their partners are doing all they can to recognise women.”

It was learnt that in Tsholotsho there are perceived changes related to the reduction of segregation and gender empowerment because of the growth point policy:

... yes, as you can see Tsholotsho is growing, we have our township here, and we also have our businesses and there is no segregation as to who in terms of gender empowerment, it is inclusive... KII3

It was established that issues relating to women's empowerment are being advanced across all the government departments in Tsholotsho. KII5 reported that the growth point policy is relevant as shown:

... issues of women empowerment are relevant across all government policies and what comes to mind is that women are usually empowered in these centres through trading... KII5.

KII5 also recognised the efforts by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Community Development as being at the forefront in advancing the socio-economic status of women:

... it is very important but the question is, are they getting the opportunities in the growth centre, if so what are these opportunities also there is the small to medium scale enterprises direction that I think the Ministry of Women Affairs is trying to push that takes us into the whole big arena of the informal sector... KII5

STRATEGIES BY GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE THE STATUS OF WOMEN

'Strategies' as a theme was contextualised as all references to the government's efforts to form departments and linkages for the promotion of rural socio-economic development especially with a link to improving the status of women. It was found that women in the communities are aware of the relational context in that they are to communicate and account for what is due to them. Both the village and centre FGD participants pointed to their relational context with the Ward structures in communicating their concerns. Through their Ward Councillors, key informants reported that they can advance various issues as part of their Public-Private Dialogue platform:

... I feel that we should engage our councillors to push for the issue of stands. They know that as women we have been promised pieces of land and financial assistance by the government... C2

The existence of Public-Private Dialogue platforms was found to be one of the strategies to enhance the rural development agenda. This would enable accountability and ownership of the development happening. Reference was also made to the devolution fund that in itself is an independent government strategy and effort to support the periphery. KII10 spoke of receiving these funds from the devolution grant as an intergovernmental fiscal transfer. This fund's use was said to be deliberated through a consultative process with the district's Public-Private Dialogue platforms. KII10 spoke of the process as being able to prioritise people's desires and rank them according to priority areas. It was also reported that a decision must be made based on what product to spend on, based on what the community needs most, be it health, social services, clinic or school repairs. KII10 further reiterated that the growth point is enabling such consultative functions. Vision 2030, as alluded to by KII10, is an overall government strategy found to be trickling down to the growth points. For the current study it was found that for Tsholotsho women, they also benefit from this as a strategy.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Community Development was also abstracted as the government's efforts to put women in the limelight for socio-economic development. Almost all the participants from both the FGDs and the KIIs concurred that the Ministry of Women Affairs and Community Development is playing a pivotal role. As said by KII3 and KII5, the same ministry is trying to push for the advancement of women in various areas of life including the social and economic empowerment of women. It is also said to be working on improving women's representation in the political arena. KII8 noted that they had done quite a lot as a ministry in terms of lobbying for women's representation:

... as you see right now in Parliament, we have got the 60 MPs who happen to be women... we call them proportional representatives who just happened to be in Parliament without even being voted in... so that one I think is our brainchild as a ministry alright. We also encourage women to participate in the development... we realise by the nature of their gender roles, they are sort of incapacitated in most circumstances to participate because we expect a woman

to be at home. If you are to do a simple survey, you would realise a single woman is more at liberty to participate in national development or politics at the expense of the one who is married, but the one who is married would fear that their husbands will leave them while at Parliament making debates... that's why sometimes they do not participate in politics. They leave it for men why? Because men are not preoccupied with household chores... KII8

Strategic partnership with developmental partners was also reported in that the government agents would be monitoring livelihood programmes and projects being implemented in the district. KII6 reported different livelihood programmes and projects being monitored through the DA's office:

... we as an office, monitor several [projects]... projects that will be carried out by our ministries. Different line ministries that we have in the district have got their partners and those partners that are non-governmental organisations, bring in livelihoods projects like broilers keeping... KII6

It was revealed that there are some efforts to provide some technical financial support for business ventures. All these efforts are due to the permissiveness and responsiveness of the government structures to allow the developmental partners to penetrate the community and help with their needs. The government would, however, play an oversight and supervisory role:

[Partners] ...giving out monies, they support in terms of financial support, giving women money to start businesses like that. They also give them advice. They also support them socially so that they have projects running. So as an office now we come in, in terms of monitoring, ...OK, yes, our role now is to supervise and monitor those projects, those livelihoods projects...yes, that's our role... KII6

Effort is also being made to enhance the quality of farming in the district. As a community largely based on agriculture, the government was also reported to be working on improving the quality of livelihoods in the district. This is being achieved through the promotion and training of the households on good farming practices especially consonant with ecological climatic conditions of the district, KII8 from the Ministry of

Agriculture, Lands and Rural Development reports:

... the role that our office plays is very critical, especially for a place like Tsholotsho where farming is poor and poverty levels are high. I can say that the push that we have done for the growth of small grains has improved food security at the household level. As for women, they are still most of the farmers and those that are growing small grains and are also engaged in nutrition gardens can sell the excess to GMB and use the money for things like school fees. However, we have those that have resisted and still want to grow maize that unfortunately does not do well in this area. So you find that organisations like the World Food Programme give handouts to such people... KII8

CATALYTIC VECTORS

All relationships, activities and linkages other than the direct government efforts that were found to be giving impetus to improving the socio-economic status of women were abstracted as catalytic vectors. Two subordinate themes emerged relating to the NGO efforts and the opportunities that rose with the migration of males to nearby countries.

NGOs AND OTHER NON-STATE EFFORTS

The presence and or attraction of NGO activities in the district was variously linked to the tremendous advancement of women's social and economic status. The proliferation of livelihoods, food assistance, health and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programmes have equipped women with knowledge and capacities to improve their statuses. During an FGD discussion in the village, V1 revealed that:

... we now have access to a lot of facilities such as health, education, water and livelihoods by NGOs. Previously there were no food handouts that we see today being given by the government and some NGOs. Knowledge and information in the communities came from NGOs and government departments. We have learnt a lot from the NGOs operating in the district, especially on agriculture... V1.

The role of the NGOs is mostly a helping hand that in part facilitates the implementation of government policies and strategies. KII3 revealed that it is usually the government's effort to find investors and partners who can

assist jointly in achieving their goals. NGOs and other non-state actors such as diasporans, locally known as *Injivas*, were cited to be filling this gap and easing the implementation of some of the policy obligations:

... well we look for investors, and partner with non-state actors that include our very own diasporans (Injiva). You will argue that there is a big number of NGOs that are active here in the district implementing projects that support women's livelihoods such as nutrition gardens, savings clubs, and health services and so on. So they complement the activities of the council. We also have Injivas who are highly contributing to the economy of Tsholotsho. They have built houses, shops and have contributed to the infrastructural development of the district...

KII3.

It was also observed that the presence of the Tsholotsho growth point has attracted non-state actors to work in the district in pursuit of addressing poverty through capacitation with different socio-economic interventions. All key informants concurred that the activities of NGOs have been fundamental in supporting government efforts. At the district level, it was established that a Memorandum of Understanding has been entered into between the RDC and prospective NGOs. The RDC has the mandate to vet, classify and approve them after due diligence is done. To confirm this, key informant (KII3) noted the following:

....the presence of my office right here at the centre ensures that when NGOs seek to partner with us, we look at gaps and urgent issues that need addressingthis is an advantage because being on the ground we usually know the issuesKII3.

When asked if non-state actors would not participate if the RDC was not at the growth points, he further explained that:

*... what I am saying is that there is the elimination of red tape and vetting is efficient
... ..we are also able to monitor their activities....I am sure you know that some NGOs can come up with an agenda that is not desirable... KII3.*

The views of KII3 show that his office is the custodian of government partners. They approve their applications and monitor their work as well.

Other key informants also expressed the same sentiments as shown below:

...in terms of livelihood projects and programmes, as an office, we monitor these projects by NGOs... different line ministries have got their partners (NGOs)... KII16.

... we have NGOs and other different organisations that offer social and financial assistance KII1.

...another thing is thatthere are various NGOs that are important for the people of Tsholotsho... KII10.

... NGO work has been aided because we have this growth point... KII2.

... NGOs are our partners...they have signed MOUs with the RDC, as for me as Councillorwe determine the pace of their work and direct them to areas needing help more... KII2.

From the above perceptions, there is a pattern that seems to be in place for NGO work. The key informants agree that NGOs are critical partners for the socio-economic development that is happening in the district.

KII3's view points on the fact that they are responsible for NGO work and the MoUs. This was shared by key informant KII2 that it is them who determine the pace of the work. It also shows that there is reliance on such assistance proffered by non-state actors. Furthermore, NGO work/projects seem to form a big part of the development discourse as indicated by KII6, that almost every government department at the growth point has an NGO as a partner. KII4 also expressed the same view:

...we have partnered with NGOs in the protection of the environment and developing good farming methods...most of the projects that we have implemented are NGO funded... KII4.

....right now I am working on a document for the establishment of safe shelters for gender-based violence survivors...we are partnering with Bantwana Zimbabwe... it is an NGO operating in the district...NGOs are major financiers for most of our projects... KII8.

Using the above information for key informants it emerged that the centrality of the growth point and the presence of key government departments is an attraction for NGOs. It also serves as an advantage to the government departments that have cited poor funding to facilitate

development in the area. Against this backdrop, it can be argued that contrary to the thinking that the government is fully initiating and funding projects for livelihoods and development, the opposite can be said since data point to NGOs being at the forefront. There are varying perceptions on NGOs in the district but the majority strongly believe that NGOs are critical for rural development and therefore women's empowerment.

THE INJIVAS/OMALAYITSHA/DIASPORANS ACTIVITIES

It was established from most key informants that *Injivas*/diasporans are a force to reckon with owing to their socio-economic contributions in the district. The views show that the diasporans commonly referred to as *Injiva* and *Omalayitsha* referring to the transporters of goods from neighbouring South Africa and Botswana have contributed immensely at both household and district levels. They are regarded as the pallbearers of economic activities at the growth point and beyond. Some of the responses from the key informants on the role played by *Injiva* were recorded as follows:

...as you might be aware...Tsholotsho is close to Botswana and South Africa where most of our people work.....they have done a lot in terms of developing their rural homes....even rural businesses... KII10.

This was about what the *Injivas* have achieved in terms of developing the areas in the district:

...most men are in South Africa and they make an effort to assist their families back home... KII11.

*...we have our *Injiva* that have invested a lot in the district and have created employment for the locals including women... KII13.*

*...we are witnessing several entrepreneurial activities by *Injiva*...they are building shops and houses here at the centre that is contributing to the growth of the growth point... KII14.*

*...most of the goods sold here in the district are from South Africa....we have regular supplies from *Omalayitsha*, that is why there is greater use of the Rand.... KII17.*

On being asked why *Omalayitsha* and not local supplies, it was noted that it was more convenient because *Omalayitsha* delivers to the growth point that is central and accessible to everyone. The above quotations indicate

that the presence of the growth point has also enabled the flow of goods and money (remittances) in the South Africa-Zimbabwe channel. Goods are delivered right at the doorstep. It was evident since most of the general dealer shops mostly stock South African goods. There is an elimination of direct travel and transport charges to Bulawayo and Plumtree. What it shows is that *Injivas* and *Omalayitsha* have generally contributed to the economic activities of the growth point and women are the main participants in the economic activities at the centre. On a social note, KII3 and KII10 are specific on the indications that the diasporans have managed to carry out work such as bridge, school and clinic refurbishment at the district level. The contributions by the *Injivas* have contributed to the improved socio-economic status of women through service provision and general development of the growth point.

MALE EXODUS – OUTWARD MIGRATION

The rife outward migration into nearby South Africa and Botswana was found to be common for Tsholotsho district and this has mostly attracted males more than their female counterparts. This migratory behaviour is the one that has largely fed into the direct contributions made by the *Injivas* and *Omalayitsha* economic transformations. The other result of this migratory behaviour is the separation of family members, often having the male household heads moving away from the daily activities and management of the household. Consequently, this was found to present an opportunity for women to be heads of households and be at the forefront of participation in the representation of their families. This has seen role reversals and active participation of women uniquely in the context of migration.

It was found that the gap left by the male migration birthed Female-Headed Households (FHH) with some vulnerabilities catalytic to the exploration of various survival modalities leading to more independence, entrepreneurship and consequently improved socio-economic statuses.

C10 from the FGD at the Centre revealed that the migration of her husband was a blessing in disguise for her because it became a wake-up call for her to introspect and awaken her to her potentials:

...yes it has, my life has changed in terms of not having to depend on anyone for financial support. I moved to the growth point from the village when the father of my children left for Botswana and never came back home. I came to the growth point looking for work and ended up having my own small business. Yes, the business has not grown and I am facing a lot of challenges but I manage to fend for my children. The growth point has not grown to give us the services that would also make us grow....C10.

The study revealed that the district population is now more dominated by women and most of them in the district are de facto heads of households because their men in Tsholotsho have migrated to nearby countries:

...you see most women in our district are de facto heads of households because most men in Tsholotsho are in South Africa. They are burdened with having to look after the family by themselves and still undertake chores and other economic activities... KII1.

...most of the women are now household heads. All the men are out of the country... KII7.

Uniquely for Tsholotsho, both at the centre and the hinterland, most businesses were reported to be run by women mainly due to the role reversal birthed by the male migration:

...Tsholotsho businesses are mostly run by women, most men are in the diaspora. Their participation is very high. Women, here at the centre and in the villages too own and run their businesses and I would like to say they are successful.... KII2.

RESULTANT VECTORS (SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES)

Resultant vectors were abstracted as the various reported and observed changes concerning the socio-economic statuses of women. As shown in the resultant vector cluster analysis below, the overarching resultant vector was microcosmic for macrocosm; contextualised as small and slow changes incrementally and over time, yielding bigger socio-economic positive changes for women. The decentralisation of services to the Centre

was found to incentivise the emergent women entrepreneurship, relatedly an impetus to increased women participation more so due to diversity and proliferation of women empowerment projects.

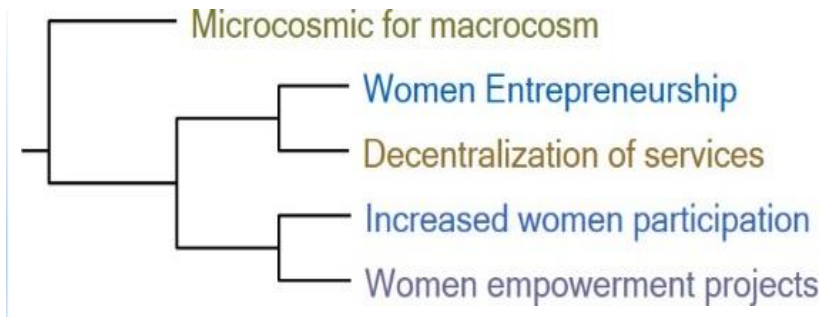


Figure 4.2 Resultant Vectors (Researcher)

MICROCOSMIC FOR MACROCOSM (SMALL AND SLOW CHANGES BY THE GROWTH POINT POLICY)

The growth point was said to be set for potential changes with necessary structures in place to facilitate the changes. Already, changes have begun to be observed and are expected to improve and increase over time and with experience. All participants in the FGD at the Centre concurred that the growth point has the government offices that have been tasked to lead the development, but at the moment the development is perceived as minute and slow. All the women in the FGDs were optimistic and believed that the growth point had the potential to address issues that constrain women. C7 expressed that through the growth point the government can be able to promote businesses so that all women can succeed by improving from the existing structures:

...things like housing, water and sanitation that are already here at the growth point can be improved so that we don't spend much time carrying out these duties but we need to spend more time at our workplaces.... C7.

Even the participants from the village acknowledged the minute changes from which future changes are going to be built. All participants noted positive changes due to the growth point and are still hopeful that more change is possible:

...I strongly believe that the growth point can change our lives because they already changed them in a way, however, things have been left as they are for so many years. What is already on the ground needs to be improved so that our lives and livelihoods can also change.... V1.

...I can say yes [presence of the growth point has changed our lives and livelihoods], it has but not fully, we are still poor but some things have improved and we are knowledgeable about a lot of things....V2.

Acknowledgement of the acquisition of knowledge and some positive changes related to lives and livelihoods denote a process incrementally leading to macro changes. KII1 reported that the growth point has evolved over the years, having started from a very small centre that started as a service centre with a few shops and as it grew there were grinding mills, more general dealer shops, service offices, hospitals and the police camp. From there on it has grown tremendously to be what it is today. KII2 also confirmed the humble beginnings of the growth point, having started as a white-owned dairy farm belonging to Potgieter, to which the coming in of the growth point strategy has managed to do away with traditional structures and changed from reserves into the nucleus of urban development.

From KII1 and KII2's submissions, it is apparent that the development is more of a process in that minute advancements build upon each other to have a macrocosmic effect. KII1 felt that as it stands now, the growth point is now fully-fledged, and it is still growing. KII10 also emphasised that several changes have taken place in the district as evidenced by the erection of several shops that are at the centre indicating the changes that have taken place over the years. KII10 agreed that there are challenges that have slowed down the growth of the district but still think that a lot has been achieved so far. The trickling down into the rural periphery was also found to follow the same microcosmic effect, with the periphery still

lagging behind but surely showing some minute and slow changes. Both women at the centre and those from the villages/hinterlands were said to be all-changing with the latter lagging due to the slow proliferation of the enabling facilities:

....I would like to say that women in urban areas have more advantages over rural women because development lags in the rural areas compared to the urban and what the city offers in terms of socio-economic development is not offered here in the rural areas, but this is not to say that rural women are not able to do what is being done in urban settings but they have limitations in terms of facility availability. But, women here, are drawn behind by several factors.... KII10.

It was clarified that because of the policy by the government, Tsholotsho's growth point is evidence of implementation of the decongestion of the urban centres and formation of urban centres within a rural set up and incrementally the goal is being achieved:

...the policy is about uplifting rural areas so that they can resemble small towns, and I am glad to say the centre here resembles a small town, we have modern houses, shops, services departments, schools and hospitals that one can find in an urban area. So, in earnest, although the area has not developed to where we want it to be, there have been some milestones that have been achieved.... KII3.

... then in terms of infrastructure, I think one way or the other is coming up well because in our case we now have an urban area, but can you see if you go to the location or locations, people are expanding, alright! They are building houses. The same people were in the rural areas. They now own houses here. They also own businesses here... KII7.

DECENTRALISATION OF SERVICES

The most central benefit reported by all the participants was the decentralisation of services, making these more accessible to the rural community. FGD participants at the Centre expressed that the growth point has enabled them to have services nearer to them. C8 and most other participants believed that the growth point is a centre where they can access most services. They felt that the growth point has almost everything that they need, "we do not need to go all the way to Bulawayo for social services and shopping" (C8). Most services were said to be available at the centre. The same applies to employment opportunities, people hardly go to other districts in search of employment:

...people from all over the district come to the centre to access different services... C8.

Access to the market also serves as a key decentralised service, especially for farmers from rural areas. The Monday Market and the general growth point populace offered a viable market for the smallholder farmers and the vendors in the horticulture and other agricultural value chains. The Monday Market was said to comprise farmers from around the district who come to the centre every Monday to sell their produce. It was reported that if there was no growth point, most of the participants would be in the village (where there is a lack of access to markets). The centre offers better opportunities for trade since a lot of people from all over the district come for their supplies at the centre. Business is conducted faster than back in the villages and there are a lot of people to sell to. C5 expressed that the kitchen business that she runs has been made possible by the number of people who come to eat at her place.

Additionally, the presence of the GMB was reported to have made the marketing of farm produce easy and accessible. C1 expressed that every woman farmer was very happy when the GMB depot came to Tsholotsho but expressed the poor service offered by the GMB as follows:

... we thought we would now make money because before then we would go as far as Bulawayo to sell our produce, it was worse because of transport costs and one had to find a place to stay while going around suburbs such as Luveve and Gwabalanda selling door to door. But unfortunately, the GMB has worsened our situation because of poor pay-outs. I hope that the government can improve the GMB service so that farmers can benefit... C1.

... we have a GMB at the growth point that makes marketing our goods a lot easier. GMB and Agritex assist us during the farming season with ploughing and we are given free seed and fertilisers. Before we used to just use draught power and we used recycled grain for the new planting season... V3.

Apart from the market access, the farming communities now have access to technical expertise on good farming practices. FGD participants at the village expressed gratitude for the accessibility of technical expertise in agriculture through the decentralisation of Agritex (ARDAS) offices and veterinary services. Like V3, V4 expressed that Agritex (ARDAS) has

introduced improved farming methods; strenuous but more putative for their livelihoods:

... well our socio-economic status has changed since we have had the growth point, we have improved farming methods that are spearheaded by Agritex. These methods are strenuous but when we receive good rains we are assured of a good harvest that we can sell the excess. After selling we can buy food, pay school fees and other provisions... V4.

Overall, government departments were reported to be offering various services that the locals used to travel to Bulawayo and Plumtree for. KI11 reported cases where children did not have birth certificates because the parents would not have bus fares to go to Bulawayo but all this has been made easy by the presence of the growth point. KI10 reiterated that the growth point is important in that it seeks to improve the economic status of the people in the district through a lot of inroads that have been made since the beginning mainly improving the lives and livelihoods of the locals:

... without this growth point, we would probably not even have a central place like this one. We would still be going all the way to Bulawayo to access services and conduct business. You will notice that most people, especially women have businesses that have created livelihoods as business owners. The centre itself provides a lot of opportunities for the rural people... it is a central point to conduct business and access services such as birth and death registration. Another thing is that there are various NGOs and other departments that are important for the people of Tsholotsho... as I mentioned earlier, the growth point is a centre for economic activity that has brought several changes. I am looking at the employment opportunities of women in the business centre where we have a lot of women employed in various places. If you walk around and into the shops, you find that more women are employed than men and in terms of vending in the district you find that more women vendors are vending for themselves, for example, the Monday Market, is women trading and participating. So having a growth point as a centre for economic activities has enabled women to have income for their households.... KI10.

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES

It was found that most of the women at the centre are entrepreneurs, as seen in the demographics, and were engaged in sundry activities. C1 reported that they sometimes get help in terms of businesses, financial

advice and services while C8 confirmed that most of them are self-employed:

...we buy and sell and also run kitchens where we cook food and we have people who come to buy, we sell dresses and foodstuff as vendors going around or at the flea markets. So, in these businesses, we also employ others (assistants) to help with the chores and that is how employment is created here....C8.

Entrepreneurship was reported to be supporting the basic needs of their respective families. C3 and C10 spoke of how they are now in a position to support their families despite the rising costs of living:

...well, I am in a position to work and support my family. Things are expensive here at the growth point but since I am working, I can afford several things even though it is hard to make ends meet. If there was no growth point, I would probably be back in the village having no income.... C3.

....yes, I agree with C3, being at the growth point, some opportunities have been made possible. Before I came to the growth point life was extremely difficult because back in the village there are no opportunities for employment or business. Here I can make some money. I know it is difficult, but I am better off suffering here than in the village... C10.

The centre was commended for variety and potential for much more growth. C1 reported that she had seen some changes in her life and the way she earns money because of the growth point:

...I have benefited a lot.... I can sell my products at the centre, and I have customers. With the money I get from the sales, I buy food and clothing for my children. If you are a hard worker, you will never go hungry because there is a lot to do here at the centre but, there is a lack of capacity, there is never a time that I can say I have enough because the business conditions are not favourable. I wish that the roads could be repaired so that transport will be affordable to enable travel for cheaper supplies... C1.

The urban (Centre) women concurred that as women, they have benefitted in that the growth point has managed to create platforms whereby women can work and be able to fend for their families.

C8 prides herself in how she has ready markets and has managed to build a house back in the village through the work she does. Even though the work was said to be mostly not sustainable, it felt better to be doing something than doing nothing.

Entrepreneurial engagements in the rural areas were, however, found to be minimal as also seen above that all the women from the village were all communal farmers. The opinions from the village FGD participants can be summarised by C7's submission that more engagement is required to source links at the centre. She reasoned that local business/entrepreneurship is preferred as compared to external markets where transport and food requirements are costly.

Overall, it was found that most women did benefit from entrepreneurial opportunities at the growth point. KII1 used an exaggerated quantifier, “everyone”, to emphasise the extent of the accrued benefits:

...everyone has benefitted from the growth point in several ways. We have women operating their businesses and making a life for themselves... Yes, most women are in a better position to fend for their families.... KII1.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

Through the government and partner support, several projects were reported in terms of supporting women to be empowered and fend for themselves. FGD at the village revealed that having a growth point has reduced poverty; V2 felt that only those who are lazy have children going around the village begging for food. V10 reported that people in the villages through the government and some NGOs have livelihoods that have been made possible by the presence of the growth point, this never used to happen before they had a growth point. V10 further reported that they have been taught not to depend on hand-outs but to work hard with the resources they have and must be self-sustainable. V1 gave an example of nutrition gardens that they got and are sources of income for them and could afford to use the proceeds to help pay school fees and buy food.

Reports were made by participants of efforts to educate women on various aspects of their lives and appreciate the worth of women in society. V8 and V6 applauded the Ministry of Women Affairs for championing the women empowerment projects in the district:

... there is an office at the growth centre that teaches us as women to know our worth in society. This office helps women with various challenges that we have in our lives. They also encourage us to vote and attend Ward meetings. This is something that we did not experience before.... V8.

... I agree with what V8 is saying. The Women's Affairs department has taught us alot of things that include reporting gender-based violence. ... V6.

From KII10 and many other KIIs, it was established that there are various NGOs and other departments that are important for the people of Tsholotsho in terms of empowerment. KII7 prides herself in how their organisation, MANA has transformed the lives and livelihoods of women through several MANA projects. V9 also referenced and was grateful for MANA's work saying that MANA that is an NGO that has given them nutrition gardens mostly enough for consumption. However, 68 families are members of the garden project and each has two beds, usually with no excess to sell.

Projects being run by NGOs were reported by almost all the key informants, more importantly, women being most of the beneficiaries. KII9 spoke of several projects that they are running with their developmental partners such as breeding of Boer Bucks. Also, there was a note of nutrition gardens and seed bank projects that promote the production of small grains, since the area is very dry and receives very little rain. Through the partners, boreholes have been drilled, training offered and village savings clubs created. KII9 noted that women are the majority in all these projects, even the Boer Bucks project was reported to have more females than males. KII9 reiterated that this is so because there are more women than men in the district because of the *Injiva* phenomenon discussed above as a catalytic vector.

EMA was also singled out as advancing eco-friendly projects in the community, promoting climate-friendly projects among the community members to which women were reported to be most active in the activities:

... I will talk about EMA's activities that include training and recycling. We have a very successful project of individuals who collect used cans that are later melted to make aluminium pots. This project has seen several women being able to create a livelihood as a result. Unfortunately, the pots are produced in Bulawayo because there is no factory in Tsholotsho. They make up to 400 rand per week.... Some of the income-generating projects led by EMA include nutrition gardens, capacity building, training and awareness campaigns... It is women who are most active in the activities and I would like to say knowledge has been imparted as people are enlightened to issues of the environment... You know that Tsholotsho is prone to floods, so we work with various partners and other government departments to raise awareness campaigns and educate people through traditional leaders.... KII4.

INCREASED WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Being the heads of households, women were found to be more involved in the developmental activities in the district, uniquely so for the district due to the migration of men into the nearby countries. As presented above, most women reported being independent and participating more in economic activities. KII9 revealed that currently in Tsholotsho, it is notable that women's participation is very high in most development interventions that are being spearheaded by government departments and their partners. From KII4's work at EMA, it was also confirmed that women's involvement resounds and is dominant than that of men. For the work that KII9 has been doing on the growth of small grains for improved food security at the household level, women were found to be still most the farmers. KII9 felt that women are critical for the food production in the district and play pivotal roles in feeding for their families:

... to an extent women have been given the chance to work and fend for their families. Whenever there is a good harvest women from the villages come to the centre to sell their produce where there is a ready market. I can imagine without a central place like this where would you sell to? For example, we have one woman in Ward 10 who is into cattle production, she has managed to come up

with ways of producing her feed that she also sells. Some women have also gone into Boer buck production and have since accumulated a sizeable number... .KII9.

As observed from what was said by all participants (FGDs and key informants), the presence of the growth point has had a transformative effect on the lives and livelihoods of women. Issues such as decentralisation of services, projects and their increased participation, therefore, are the outcome attributed to the growth point policy. Women from the FGDs, at both the centre and the villages, concurred that several developmental interventions have been key in promoting the socio-economic empowerment of women. In the same vein, key informants also acknowledge that the decentralisation of services has been instrumental in the changes that have occurred in the district since the promulgation of the growth point policy. An increase in women's participation in projects initiated by the government and its partners is the cornerstone of the improved livelihoods that women depend on.

ESTABLISHING RURAL WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES IN THE GROWTH POINT THRUST

The participants' evaluation of the extent of women's empowerment due to the growth point policy was subsumed as thematically relating to the applicability of the growth point policy in promoting women's empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point. Evaluations from all the participants, both FGDs and KIIs were categorised by source reflecting key areas of improvement.

Six key areas were coded as follows;

- Improving service delivery
- Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs),
- Developmental Aid
- Increased agency from women,
- Skills development
- Employment creation.

Among these key areas, improving service delivery followed by SMEs and developmental aid were the most dominant findings that came from among the KIIs. Equally on the other hand improving service delivery was the most dominant among the FGD participants also followed by SMEs but then with relatively more allusions to skills development as protruding findings from among the women who participated in the FGDs.

IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY

Evaluations relating to proximity and availability of services were contextualised as a conduit to women's empowerment due to the growth point policy. The finding is equally the most dominant for both the KIIs and FGDs. The centre was said to have offered a near and reliable market for both rural farmers and enterprising women from the central growth point. KII1 emphasised that the growth point is instrumental in rallying customers and enterprising women at the centre:

... definitely, it has, if there was no growth point here, where would women be conducting their businesses or working. The growth point has been an enabler in promoting the socio-economic status of women... As a meeting place, it means that markets for different goods are readily available. Whatever one is selling, they don't need to travel far... KII1.

Women at the centre confirmed that the growth point has enabled them to have services near to them, they are now getting help nearer. The Monday Market and the generally growing urban population offer a business-enabling environment for women.

Key informants and others noted the improvement in service delivery attributed to the centrality and proximity to health services. Despite the noted challenge with the cost, the mere nearness was applauded as a positive linkage to the growth point policy, C1 and C5 debated:

... we have access to the hospital where we can be treated. However, the difficulties are that you must pay before being attended to.... R180/ \$12. The 12 dollars is beyond the means of many, (laughing) we are now resorting to traditional medicines just like in the old days... "who can afford the hospital fees and medication"? C1.

... but we cannot say having a hospital is bad, it is good and those who can afford it receive medical treatment. So, I can say that having a growth point has positively changed our lives. Talking of women's health, we have NGOs who offer training and advice and screening on women's health. But what they do is screen and refer you to the hospital, so it is up to you to seek further medical treatment depending on if you have the money or not... C5.

KII1 also concurred with C5 that they do have NGOs that promote women's health and the hospital and clinics around the district that women benefit from. KII2 further illuminated that they do have a big hospital with a capacity of 300 beds for women, men and children's wards with a lot of departments, doctors and nurses and a school of nursing:

... we have a big hospital that services the whole district... the hospital is quite big and has a capacity of 300 beds for women, men and children's wards. It has a lot of departments, doctors, nurses, and a school of nursing. [the hospital offers full board] Yes, it does, it offers consultation, X-rays and admissions. It is fully equipped, and only more complicated cases are referred to Mpilo Hospital in Bulawayo, there are 3 resident doctors currently... KII2.

As earlier reiterated, the most central benefit reported by all the participants was the decentralisation of services, making these more accessible to the rural community. The hospital and the registration offices are now localised. People from all over the district come to the centre to access different services. Access to the market also serves as a key decentralised service, especially for the farmers from the villages. For instance, the presence of the GMB was reported to have made the marketing of farm produce easy and accessible. Overall, government departments were reported to be offering various services that the locals used to travel to Bulawayo and Plumtree for.

ESTABLISHMENT OF SMALL TO MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs)

The establishment and growth of women-led businesses, characteristically SMEs, was subsumed as empowerment due to the growth point policy. This finding is equally the second most dominant for both the KIIs and FGDs,

especially through buying and selling. SMEs, it was found that women are thriving at the centre tending for their families. As reiterated above, most women are self-employed in their SME capacity and also employ others in these enterprises. All the women in the FGD at the Centre concurred that most of the employment opportunities are within the small businesses operating at the centre. C8 echoed a description that all the participants agreed with:

....yes, most of us (women) are self-employed, we buy and sell, we also run kitchens where we cook food and we have people who come to buy, we sell dresses and foodstuffs as vendors going around or at the flea markets. So, in these businesses, we also employ others (assistants) to help with the chores and that is how employment is created here....C8.

With regards to the extent of success of these businesses, the profit margins were said to be low. For example, C5 has her kitchen (a small eating place) and she serves meals three times a day. Her income hardly covers the expenses. Most of the money goes towards procuring supplies, rent for the premises and wages for the assistants' help. However, the returns were said to be sufficient for them to make a living, paying for household expenses like school fees, food and rent. Living in the urban setup had driven several women to tap into their capacities and this has seen a number of them, establishing more than one enterprise, multi-tasking and task shifting among these endeavours. In C8's case, she runs a kitchen, farming and manufactures detergents:

....it is an advantage for me to have three business ventures, when the kitchen is not making any profits, instead of having to borrow, I take money from the detergents to support the kitchen. I also do the same for farming activities. I have employed people to help me in all three projects...C8.

Having small businesses were said to be a response to the capacity and market thresholds of the growth point. It was noted that none of the women mentioned big amounts or business intentions reportedly so because the reality at the growth point has not grown sufficiently enough to sustain big initiatives:

...we are dealing with real situations, so why waste time wishing for something that will never happen, what we want is to be able to fend for our families only. So the little that we can get, we appreciate that a lot....C2.

...we all depend on our small businesses for survival, but these businesses are small, not growing hence we are not able to make good profits. The conditions that we operate in make it difficult for businesses to expand. ...C8.

Most of the businesses are just SMEs and there are no big industries to stir the development, most of the activities and employment creation are within the SMEs or other service points:

... there are no big industries, only a few small industries. So when people come to the centre it is us who give them employment as our assistants or in the big shops where they earn up to R300 depending on the size and nature of the job. Most of the people here are not educated, so they just take whatever jobs available that is why they end up having their businesses because the wages are too low. But with no capital, it is these businesses that we end up doing, buying and selling and cooking in the kitchens...C8.

Currently, the Centre was described as operating with light industries, KII2 pointed to the existence of small light industries comprising two abattoirs, motor mechanic workshops, welding and general dealer shops. As for women's endeavours, KII7 confirmed that there is no diversity; everyone is selling the same things. It was viewed that selling the same products also accounted for the low incomes that most women experienced and hence the lack of growth within the business ventures. It is therefore evident that such factors are viewed as piecemeal economic empowerment.

REALISATION OF DEVELOPMENT AID

The ability to attract, relate and monitor various developmental partners, mostly NGOs, was subsumed as empowerment due to the growth point policy. The establishment of the district offices and urban built-up area has facilitated the centralisation of the NGO efforts and efficiencies in communication and response to community needs. NGO efforts were mostly noted in enhancing livelihoods, health promotions and skills/knowledge development. FGD participants in the village were

delighted in having access to a lot of facilities such as health, education, water and livelihoods through NGOs. It was revealed that knowledge and information in the communities came from NGOs and government departments:

... we now have access to a lot of facilities such as health, education, water and livelihoods by NGOs. Previously there were no food handouts that we see today being carried out by the government and some NGOs. Knowledge and information in the communities came from NGOs and government departments. We have learnt a lot from the NGOs operating in the district, especially on agriculture... V1.

NGOs have done so much work in the community to the extent that their work was being perceived as having overshadowed the efforts of the government that enabled them in the first place:

...the government has forgotten us, if it was not for the NGOs we would not be having some of the things and knowledge we have. We also want to have better lives and livelihoods that are sustainable like irrigation.... V10.

As said above, the presence and or attraction of NGO activities in the district were variously linked to the tremendous advancement of women's social and economic status. The proliferation of livelihoods, food assistance, health and SRHR (sexual reproductive health and rights) programmes have equipped women with knowledge and capacities to improve their statuses. With the high prevalence of HIV&AIDS in the district, NGOs have tried to spearhead campaigns in this regard. The role of the NGOs is, therefore, mostly a helping hand that in part facilitates the implementation of government policies and strategies. It was also observed that the presence of the Tsholotsho Growth Point has attracted non-state actors to work in the district in pursuit of addressing poverty through capacitation with different socio-economic interventions.

Increased inclusive participation and involvement of women in various developmental forums and leadership in business initiatives were contextualised as empowerment due to the growth point policy.

Developmental projects have mostly attracted women, more so because they are now playing critical roles in families following the massive movement of males into nearby countries. Being the head of households, women were found to be more involved in the developmental activities in the district and they reported being independent and participating more in the economic activities.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Reference to various pieces of training and evidence of application and hybridisation of the applied skills was contextualised as empowerment due to the growth point policy. The skills acquired have fed into the growing entrepreneurship reportedly supporting the basic needs of their respective families. The centre was commended for variety and potential for much more growth. Urban women have benefitted from platforms whereby women can work and be able to fend for their families. The government and partner support created several projects which were aimed at supporting women to be empowered and fend for themselves. Reports were made on efforts to educate women on various aspects of their lives and appreciate their worth in society. Reference was made by KII2 to the presence of a school of nursing attracting qualifying applicants. However, most training was said to be done by the NGOs:

....most of the training for skills development is conducted by NGOs especially when they are introducing a new project. So most training is done in the villages because that is where most NGO work happens. With us here at the centre, we get training for women's health. Most of us do not have tertiary education and we have learnt to train ourselves using skills learnt from others... C8.

In the same vein, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was also noted as being at the forefront in stirring the skills development among women and the general welfare of women. Agricultural extension workers were also said to be working well in enhancing their farming skills. V9 reported the existence of veterinary services extension workers who have enhanced their skills through village visits, teaching them about the care of livestock.

As a result, they are not losing livestock as much as they used to because their knowledge had been enhanced. V5 also prides herself in having a permanent Agritex (ARDAS) officer who stays in the villages and often carries out training and awareness campaigns. When there is an outbreak of disease the officer informs and guides them accordingly.

Availability of work opportunities for the self and others was contextualised as empowerment due to the growth point policy. As shown above, women are mostly employing themselves as well as others in their business ventures. C8 gave the best description of the work situations at the Centre; buying and selling. C10 reiterated that those with businesses employ others and these small-scale businesses are the basis of most employment opportunities. K12 also confirmed that the light industry and the SMEs are attracting employees from all over the district.

FACTORS CONSTRAINING THE GROWTH POINT POLICY AND THE IMPACT ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES

An inquiry was made on the perceptions of the factors constraining the growth point and the effects on the lives and livelihoods of women. The proffered factors formed a trichotomous and intractable interlinkage identified as;

- Systemic Factors
- Social Factors
- Natural Factors

Submissions from both FGDs and KIs were categorised by source reflecting the dominating key factors. Systemic factors related to government functions and policy implementation. Social factors related to societal reactions and contributions to the development or lack of it. Natural factors were related to naturally occurring events/conditions or globally acknowledged phenomena.

Systemic factors were contextualised as constraints emanating from the imperfections associated with government implementation of policies and activities or situations associated with government functions. As shown in the cluster analysis below, the factors ranged from resource exploitation, infrastructural development, public-private dialogue, funding, macro-economic conditions, industrialisation and politicisation of development.



Figure 4.3 - Systemic Factors (Researcher)

The district and the province at large is endowed with natural and man-made resources. These are underutilised and as a result, slow potential development for women and communities. KII3 noted that the level of poverty for women in the district is partly due to a lack of initiatives for resource exploitation:

... well what I can say is that women can look after their families in one way or the other.... but yes, I agree that most are poor. This goes back to the district itself as having not much in terms of resource exploitation. You will also realise that we have no farms here because of the geographical location, the soils themselves are not good, we lie in regions 4 and 5 with Kalahari sands that are not good for farming. Also, there is the issue of the border with Hwange National Park.... KII3.

There is not much in advancing the agricultural value chains in the district. The council is failing to attract funding and investment to the district. KI10 revealed that as a council, they mainly lobby for development interventions such as infrastructural development and are always on the lookout for potential investors because they lack investment in the district. They have a lot of resources that remain unexploited because of a lack of investment.

As shown in the cluster analysis above, the lack of resource exploitation is related to the poor state of the infrastructure. Women from the FGD at the centre decried that it is very difficult to conduct business as they work in open spaces, when it rains, they lose out on business. C2 explained that market structures are not fully developed and they must improvise for them to work:

... the flea markets are there by name, it is just open space with no structures, Council has failed to build flea markets. We use plastics and anything we can get to make it more habitable so that we continue to work. It is also difficult because customers shun such places, they prefer buying from the shops.... C2.

Women in the village also decried the status of the infrastructure, especially relating to water and transport. Women decried that most of their time is spent looking for water, leaving less time for them to focus on their core businesses. The boreholes were reported to be far and apart:

...we have different activities such as borehole pumping (because we do not have running water). The boreholes are located far from the homes. This makes it very labour-intensive because one can have many trips to the borehole... Pumping water from the borehole is very exhausting because I need water for household use and livestock. I spend a lot of time doing this task and yet other tasks still need to be done... V6.

The road and communication infrastructure was noted as lacking, especially in the rural part. V6 was hopeful for the improvement of the network because only a few places have good networks. It was also reported that the District Development Fund (DDF) takes time without attending to roads, during the rainy season, 'omalayitsha' were reported

to shun the rural routes as a result further complicating the flow of the remittances with beneficiaries having to go up to Tsholotsho (centre) to collect their parcels.

The health facilities were also said to be largely based at the centre with the rural clinics not adequately equipped. V3 desired more fully equipped clinics so that they do not spend money on transport to the centre for medicines and consultation. As it is, they must walk long distances to the nearest clinic where they know that they will not get any medication.

KII1 acknowledged that the growth point is growing but the facilities are not improving. There is a poor sewer system and no public toilets, people relieve themselves in open spaces. This is a problem and they live in fear of disease outbreaks. The road linking the centre to Bulawayo is very poor, and KII1 said this had made transport expensive. Delivery of the farm produce to the centre has not been spared, women who get the farm produce supplies from the farmers around the district, due to poor roads affect these businesses. KII10 concurred one of the main reasons is poor infrastructural development due to limited resources. There are issues of poor roads within the district and those linking with big towns. The district has the District Development Forum to lobby for the state to attend to roads. Many times, they have been promised that the Bulawayo to Tsholotsho road will be attended to, however, it has been years and this has not happened:

....there have been some sentiments where people and companies have said they are not able to come to the district because of the road. So, the state of the road has had adverse effects on investment in the district. If they sort out this road (Tsholotsho-Bulawayo), we will have much more investment because as you are aware Tsholotsho is close to Botswana and South Africa where most of our residents work in those countries. They have done a lot in terms of developing their rural homes, even rural businesses. But their efforts have not been complemented by the development of infrastructure... KII10.

All the key informants acknowledged that the poor road network has affected the growth of Tsholotsho, deterring investments in the district. A lot of people who want to come and give help in Tsholotsho are discouraged. KII2 reiterated that women, for their social and economic development, would desire roads, well-equipped health facilities, business and residential stands, jobs, loans and industries, they want to own and run their businesses and they also want to be involved in sustainable farming. They also desire to have irrigation schemes, inputs and boreholes to promote agricultural activities (off-farm) because most women rely on farming for their livelihoods. Even in the centre, the state of service delivery was said to be deplorable, KII2 highlighted that the government offices are still incomplete:

... they also expect infrastructure in terms of good road networks that link them. Even if it is a dust road, let it be a good gravel road. Instead of a road that is not trafficable during the rainy season, they also expect facilities like clean water that is accessible. They also expect facilities like health to be improved with reliable medication supplies. They also expect our offices, government offices that are finished. As you can see, we're not finished here. It would also be expected to have offices to be manned fully, those offices that provide services. I was indicating they should have more employees... so if right now I need to go out no one will be in the office to assist the clients... KII2.

The rate of infrastructural development was said to be very slow and from the sentiments by KII2, it is evident that they are short-staffed and therefore ineffective since his, is a one-man office. Clients often come to an empty office.

POOR TELECOMMUNICATION

Related to the poor infrastructure is also the telecommunication connectivity, especially in rural areas. As highlighted by V6, there are a few places with good networks. V4 also concurred that the network is very poor with patched spots where one can go for better reception. KII2 revealed that the network is very poor if you move more than 7km from the centre:

.... in terms of communication infrastructure, if you move from here some 7 kilometres you find you no longer have network.....we would have expected to

see more boosters in Tsholotsho to reach out to the people. We are even unable to communicate with our officers inwards just because they don't have access to communicate.... K112.

Most of the women-led businesses were found to be informal and not registered. The regulations and registration for formal operations were noted, withstanding the poorly developed market infrastructure. C2 revealed that the flea markets are there by name, but the Council has failed to build flea markets. The makeshifts from which women are conducting business have not attracted good business, sufficiently enough for them to legalise and grow their businesses:

...as for me, I sell vegetables and fruits from the front/veranda of a shop where I pay 150 rand a month. But I face a lot of harassment from the shop owners.... but I don't mind because I have no other choice, it is still better than being in the open space or going around with all your stuff. If business was good, I would buy a stand and build a shop because as it is, 2 of my children have joined me in vending in street shops, we are all conducting business in the same manner where there is no growth. We read assistance to move on... I have not bothered to apply for a stand because I know I cannot pay for it and build it as well... C6.

Most women have accepted being informal and unregistered. This can be ascribed to the council not having built up business infrastructure to encourage development.

ILLEGAL SETTLEMENT

Relatedly, due to a lack of regulation and maintenance of standards, illegal settlement is booming and people building without the council's approval. This has thwarted the development, especially for accountability of the quality and quantity of service delivery. During an FGD at the centre, it was noted that the problem is that most houses have been built without council approval and it is difficult for such occupants to access services or even go to the council to complain:

... we live in places where these services are supposed to be available, but we are worse off than people in the villages. Lack of such provisions adds to our roles as women since we must make sure that we protect the family...C4.

...I agree with her (C4), at least in the village most households have Blair toilets and there is less risk of the outbreak of diseases. The problem here is that the Council waits for the NGOs to build toilets. Even the boreholes around the centre were drilled by NGOs. I wonder what the work of the council is. As you can see, they are even failing to clean the place, there is garbage everywhere.... C1.

K114 noted that about three-quarters of the houses at the centre are substandard and have no electricity and running water.

There is an increase in illegal settlements at the centre and the Council is struggling to provide for those in legal spaces. The lack of access to water has made the lives and livelihoods of women more strenuous, C1 narrates her day:

...I have many roles that I undertake in my household. Firstly, my day starts as early as 5 am. Because I don't have running water in my house, I must go and fetch water from the borehole. There is usually a very long line so the earlier you get there the better. From the borehole, I must prepare the children for school and then prepare to go to work. The roles are made difficult by the distances I must cover in preparation for the day, and everything is manually done... C1.

C3 concurred that their roles as women are determined by factors such as lack of running water and electricity in their houses. As for C3, she stays in a house without electricity and uses firewood. She reported that it is not easy to get firewood sometimes she buys from those selling around the centre, a scotch cart full of firewood costs R200 that is unaffordable for her. At times they share the cost with neighbours.

Refuse collection was reported to be a challenge. More so, several people were reported to be using the bush toilet:

...you might have noticed how filthy this place is, wherever there is a bush, people use that as a toilet, yet we have ZINWA that is supposed to provide water. Many of us use the bush and we fear for diseases because the situation gets worse every day... C7.

For those with tapped water and electricity, these were said to be hardly available. C8 reported having to go for 2 weeks without electricity and this disrupts business because the fridges will be off and there would be nowhere to store ingredients. As for water, the service is very poor, most of the time they must buy water. When there is a fault, Council takes time to repair it. C7 urged the Council to improve and not worsen the situation

because they are not seeing any improvements in the services they are supposed to offer. Because of these challenges, women find it hard to conduct their business since most of the time will be spent trying to gather the essentials for both home and work. C9 revealed that they are trying as women to fend for their families but such challenges are a burden. One cannot do without water and energy so it is either they buy or must walk some distance and spend time getting the resource for something that is supposed to be at their disposal.

Health services even at the centre were said to be poor, C8 reported that they have seen a lot of people failing to meet hospital fees for serious conditions. C7 confirmed that the doctor comes in on certain days, only nurses are in attendance and in most cases student nurses. C1 reiterated that as women, they desire to see a growth point that will provide them with the necessary factors to enable them to be independent. C2 would like the growth point to electrify all areas even in the villages with more boreholes drilled in and around the centre and road to be rehabilitated.

The public-private dialogue platforms are there but not fully functional and respected. It was expressed that people are hardly consulted for various developmental activities. C8 felt that as people residing in the growth points, they should be asked what they need and what should be done to improve their lives and the lives of women in general. Even other women leaders were said to be inactive:

....I don't know much about the policy itself, but what I know is that as people residing in the growth points, we should be asked what we need and what should be done to improve our lives and the lives of women in general.... C8.

...I think everyone agrees with me that what we want to see is a place that is growing so that we can be financially independent. We have women leaders in our district but not even a single day have they ever called a meeting to understand the challenges that we face here in the rural areas.... C1.

...we have lost hope of ever having people in the top offices come to ask us what we need. All we ask is for them to improve some facilities here so that we can work and live in safe environments... C9.

...if they would come today to ask us what we need, we will tell them to improve the facilities in the growth point first... C2.

From the above quotes, there are indications that some of the initiatives being implemented by various stakeholders lack sufficient consultation with the communities. For example, the Tsotso stove project by the Bantwana Zimbabwe was said to be good but had insufficient consultations to meet the needs of people:

... we now have tsotso stoves, a project by Bantwana Zimbabwe. The stoves are good in that they use less firewood, but they are too small for the sizes of pots that we use. A three-legged pot cannot sit on the stoves and yet these are the pots that we use for everyday cooking... V3.

... most households have tsotso stoves but they are not in use most of the time because of the capacity. If we had been asked what we wanted as energy, we would have made other options... V2.

... we understand that the tsotso stoves are meant to benefit us and make our workload bearable, but they are just there for display... V8.

The sentiments of the above participants imply that projects are imposed on the receivers of developmental projects. Consultation is therefore lacking hence the ineffectiveness of the interventions. It was therefore not surprising that all the FGD participants at the village concurred that they have several projects that have failed to take off because they do not work for them, not because they do not want them but mainly because they are not suitable for the local conditions.

In some instances when consultations are made, it was also decried that their recommendations are hardly followed:

... we usually have meetings here at the ward level where we are asked what challenges we are facing and how we think they should be addressed, we tell them but they do the opposite or do nothing.... V6.

... we have Ward Councillors that call for meetings whenever there is something that we, as villagers need to know. They promise to take our requests to the higher authorities, so we do not know whether that happens or not.... V1.

... there was also a time when the government was in the process of coming up with the new constitution and we were asked a lot of questions... we contributed as much as possible, what I do not know is whether our input was taken into consideration... V8.

...I feel that they need to implement what we request, we cannot have a situation whereby they keep asking us what we want but never do much to improve our lives... V2.

Reports were also made in that consultations and promises are made but in terms of service provision, there is nothing that comes to the community. The community members felt being used:

....last year we had some people from the Women's Development Bank who came promising us loans that we can use for projects like poultry. We filled in forms, had our pictures taken and they promised that in a month they would come back to us. To this day we have not heard from them... V10.

...such promises make us feel undermined, that is why we do not ask for a lot but enough to survive... V8.

Strategies to secure and allocate funds for the development of the district were found wanting. The district was found to lack financial institutions to lead and guide the financial needs of the people.

All the banking services are outsourced from other districts. This has seen women being vulnerable to trickery from unregistered money lenders taking advantage of the situation in the district. All women in the FGD at the centre concurred that they borrow from each other or unregistered moneylenders and are charged high interest. If they do not pay on time, they risk having their properties attached. They felt that if they had financial assistance, they would be able to expand their businesses and have regular incomes. To benefit from their growth point, they desire to have banking services restored so that they do not go all the way to Bulawayo.

The lack of financial support was not only felt in the Centre but also the Village. Often due to a lack of financial capacity, women are failing to run their projects:

....I think it is a matter of being used to the situation. We have lived our lives like this for years. As long as we have enough to eat and can pay school fees then we cannot complain. But it does not mean that we do not need more, if we had financial support we would probably be running projects like poultry... V10.

...I feel that the growth point can promote women in several ways, if we get sustainable projects, we can be able to be financially independent and not rely too much on farming... V2.

The council and other departments are failing to attract funding and investment to the district. KII10 revealed that as a council, they are always on the lookout for potential investors because they lack investment in the district. They have a lot of resources that remain unexploited because of a lack of investment. KII10 reiterated that obviously, lack of investment is one of the challenges but poor financing of the council by the government makes it difficult for development plans to be met and this impacts women too whose livelihoods are anchored on the success of the growth point. This is despite the other plans to raise funds to keep the work going, for example, revenue collection and engagement of partners to assist. KIIs noted some efforts to try and raise the investment for the district:

... so far, we still have not received any funding for that, but we hope that in the future we might have... we might receive funding for that. But in terms of investments, I know that was the purpose of setting up this office to see or champion those developments around the district. So, in terms of investment, I know that soon we will be having investors coming to the district to try and see how best we can develop the district because we have got a lot of resources. Be it minerals there are so many resources around.... KII6.

KII4 pointed out that funding is a key challenge, interventions that are implemented must be funded so that women can have livelihoods that they can rely on:

.... there is a need to capacitate the various departments in the growth point. As it is, you find that only wards and villages that are nearer the growth point are mostly the targeted ones for projects mainly because of incapacitation.... KII4.

Incapacitation due to lack of funding has thwarted development. KII8 also agreed that the performance cycle is often incomplete due to a lack of funding:

... yeah, there is still a lot to be done. There are quite several things that need to be done for the betterment of their lives. That's why we are here, the Ministry is still doing this and that.... we are also incapacitated in terms of funding because we would have wanted to fund more. In a performance cycle... sometimes we just happen to fund just a few... KII8.

KII8 emphasised that to a large extent, the intention of the policy could have been better or it could have borne some fruits if there was funding:

... the impact on women is another thing... they are helpless because they will be

looking upon us as policy implementers. But you will find we may be incapacitated in terms of funding.... KII8.

KII9 revealed that the growth point itself is not well developed to cater to the needs of women and drive them out of poverty, even government departments are not well-resourced to ensure that there is productivity to fight poverty:

... we have a lot of challenges that have stopped us from carrying out our work efficiently.

For instance, the officers that I spoke about earlier who are based in the wards, have no vehicles or motorbikes to move with ease around their respective wards. Communication is also another issue. We struggle to get through to them even for emergencies. So it becomes difficult to reach our farmer... KII9.

Tethered to the lack of funding, is the growing acute problem of donor dependency. Due to lack of funds, the government is largely dependent on the community development projects being led by NGOs. From the FGD at the centre, it was noted that often the council is waiting for the NGOs to come up with some community development initiatives:

... at least in the village most households have Blair toilets and there is less risk of an outbreak of diseases. The problem here is that the Council waits for the NGOs to build toilets. Even the boreholes around the centre were drilled by NGOs. I wonder what the work of the council is. As you can see, they are even failing to clean the place, there is garbage everywhere...C1.

...most of the training for skills development is conducted by NGOs when they have a new project that they are introducing. So most training is done in the villages because that is where most NGO work happens. With us here at the centre, we get training for women's health. Most of us do not have tertiary education and we have learnt to train ourselves using skills learnt from others...C8.

... the government should give us water and boreholes in the district so that we can have more nutrition gardens..... what we have is from the NGOs. You know that NGOs only provide start-ups, if you want to expand you must do it on your own using proceeds from the initial project...V9.

Even among the people, there is also the same dependency, there is even

now a scramble for NGO attention:

...the NGOs in this area are very selective, they do not cover the centre, only the villages because there is a belief that people at the centre are financially stable. What we get are women's health interventions... Of course, who does not need assistance? They are based here at the growth point, but they conduct their work in the villages. We have expressed our concerns to the Councillor that we also need assistance....
C3.

On being asked what type of assistance they needed from NGOs? C6 responded as follows:

...in terms of financial assistance, they can give us amounts like \$10 as revolving funds, that way we don't borrow but use the funds to boost our businesses. Such an intervention may bring a change.... **C6.**

The face of rural development is branded NGOs. This is so to the extent that people feel abandoned by the government:

...definitely, the government has forgotten us, if it was not for the NGOs we would not be having some of the things and knowledge we have. We also want to have better lives and livelihoods that we can depend on like irrigation.... **V10.**

People in the community are even emulating those receiving the humanitarian aid yet the reality should be the opposite:

...it is a struggle, it means that even at schools children are chased out of school or must borrow to survive. Those who qualify for food parcels from WFP (World Food Programme) are better placed, some of us suffer.... **V9.**

Due to the lack of government funding, much of the work for government officials is about the monitoring and regulation of NGO activities as they embrace them as partners:

....those are our partners; they have signed MOUs with the Rural District Council. I, as Councillor determine the pace of their work and direct them to areas needing interventions more. As far as their work is concerned, I will talk of my ward 22, they have done quite a lot of work and there has been a lot of investment in terms of projects, training, skills and general funding...
We are gatekeepers, we establish first if their interventions are suited to what the

people need. This is to avoid a situation where they create dependency. Some NGOs implement projects that cease to exist the moment funding is stopped. We urge them to come up with projects that can carry on after. We want to improve supplies to GMB by promoting sustainable farming that is the mainstay of women's livelihoods... KII2.

Regardless of NGOs being embraced by the government as partners, the perception in the community is clear that this is the work of the NGOs. The dependency on NGOs is too apparent and worrying. For instance, KII4 acknowledged that EMA, as a government department, is also under-resourced, and there is much dependency on NGOs. The EMA department had some projects put on hold due to poor funding, the interventions that are implemented must be funded so that women can have sustainable livelihoods.

Running a business at the growth point was found to be a challenge. This is difficult for both the local women and bigger business entities. For the women small businesses, they only generate enough for family sustenance. The money they make is not enough to expand the businesses, at times there is not even enough for restocking. Such challenges often result in one closing down. There was also a feeling that the situation is a vicious circle, trapping successive generations into poverty:

...I agree with what C6 is saying, our children are falling into this poverty trap because we have nothing to offer them, we do not generate much income and school fees are too high, so if I choose school then the business suffers and all the family members also suffer, so at times we are forced on making choices that are not good for the children and for us. I wish that the government would give us loans to support our livelihoods... C3.

...the growth point has the potential to make our lives and livelihoods better, but there are just so many challenges, we are managing but we remain poor because most essentials are out of reach. I have children who have dropped out of school because what I make is not enough to pay for all of them. I prioritised the boys to send to school... C6.

THIS IS CREATING A VICIOUS CYCLE OF POVERTY.

The instability of the currency also makes it unpredictable and unreliable

to run a business, especially small-scale:

... I am a smallholder farmer on the outskirts of the growth point. I sell my produce to the GMB but we are given RTGS that has no value and I cannot use it here, the shops do not take RTGS. We also wait for a long time for payments from GMB; by the time we receive the money it will have no value. Last year, I only got enough to pay school fees for one child... C1.

The decision to remain in business is largely based on a subsistence basis rather than a growing business. Most of the women reported that they did not have options but relied on the little profit that is only enough for their food and basics:

... I do because I do not have much of a choice, if I don't, I find myself in a worse-off position. I should get the R20 than have nothing. I hope that one day the situation can change and I can make more.C7.

....I also sell tomatoes, they rot easily and in most cases, I end up selling them at a discounted price than risk throwing them away. I have resorted to borrowing for re-stocking... C9.

Formal businesses were also reported to be facing some operational challenges in the district. Women decried the closure of the banking services:

... I mean that most of what is at the growth point has been there since I started living here and even some of the services like banks have closed. Maybe if we had banks we would get loans for our businesses... C2.

KII2 noted the closure of CBZ, the only bank that used to be at the centre. The closure has made the district vulnerable:

... well, those are the majority and like others, they also have several challenges like lack of access to capital. This puts their businesses under pressure especially those in very small businesses. We had CBZ bank but it closed leaving people vulnerable... KII2.

KII3 noted that the district is working towards attracting the banks to the district following the exit of the Commercial Bank of Zimbabwe (CBZ). However, this could be difficult given that the centre is not growing lucratively enough to attract investors. KII4 noted that the growth point is

not growing, the only growth they are witnessing is that of *Injivas* building houses and shops at the centre but not in terms of coming up with facilities such as factories. This has not happened notwithstanding the closure of the only bank that was at the centre. KII4 reasoned that this shows that there is no growth, of course, the poor economic conditions are contributing as much.

The operational costs for CBZ were said to be too high such that it ended up closing, KII8 revealed that they no longer have banks because of the cost of operation. As such they decided the cost that included the armoured vehicle that came with money from Bulawayo cost 1000 U.S. dollars per trip.

The rate of development was said to be very low if not deteriorating because the closure of the banks and the DDF vocational facility could be indicative of a deteriorated state. KII8 reasoned that the centre is improved but not to the desired extent:

... the level of development in my opinion is not that it's not marginal it's slow, the pace in terms of development like I was saying, we once had some banks instead of adding more we had banks closing shop. So I think that we are moving but at a slow pace... KII8.

Absence of the banking services had cost the district, they cannot even efficiently run loans and financial services.

...we are supposed to be rolling out loans like other districts, but we don't have an agent for the woman's Bank... KII8.

MACRO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Much of the challenges were largely linked to the ailing economy. Most largely attributed this to the economic situation of the country. It was noted that even those with trained skills such as motor mechanics are failing to make ends meet because even the clients are finding it difficult to afford the services. C1 noted that she together with her mechanic husband are struggling to make ends meet. C6 also noted that the cleaning work that she does is increasingly getting thinner, for most people are failing to

afford extra help for cleaning their houses:

... my work involves cleaning people's houses at a rate of R50 a day. Work is hard to get by because not a lot of people cannot afford extra help. I and my husband are cleaners. We have two school-going children. At times we can go for weeks without any work. It becomes very difficult to sustain the family. ... C6.

It was noted that there is not much development at the centre since the main business is just on district administrative functions rather than industrial activities. The FGD participants at the centre wished that there could be big companies investing in Tsholotsho so that they can be gainfully employed:

...our children are also joining us in these businesses, imagine everyone selling tomatoes for a living.... C5

...there is no diversity... now when you are saying it that way and it brings to the point that there is no diversity. Everyone is selling the same thing... K17.

K110 noted earlier that generally, the growth point is growing in terms of structures such as housing and retail shops. Other than that, there is not much going on. The lack of such development harms women. K13 concurred that Tsholotsho is growing but of course, is lacking critical development factors like industries that are envisaged to create sustainable employment opportunities:

... we do not have industries but what I will tell you is that Tsholotsho is endowed with several natural resources, wildlife, timber and minerals. For instance, as a council, we have contracts with timber loggers, and we have agreed that we do not want any movement of round logs outside the district. We are trying to look for investors to value add but then we have not been able to attract any. On the minerals side, of late, several people are prospecting for gold and diamond in the area, and we hope once they explore we can start some processing. On wildlife, our main aim is to expand the sale of animal hides. Once this happens there will be employment creation that will also benefit women... K13.

K18 noted that some of the components of the policy are not yet met.

The livelihoods of women in the hinterlands/village were found to be lagging. This was a sign that the rate at which development is spreading was very low. In the village FGD, it was expressed that had it been that they had

electricity like those at the centre, life would have been easier as they would dedicate more time to more productive work:

...I am not saying that we should all move to the growth point, but why can't we have what is there like electricity and water. These things can change our lives....

V8.

...all we are saying is that we also need to have the facilities that are at the growth point and we have said it many times to our leaders....times are changing but we still find ourselves in the same situation we were in many years ago... V5.

...I am 82 years old and most of the things that have been improved in our district are not much. Yes, some changes have improved our lives but to this day, I still must carry buckets of water, why is it that the development is not reaching us....

V9.

...those at the centre have much better lives and facilities than us. They have job opportunities and all other things that make life easy...V1.

There was consensus confirming that there were better services at the centre than in the villages. The village dwellers were not asking to be at the same level as urban women, but asked for improvement in their facilities so that they can be fully productive in their areas:

...I am referring to things like power, water and hospitals. Do you know that we spend more than anyone else because of our location? If I decide to go to Tsholotsho today I must pay for transport, if I want to deliver my grain to GMB I pay double. You see that our life is very difficult and for that matter, all the profits can go into transport costs...V4.

V8 acknowledged that what has been achieved at the growth point has benefited them in that shops and other facilities are available at the centre. Some years back, they would go to Bulawayo for the same services that they currently get from the centre. But the problem is that one must make a journey for the services to the centre because the trickle-down effect has not been realised, hence, they felt that it was about time they also had some satellite offices and services for even closer access.

Beyond secondary schools, the district was said to offer very limited options for skills development:

...what we have in the district is a lot of secondary and primary schools. There are

no colleges. The only training centre that used to be run by the District Development Fund closed many years ago... C5.

The main hospital was said to be training nurses but this was said not to have benefitted the locals:

... the only training offered here is for nurses. What we have is a school of nursing at the hospital. The enrolment is not fair for student nurses, most of them are from other districts even though we also have children who have applied but are not admitted... C4.

Politics was said to often permeating in developmental processes, creating unjust practices and room for corruption. Several public consultations and promises were reported to have been made only for political expedience. V1 reported that they have Ward Councillors that call for meetings whenever there is something that they, as villagers need to know. Ward Councillors promise to take their requests to the higher authorities but often this would just end at that. It was noted that such consultations are only made during election times. KII8 concurred that the political will is biased, only serving its best interests:

... then we also have got a problem to do with what I would call political will. We do our things as election gimmicks. They lack sustenance in implementation. You realise we had some policies like ESAP that died a natural death at the infant stage... KII8.

The sheer need for monetary benefits was also noted especially among those who are in influential political positions. FGD participants at the centre noted that there is more corruption in the allocation of stands by the council:

... yes, the main reasons are that we do not have the stands to build our premises and there is corruption in the allocation of business and residential stands by the council. You will find that priority is given to Injiva and those with political influence... C10.

....I have been on the waiting list for many years for both residential and business stands. But every time I make a follow up, I am told that stands are not available yet, but then I see others getting them. I have given up hope of ever getting a stand. ... C7.

FGD participants at the centre felt that the growth point has benefitted those that already have financial resources and the politically affluent. For ordinary women, it was reported that they have been left out. Even the developmental activities at the village level were also reported to have corrupt activities related to the politicisation of activities meant to benefit everyone:

...we also distribute inputs but the political situation is a barrier. These are politicised while those who get sell them... KII9.

...corruption is another thing that also impedes the smooth implementation of the growthpoint policy... KII8.

Social factors were contextualised as normative activities affecting the development of the women and the factors identified are;

- Multi-tasking and Task Shifting
- Educational Priorities

Roles of women were found to be more complicated, more so with the male migration, women were found having to do much more work to cover for the absent male partners. This has not been made easy with the poor service delivery that could have eased the household chores. C1 reported having many roles that she plays in her household. Firstly, her day starts as early as 5 am. Because she does not have running water in her house, she must go and fetch water from the communal borehole. There is usually a very long queue so the earlier she gets there the better.

From the borehole, she must prepare the children for school and then prepare to go to work. The roles are made difficult by the distances she must cover in preparation for the day. C5 agreed that most of the boreholes are not working, so one must move around looking for one that works. That is a burden because the time one spends looking for water means that she will get to do her work late. This also compounded with the need to take care of the children makes the work of the women insurmountable:

...I want to say that as women we have many roles but they are more because of the conditions we live and operate in. Even at our businesses, I must carry a huge

dish of the things that I am selling going around selling and I have a small baby that I will be having the whole day. If we can have favourable conditions, then the burden will be less. There have been promises that the council will construct houses for those with low incomes, that was a few years back but up to now nothing has happened....C2.

Even at the village level, women are often left with less time to focus on income-generating projects since much of their time is spent on house chores, more on reproductive duties than productive activities. V6 reported that her day starts at 5 am when she prepares her children for school. At 6 am she does household chores that are fetching water and pounding millet; at least twice a day, in the morning and the afternoon. Already this is time-consuming, and one must do it properly otherwise the 'isitshwala' (from pounded millet) does not taste good. V6 reiterated that as women, they undertake community duties that include burials and public meetings, so overall, their roles are overwhelming:

...had development reached us, maybe we could be having electricity at ward level to lighten the burden... V6.

EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES

The education of women is not prioritised in the community. KI12 agreed that another challenge is lack of education, most of the women are not educated, and others, even lack basic numeracy to be able to run their business ventures. The vicious circle was said to be difficult to rid of as it continues to self-create:

...you would find uneducated women who are not even capable of reading. We were not supposed, actually, by now to be having people who are not literate...

KI18.

From the FGDs, it was learnt that most women acquire some basics skills from the non-formal education offered by NGOs. C8 noted that most of the training for skills development is conducted by NGOs whenever they are introducing a new project. So, most training is done in the villages because that is where most NGO work happens. Most women at the centre do not have tertiary education and they have learnt to train

themselves using skills learnt from others. C3 confirmed that they would benefit from training such as the management of funds and the basics of how to run a small business. Some of them did not reach the secondary school level and often struggle with basic knowledge. Furthermore, C8 noted that there are no industries in the district but only a few small ones often run by those without the necessary skills. So, when people come to the centre it is these women who give them employment as assistants or in the big shops where they earn up to R300 depending on the size and nature of the job. Since most people are not educated, they just take whatever jobs are offered and available.

Three natural factors were found identified as shown in the figure below;

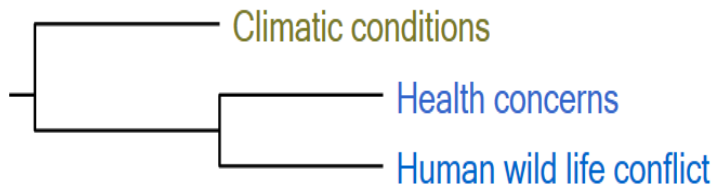


Figure 4.4 – Natural Factors (Researcher)

As a district largely based on agricultural production, its development resonates with the varying climatic conditions. KII1 revealed that agricultural production is the major livelihood in the district but it is affected by many factors such as changing rainfall patterns, use of labour-intensive methods of farming and lack of inputs. Women desire to have water and irrigation schemes to improve their livelihoods. There is a ready market for farm produce, but water is a challenge in the district. KII3 was optimistic that women can support for their families in one way or another, but they remained poor partly because of no lucrative off-farm activities owing to the district's geographical location. The soils themselves are poor, in regions 4 and 5 with Kalahari sands that are not good for farming. KII3 also describes the challenge of floods and drought as major factors in the poor economic performance in the district.

Women confirmed that they are facing challenges due to the climatic conditions mentioned above. V3 revealed that farming would be more profitable if it was done on a rotation basis. But this can only happen when there is adequate water, others also concurred:

... water limits our efforts in a big way. They say water is life, with enough water we can produce different types of crops all year round. This would improve our lives.... V8.

....we need the government to allocate more land and drill boreholes so that we can extend the nutrition gardens that have been established by the NGOs... V5.

... most of us are farmers and we depend on the rains, so our livelihoods are also dependent on the rains. When rains are poor, it means we have nothing to consume and to sell... V3.

HIV was the main health concern affecting the district mainly due to families' high mobility and separations in the community:

... first of all, the issue of HIV is still a challenge. There is a high prevalence in the district mostly because of the Injivas. You see Injivas only come home once a year, to return with HIV because they will be staying with another wife, so spousal separation is a problem..... HIV affects women more than men, so we have NGOs working with and educating the people on HIV&AIDS... KII3.

The community decried that the presence of wildlife has lost much of its efforts in agriculture. As communities, they felt that they have benefitted less from living with these wild animals. V5 revealed that one of the hardest tasks that women undertake is of having to go into the forest for firewood. Their area has elephants coming from the Hwange National Park that borders them. Women indicated that because of their fear of elephants, they must move in groups since a lot of people have lost their lives to elephants. Even going to the fields is also scary when alone. They live in fear of these animals, however, through the Council's Department of Natural Resources Board, they have been taught to coexist with wild animals but are failing to understand how humans relate to wild animals.

KII3 also noted the issues of the border with Hwange National Park. He reiterated that wild animals come to the villages and destroy habitat and

crops resulting in human-wildlife conflict. Elephants escaping from the game park destroying crops. KII3 reported that they have rangers who do PAC (Problematic Animal Control). They always try to drive them back to the park but it looks like the holding capacity at Hwange is a problem.

An inquiry was made on the perceptions of the critical role of success and effectiveness of the growth point policy in improving women's empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point. The analysis of the findings was grouped into three interlinked efforts:

- Government
- Community
- Developmental Partners

Submissions from both FGDs and KIIs were categorised by source reflecting the dominating key institutions. Government efforts related to the roles and expectations from the government, current and those not fulfilled. Community efforts were those perceived changes in attitudes and behaviours and community-based activities linked to the socio-economic development of women. Developmental partners' efforts were mostly related to rural development projects linked to the work of NGOs. KIIs almost had a balanced attribution to all three while the FGD women seemed to mostly pinpoint the government and developmental partners' efforts.

The government effort was critiqued, and six key areas emerged as the critical roles linked to (and/or lack of) success and effectiveness of the growth point policy in achieving the socio-economic outcomes of women at Tsholotsho Growth Point. The availability of markets, industrialisation, collection and utility of revenue, decentralisation, increased urbanity and the creation and functionality of the PPD platforms were the key areas considered as possible solutions.

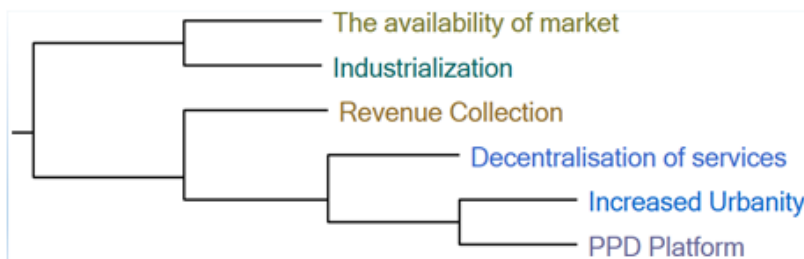


Figure 4.5 – Government Efforts (Researcher)

The Centre was said to proffer a business centre attracting customers all over the district. Business is conducted faster than back in the villages, there are a lot of people to sell to. GMB is also a critical market player credited for making the marketing of farm produce easy and accessible. Unfortunately, the market dynamics were said to be not favourable. C1 expressed that GMB has worsened their situation because of poor pay-outs, an area needing improvement. Women from the village also confirmed that they are now shunning GMB:

... if we have a good season, we make some money, but we do not sell to GMB because they don't give us the dollar or rand. Some people and companies come to buy privately. At times Ingwebu Breweries buys from us but they would have provided us with seed... V1.

The briefcase buyers would take advantage of the farmers due to the lack of a stable and reliable market. The rural women said there is a lot that they desire to have. Living off farming and petty trade was said to be risky, especially during these years when the rain seasons' patterns have changed. The farming methods used were said to be labour intensive and they have no draught power. GMB's buying price was decried low. V3 wished the government to facilitate market structures so that they are not entirely dependent on farming and be able to diversify their businesses. Development of flea markets and markets are centralised to allow people to get supplies from one place.

Debates and discussions to stimulate industrialisation were found to be lacking. KII10 and KII3 concurred that Tsholotsho is growing but not in industries. Despite the endowment with several natural resources, wildlife, timber and minerals, there is stagnation in processing and value- addition initiatives. KII8 noted that some of the components of the policy are not yet met, considering that some of them were to urbanise, industrialise, create employment and not just have service centres. All the participants felt that it would be beneficial to have big industries that can use the local resources and create employment for the locals.

The council reported collecting revenue, a critical resource for potential development at the growth point. KII10 revealed that the policy is about the provision of essential services that is the mandate of the council. To this, revenue collection is essential for rural development:

....my office collects revenue to ensure that we have our development projects. For example, we can say we want to raise money from service delivery to carry out a sewer system repair, street lighting, or a centre for women and the youth. This needs budgeting depending on what we want to achieve. So, we must have ways and means to collect that revenue, so we do fundraise activities through development levies, called "imithelo yamakhanda" in Ndebele at the village level. Then at the centre, there is service delivery where each household is supposed to pay USD12 a year to collect waste and repair drainage systems. Water has been taken over by ZINWA but we still need to ensure our services are development oriented... KII10.

The growth point has government departments offering various services that people used to travel to Bulawayo and Plumtree for. This so far has managed to make the growth point a success. NGOs and other different departments that offer social and financial assistance to women have established their bases and are now housed at the centre:

...it is a policy to decentralise, services from the major towns and cities to the rural areas. For instance, when the government was just saying from Bulawayo, let's have Tsholotsho, let's have Lupane, let's have Umguza as a development centre where development can be taking place so that at least the person who is travelling from the furthest point will not go to Bulawayo, but rather end up getting services in Tsholotsho district...we do have some services that happened

to be moved closer to the rural population, for example, we do have the district offices. We have women's affairs in Tsholotsho at the district level that means the person needs not go to Bulawayo to access services. So we have got the government departments at the district level. I think it's a milestone that one. We also have got some businesses that are functioning, as you see at the centre where people can purchase from. We also have people accessing health facilities and also pharmacies.... KII8.

However, the effectiveness of some of the services is still wanting, and the infrastructural development is delaying the availability and reliability of the services offered.

INCREASED URBANITY

The expanse of the urban built-up area and business spaces has seen an improvement in women's livelihood and quality of life. For C6, whose work involved cleaning people's houses, the expanse of the urbanity would also make their work more lucrative. KII1 revealed that women at the growth centre are like those in urban centres where facilities are within reach, they are more exposed to modern facilities than those in the village. This then puts them a step ahead. KII10 confirmed that the growth point is growing in terms of structures such as housing and retail shops. However, the pace is very slow:

...of course, we are moving towards that but the pace is a bit slow. So, we need to increase our pace so that we will reach what we want to reach. But I think going forward with the policies that are coming and with the vision, I think one day you will see this growth point obtaining a town status... KII6.

Structures and platforms for Public-Private Dialogue Platform (PPDP) were said to be available and KII3 revealed that as Council they make sure that women's issues are addressed through ward councillors who work closely with the council:

...as I stated earlier on, we have a transparency system of no segregation. Local governance is all about participation. Women are also included and if you look at our district most men are outside the country, it is women who are looking after cattle, grazing them, tending to the villages, and just doing all things development. Even in NGO-led initiatives, women's participation is high... KII3.

Despite the availability of the channels and systems, there was a strong registry of inconsistencies and partiality. FGD participants both at the centre and the village felt that they were not sufficiently consulted about developmental issues that concerned them and often projects are just imposed on them:

....I don't know much about the policy itself, but what I know is that as people residing in the growth points, we should be asked what we need and what should be done to improve our lives and the lives of women in general... C8.

...we desire to see NGOs that make a needs assessment first and then bring in projects with consent from the community... V2.

Two critical roles in the community were identified, relating to the feminisation of the business environment and the function of the remittances.

Women from the centre concurred that they benefitted in that the growth point has managed to create platforms whereby women can work and be able to fend for their families. Through the government and partner support, several projects were reported in terms of supporting women to be empowered and fend for themselves. Reports were made by women of some district efforts to educate women on various aspects of their lives and appreciate the worth of women in society. Projects being run by NGOs were reported by almost all the key informants, more importantly, women being most of the beneficiaries. Being the head of households, women were found to be more involved in the developmental activities in the district, uniquely so for the district due to the migration of men into nearby countries. As presented above, most women reported being independent and participating more in economic activities.

KII10 revealed that the growth point being a centre for economic activities has brought employment opportunities for women at the centre where there are a lot of women employed in various places:

...if you walk around and into the shops, you find that more women are employed than men and in terms of vending in the district you find that there are more

women vendors, for example, the Monday Market, it is mostly women trading and participating. So having a growth point as a centre for economic activities has enabled women to have income for their households... most women are small shop owners and of course, more women are employed in these establishments. I can therefore testify that when a shop is opened let's say a restaurant, it is women who are employed as shopkeepers or cook or waitresses in the restaurant. So if we are to carry out a survey it will reveal that it is more women employed than men. More trading is in retail, so women are a part of it. They are also participating a lot because as a country we are more into retail than manufacturing... **KII10**

KII2 also confirmed that Tsholotsho businesses are mostly run by women, most men are in the diaspora and their participation is very high. Women at the centre and in the villages too own and run their businesses. Men who have shops also have wives who own their businesses, like KII2 himself owns his shops and his wife has hers and several people were said to have that same arrangement. KII6 also felt that women are doing quite well:

...their participation is good and their projects are successful. I think maybe it's because women have got a lot of patience in terms of business. Business needs someone who is very, very patient. Yes. If you see profits not coming, you keep on trying. Men, sometimes quickly give up and say no, shift to another project if this one has failed. So, we have got so many women's groups in the district who are into livelihood projects. Again, I can give you an example, we have got a group of women who are into basketry. They produce baskets, mats and nice products, especially targeting tourists. It's a very, very expensive material that they use and some of those products are now sold as far as England and other European markets. It's a group of women, I'm only talking about women, there are no men there, it's only women. So, they are doing their thing alone... KII6.

KII9 has also noticed that women's participation is very high in most development interventions that are being spearheaded by government departments and their partners. To an extent, women have been given the chance to work and look after their families:

...whenever there is a good harvest, women from the villages come to the centre to sell their produce where there is a ready market... KII9.

The community was also said to thrive on the remittances. FGD at the centre pointed out that the growth point makes it easy to conduct business because even those who (*Omalayitsha*) bring goods from South Africa to the centre, this is an advantage because a lot of people have family in South Africa (*Injiva*). Families with *Injiva* were said to be doing well and able to build better houses and livelihoods:

...as it is every backyard here, has a cooking area resembling that of the village. It is not surprising because even the houses are substandard, and most are incomplete because of financial constraints. Those who have built to the end are usually injivas (diasporans)... C10.

... there are not a lot of economic activities here in the villages besides farming. We rely on farming a lot and from remittances from the family in South Africa and Botswana.... V6.

... I receive money and groceries every month from my husband who works in South Africa. I manage to look after my family this way, however, I still engage in farming so that he does not must send mealie meal but concentrate on other things.... V2.

...I receive money and groceries bimonthly, life is better for me and the children, we donot lack the essentials... V6.

V10... I receive money and groceries every month from my family in South Africa.

The *omalayitsha* plays a critical role in the success and effectiveness of the growth point. FGD at the village revealed that roads and communication enable "*omalayitsha*" to transport goods home all the time. Without them, they do not even know how they would survive. They are keeping them going by supplying local shops with goods. V7 felt lucky because her husband and children are in the diaspora, so they are always assured of supplies every time. V4 said remittances are a more reliable source, at least one is assured of food parcels and money every time.

The infrastructural development is, however, posing an impediment to the efficient movement of goods and services in the district. KI10 pointed out that there have been some sentiments where people and companies have said they are not able to come to the district because of the bad road. So, the state of the road has had adverse effects on investment in the district:

...if they sort out this road (Tsholotsho-Bulawayo), we will have much more investment because as you are aware Tsholotsho is close to Botswana and South Africa where most of our residents work in those countries. They have done a lot in terms of developing their rural homes, even rural businesses. But their efforts have not been complemented by the development of infrastructure... KII10.

KII3 acknowledged that they have *injiva* who are highly contributing to the economy of Tsholotsho. They have built houses, shops and have contributed to the infrastructural development of the district. KII3 reported that they currently have a group of *injivas* that have constructed a school, scooping of dams and refurbishment of clinics and could safely say that 80% of the district's GDP is coming from the *injivas*.... 'Even during drought, they bring food from outside to feed their families...KII3.

Efforts from developmental partners were acknowledged in the rural development projects, contract farming and the creation of ISALs and VSLAs.

The community is still decrying more community development projects. V4 desire to have facilities that can promote entrepreneurship activities such as poultry. V7 desired irrigation schemes, tap water and more boreholes drilled around the villages. V2 felt they would benefit from electricity, maybe a bakery industry can be opened then they can buy bread locally. KII1 expressed that agricultural production is the major livelihood in the district but it is affected by many factors such as changing rainfall patterns, use of labour-intensive methods of farming and lack of inputs. Therefore, women desire to have water and irrigation schemes to improve their livelihoods. The developmental partners were called upon to provide this assistance:

...in terms of livelihood programmes and projects, we as an office and just maybe speaking on behalf of the office and our role as an office, we monitor several projects that will be carried out by our line ministries. Different line ministries that we have in the district have got their partners, they bring in livelihoods projects ...

KII6.

KII7 revealed that the first market that farmers are forced to sell to, is the GMB. However, they are not paid well and at the end of the day, people are discouraged to take their produce to the GMB. As a result, one ends up selling to briefcase buyers and this becomes an advantage in situations where they have people grow crops on a contract basis and they know what they are dealing with:

... though they used to be there... I think they used to do contract farming even for sorghum. It's better that way... KII7.

Financial support was cited as a major challenge. All the women cited that they borrow from each other or unregistered money lenders indicating the readiness to engage in Internal Savings and Lending Associations (ISALs) and Village Savings and Lending Associations (VSLAs). Advances in facilitating more organised community-based monetary systems could help reduce the risk of high interest and trickery from unregistered money lenders.

The discussion on government, community and developmental partners' efforts in improving rural women's empowerment show that there is more that women in Tsholotsho desire in order that they can have improved livelihoods. Government efforts are central and dictate the pace for the community and developmental partners' efforts.

Moreover, women's desires that include improvement of the factors of the growth point that inhibit women's participation have been seen as contributing to the many challenges confronting the growth point itself and women as shown by the discussions from both FGDs and KIIs.

In this chapter, presented is the analysis and interpretation of data generated from Key Informants, FGDs and in-depth interviews about rural women's empowerment outcomes in the growth point thrust of Zimbabwe with a view to ascertaining the different but enmeshing strands adversely affecting women's empowerment in rural locales. The next chapter discusses the key findings of this study.

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 (Manyanhaire *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 availed. 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 provider 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.

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.

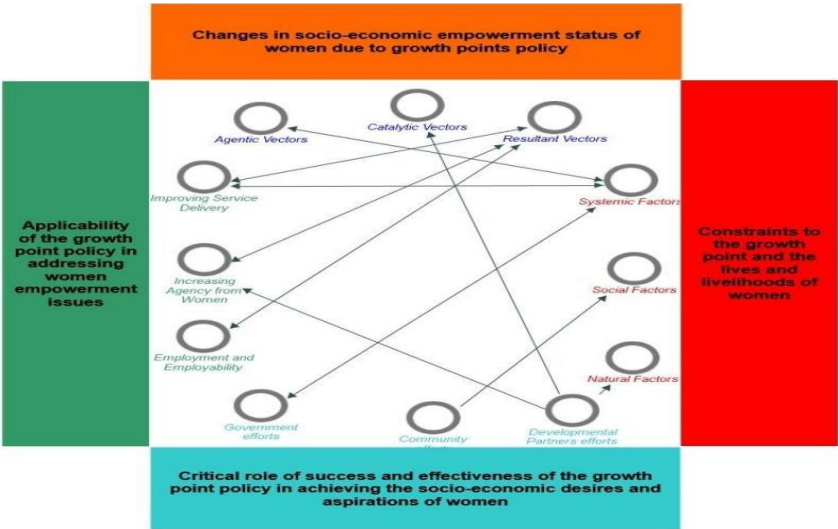


Figure 6.1- The Growth Point Policy and Rural Women's Empowerment Model (Researcher)

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.

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Synopsis

Globally, issues of rural women empowerment and women's agency, have been directly and indirectly addressed through various development and gender policies that include the growth point strategy. However, most countries abandoned the growth point strategy to pursue other approaches that appeared to be better citing its ineffectiveness. In Africa, it was largely adopted by several countries in trying to redress the rural-urban divide created by the colonial government's residual legacy of unequal development along racial lines. Zimbabwe adopted and implemented the policy in 1980, however, the growth points face stagnation hence the impact has been adverse for women in the rural economy. This study critically explored rural women's socio-economic empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe, at Tsholotsho Growth Point. The study adopted the qualitative research paradigm and data were generated using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The target population comprised of women living in the central growth point and from the hinterlands (villages) while key informants represented government departments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) located in the district and an independent analyst of the growth point policy in Zimbabwe.