THE POLITICS OF BELONGING IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

The African Journal of Inclusive Societies (AJIS) is published by SIVIO Institute and aspires to address the problem of ineffectual participation in public processes by non-state actors in Africa. The journal features independent research and promotes knowledge generation by African scholars by creating a publication space centred on collective action, civil rights, democracy and development in Africa. SIVIO Institute (SI) is an independent organisation focused on ensuring that citizens are at the centre of processes of socio-economic and policy change. It aims to contribute towards Africa's inclusive socio-economic transformation. It is borne out of a desire to enhance agency as a stimulus/catalyst for inclusive political and socio-economic transformation.

The **African Journal of Inclusive Societies** is indexed in the following databases and search engines: CrossRef.

The Politics of Belonging in Contemporary Africa: Deconstructing Mechanisms of Inclusion and Exclusion

Delta Sivalo iD

INTRODUCTION

This volume arrives at a critical juncture for the African continent. Decades after independence, and firmly within the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the rhetoric of inclusion, equity, and justice is enshrined in national constitutions, development plans, and policy frameworks from Cape Town to Nairobi (United Nations, 2015). Yet, this rhetoric often clashes with the lived realities of citizens.

This is not a gap of citizen apathy, but one of institutional responsiveness. The latest Afrobarometer (2025) report, reveals a citizenry that is actively "claiming the promise of democracy", with significant numbers attending community meetings, contacting local officials, and joining others to raise issues. Yet, this high level of engagement is met with profound skepticism about its effectiveness; in many countries, fewer than half of the citizens believetheirlocalgovernmentcouncilorsactually listen to them (Afrobarometer, 2025). This disconnect between participation (the act) and influence (the result) is the "implementation gap." This gap is not an accidental policy failure; it is a symptom of the underlying political settlement (Kelsall et al., 2022), the stable, often informal, distribution of power among elites which dictates who benefits from state institutions and whose voice is considered legitimate. The unresponsiveness of formal institutions is, therefore, a rational feature of a settlement structured for elite preservation, not broad public accountability. As Schöne and Dumani (2025) argue, when formal civic space shrinks in response to this settlement, citizen energy does not simply vanish; retreats into "pockets of democracy", resilient, everyday spaces organised around "bread and butter issues" like community gardensorlocalcarenetworks,whereparticipation is practiced away from the unresponsive gaze of the formal state.

This collection, The African Journal of Inclusive Societies (AJIS) Volume 5, is premised on the objective of moving beyond a simple mapping of who is excluded. Instead, it brings together a diverse, multi-disciplinary, and empirically rich set of papers that critically dissect the how and why, the very mechanisms through which exclusion is produced, reproduced, and contested. The volume's purpose is to re-centre the debate, shifting from a technical discussion of "inclusive policy" to a political analysis of "inclusive practice." Its core contribution is the synthesis of nine distinct case studies from South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, which, read together, provide a powerful, ground-up perspective on the structural, cultural, and environmental barriers that define belonging in contemporary Africa.

MAKING SENSE OF EXCLUSION: BEYOND PRESENCE TO POWER

The study of inclusion has often been siloed; economists study financial inclusion, political scientists study civic space, and sociologists study gender norms. The strength of this volume is its multi-sited, multi-disciplinary approach, which demonstrates that these are not separate phenomena. Rather, they are facets of a single, interlocking system of power.

The contributions here implicitly draw on established frameworks of justice and empowerment (e.g., Kabeer, 1999; Fraser, 2009), arguing that inclusion is not merely about presence (e.g., a quota for women) but about power (e.g., the ability to set agendas, command resources, and hold institutions accountable). This distinction, between presence and power, is the critical insight of this volume. It moves beyond the metrics of participation found in large studies (Afrobarometer, 2025) which quantify how many people engage, to ask the more difficult qualitative question of what happens when they do. The papers collectively demonstrate that exclusion is:

- Structural and Legal: Produced by the state itself through policy gaps, such as the precarious status of undocumented learners (Murata & Murigu)

- Cultural and Interpersonal: Enforced by patriarchal norms that question women's leadership (Oino) or by hostile institutional cultures that deploy "contrapower harassment" to silence female academics (Munyuki & Vincent).

- Economic and Financial: Driven by market logics that may, counter-intuitively, link financial inclusion to systemic instability (Mutale & Shumba) or by development models that promise a "just transition" while failing to deliver social justice.

- Environmental and Gendered: Intensified by climate change, which places a disproportionate and unpaid care burden on women (Hoveni) and frames gender-responsive agriculture as a human rights imperative (Muperi & Sisimayi).

By connecting these threads, the volume argues that exclusion is not a passive state of "being left behind"; it is the active result of political, economic, and cultural choices embedded in the prevailing political settlement.

A SNAPSHOT VIEW FROM THE CHAPTERS IN THIS VOLUME

The conceptual knot tying this volume together is the deep interrogation of the implementation gap. The contributions are clustered here to illustrate three core insights. First, several chapters reveal the deeply gendered mechanisms of exclusion. Peter Gutwa Oino (Chapter 3) provides a foundational analysis of Western Kenya, demonstrating how entrenched patriarchal cultures and norms construct barriers to women's leadership long before they reach the political arena. This is powerfully echoed by Chipo Munyuki and Louise Vincent (Chapter 7), who analyse the "contrapower harassment" faced by female academics in South Africa. Read together, these chapters expose a dual barrier: one cultural barrier to entry (Oino) and a second institutional barrier to survival for those who do manage to enter (Munyuki & Vincent).

Second, the volume breaks new ground by connecting exclusion to the intersecting crises of climate and care. Jamela Basani Hoveni (Chapter 2) offers a poignant ethnographic study from rural South Africa, revealing how climate impacts intensify the "triple burden" on grandmothers, who must navigate the unpaid, intersecting demands of childcare and eldercare with dwindling resources.

James Tauya Muperi and Tapiwa Patson Sisimayi (Chapter 5) extend this analysis from Zimbabwe, re-framing this gendered burden not merely as a development challenge, but as a failure of human rights. They argue for "synergies of convenience" where gender-responsive climate-smart agriculture is treated as a non-negotiable legal and moral obligation.

Finally, the collection provides a sober, critical assessment of the limits of policy. These chapters serve as cautionary tales, demonstrating that even "inclusive" policies and platforms can reproduce exclusion. This critique of a "best-practice" model resonates with Tinashe Gumbo's (Chapter 6) analysis of national dialogue initiatives in Zimbabwe, which shows how a supposedly inclusive process can fail to engage key stakeholders, thereby preserving old power hierarchies. This critique of policy failure is further detailed in three powerful case studies. Charles Murata and Winnie Wothaya Murigu (Chapter 1) expose the structural barriers (xenophobia, policy ambiguity) that deny undocumented Zimbabwean children in South Africa their right to education, despite clear legal frameworks. Perhaps most counter intuitively, Japhet Mutale and Darold Shumba (Chapter 4) present a quantitative challenge from Zimbabwe, suggesting that the drive for financial inclusion, a core SDG target, may have a significant negative relationship with banking stability, forcing a hard reconsideration of how development goals interact.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In different ways, the nine contributions in this volume answer the question: "Why does inclusion fail?" The epistemic knot tying these chapters is the demonstration that inclusion is not a technical problem solvable by a "better policy," but a deeply political, cultural, and economic contest over power, resources, and belonging.

This collection's primary contribution is its multi-sited, empirical grounding of this "implementation gap." The authors have moved beyond diagnosing victimhood to analysing the systems of power that produce marginalisation, as well as the strategies of agency used to resist it.

The implications for future research are clear. First, while several papers document agency and resistance (Munyuki & Vincent; Oino), a deeper inquiry is needed into successful, sustainable models of collective action that have translated "voice" into "influence." This remains the central challenge for the continent. The new Afrobarometer (2025) data confirms that citizens are already participating; the failure is not one of citizen apathy but of institutional responsiveness. The next generation of scholarship, which this volume aims to instigate, must therefore focus on deconstructing the institutional, political, and cultural barriers that sever the link between participation and power, barriers that, in effect, constitute the political settlement (Kelsall et al., 2022) itself.

It must also, as Schöne and Dumani (2025) suggest, learn to identify, protect, and build "horizontal" and "vertical" linkages for these informal "pockets of democracy", such as the care networks in Hoveni's work (Chapter 2), or the farmer groups in Muperi & Sisimayi's study (Chapter 5), as these are the critical sites of "democratic renewal from below."

Second, this volume is heavily weighted toward Anglophone Southern and Eastern Africa. Comparative research from Francophone and Lusophone contexts is essential to test whether these mechanisms of exclusion are universal or context-specific.

Finally, the collection poses new causal questions, particularly the provocative link between financial inclusion and instability (Mutale & Shumba), that demand urgent, further quantitative and qualitative testing.

This volume was brought together through a rigorous, double-blind peer-review process, and we are confident that all contributions adhere to the highest ethical standards. Ultimately, the chapters all set an invigorating agenda by providing the critical, ground level evidence required to move from inclusion as rhetoric to inclusion as practiced, resourced, and lived reality.

REFERENCES

Afrobarometer. (2025). Citizen engagement, citizen power: Africans claim the promise of democracy. Afrobarometer.

Fraser, N. (2009). Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world. Columbia University Press.

Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. Development and Change, 30(3), 435–464. doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125

Kelsall, T., Schulz, N., Ferguson, W. D., vom Hau, M., Hickey, S., & Levy, B. (2022). Political settlements and development: Theory, evidence, implications. Oxford University Press.

Mamdani, M. (1996). Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism. Princeton University Press.

Schöne, T., & Dumani, N. (2025). Pockets of democracy: Ideas for democracy support in restrained contexts. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

United Nations. (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development. UN General Assembly. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

Overcoming Barriers: Intercultural Education and the Integration of Undocumented Zimbabwean Migrant Children in South Africa

Charles Murata – Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Germany (iD)

Winnie Wothaya Murigu – Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Germany

ABSTRACT

Undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa face significant barriers to accessing education despite national and international legal frameworks guaranteeing their right to schooling. This paper explores the structural and institutional challenges hindering undocumented migrant children's educational access, including policy ambiguities, xenophobia, and financial constraints. Using a qualitative exploratory approach, the study employs discourse and policy analysis to examine challenges faced by Zimbabwean undocumented children in accessing education in South Africa. The paper uses an intersectional approach to analyse these challenges and suggests the development of intercultural competence within the school system to mitigate discrimination and facilitate the successful integration of undocumented migrant children. Findings indicate that legal inconsistencies, restrictive school admission policies, widespread xenophobic attitudes, otherisation, and societal prejudices largely contribute to the exclusion of these children. Intercultural education emerges as a viable strategy to promote inclusivity, tolerance, and equal educational opportunities. The paper advocates for policy reforms that align with South Africa's constitutional commitments and international human rights obligations for child education. By embedding intercultural competency in teacher training and curriculum design, South African schools can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for migrant children.

Key words: Children migrants, xenophobia, intercultural competence, integration

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the structural and institutional barriers hindering undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children's access to education in South Africa. The aim is to contribute insights to the growing global sociopolitical debate on the undocumented migrants' issue, which has dominated contemporary political discussions. The rising tide of populism and anti-migration sentiments within developed regions has also influenced political discourse in the Global South, with South Africa being notably impacted by such dynamics (Crush et al., 2017; de Haas et al., 2019a; Ruedin, 2019). This has fuelled political debates within the South African context, with politicians continuing the use of segregatory terminologies such as 'wave' and 'influx' of undocumented migrants from neighbouring countries, including Zimbabwe. Such sentiments spark scholarly debates on whether migration has undeniably become an intrinsic part of contemporary global development processes or a problem to be solved (Castles, 2009; de Haas et al., 2019b). Of note, from South Africa, the issue of undocumented migrants has given rise to hate politics, exclusion and institutionalised xenophobic movements (Crush et al., 2017; Gordon, 2010; Neocosmos, 2008).

Such segregations and xenophobic movements remain apparent, as undocumented migrants in SA are estimated to be between 500,000 and 2.2 million (Maunganidze et al., 2021), including 642,000 displaced and refugee migrant children (UNICEF, 2020). The South African Department of Social Development (2021) has indicated that

a significant proportion of these children are from Zimbabwe, although the number is difficult to ascertain. Such claims have been substantiated by an Al Jazeera report, which highlighted that by mid-2018, over 175,000 undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children resided in South Africa (Krige & Panchia, 2020). Noteworthy factors contributing to this phenomenon include the porous borders between these two countries, geographical proximity, and economic opportunities in South Africa, which serve as catalysing factors, while increased poverty and political instability in Zimbabwe increase people's aspirations to migrate (de Haas, 2021; Bloch, 2008; Gordon, 2010; Crush et al., 2017). These dynamics have led to various migratory patterns, including children arriving alone at the Musina border, some born to irregular migrants, and those who migrated with their undocumented parents (South Africa Department of Social Development, 2021; Crush et al., 2017). Thus, the status of undocumented migrant children encompasses both accompanied and unaccompanied minors, including those seeking refuge (Vižintin, 2022).

While accurate figures for undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa remain elusive, the conceptualisation of undocumented children is a pressing need (UNICEF, 2020). With many variations in its definitions, the term "undocumented migrant child" in this paper refers to any individual under the age of 18 who lacks the official documentation required for identification or legal status (South Africa Department of Social Development, 2021). By nature of their status, these undocumented migrant children are in

acute need of accessing fundamental social protection services such as education, healthcare, and social support (South African Government News Agency, 2017; UNICEF, 2020), which is deemed a challenge in a hostile community such as South Africa. Despite having sound legal frameworks (such as the South African Education Policy) meant to protect all children, undocumented migrant children's access to education is marred with challenges (Landau & Amit, 2014; Crush & Dodson, 2017). Policy gaps and ambiguities lead to discrimination, xenophobia, and racism within schools (White & Rispel, 2021). Without proper documentation, these children face barriers to enrolment, and negative societal attitudes, fuelled by anti-immigrant rhetoric, further hinder their educational opportunities, perpetuating exclusion and limiting their prospects (Ruedin, 2019; Crush et al., 2017).

The lack of educational support highlights the broader integration challenges faced by these undocumented migrant children. Education is a crucial component for successful integration (Grant & Portera, 2017; Vižintin, 2022); hence the question still remains: can development of intercultural competence in the education system (Vižintin, 2022) offer a just solution to successful integration of these undocumented children in South Africa? Consequently, many scholars (Hahl et al., 2015; Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt, 2013; Palaiologou & Dietz, 2012; Grant & Portera, 2017; Rignarsdóttir & Blöndal, 2015; Robson et al., 2015; Vižintin, 2022) have significantly contributed to the literature on intercultural education, advocating for its theoretical and practical value in ensuring access to education for all. Therefore, this

paper seeks to answer two central questions: 1) What are the primary legal, institutional, and societal barriers preventing undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children from accessing education in South Africa, despite constitutional guarantees? 2) How can the implementation of an intercultural education model serve as a practical framework to dismantle these barriers and foster genuine integration? To the best of our knowledge, this is the first inquiry that proposes an additional approach, such as the intercultural education model, to the South African context in an attempt to address the matter of undocumented migrant children. Following this introductory part of the paper, the next sections are presented as follows: methodology, legal frameworks, challenges, and intercultural model.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach is adopted for this study, as it allows for a nuanced analysis of the sociopolitical and institutional barriers that undocumented migrant children encounter in the education sector. The study integrates discourse and policy analysis to examine South Africa's legal and institutional frameworks concerning the right to education for undocumented children. The paper relies on secondary data sources, including legislative and policy documents, such as the South African Schools Act (1996), the Refugee Act (1998), and international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Scholarly literature on migration, xenophobia, and access

to education for migrant children in South Africa was incorporated. It also encompasses reports from organizations such as UNICEF, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), and academic think tanks that document the challenges of undocumented migrant children. Media sources and discourse analysis were used to examine prevailing public and political narratives around migrant children's access to education.

To further develop a solid, coherent argument, this study employed a critical discourse analysis to examine the language used in policy documents and media reports, identifying underlying assumptions and biases related to undocumented migrants. A policy analysis was also conducted to map the inconsistencies and ambiguities between South Africa's constitutional commitments and the practical implementation of school admission policies. Thematic analysis was used to synthesize findings from secondary literature and reports, identifying recurrent barriers such as 'gatekeeping by schools,' 'financial exclusion,' and 'internalized xenophobia.'

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON CHILD EDUCATION IN SA

In terms of policy, South Africa proves to be ahead in supporting the inclusion of migrant children in its educational sector, as several key policies and legal frameworks have been established. For instance, the South African Schools Act of 1996 and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Section 29) guarantee the right to basic education for all children within the country, regardless of their legal status (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, section 29; South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, section 3). These constitutional and educational acts complement the Refugee Act 130 of 1998, which ensures that refugee and asylum-seeking children, including undocumented immigrants, are entitled to primary education and healthcare services (Refugee Act 130 of 1998). Moreover, the South Africa Department of Education mentioned that South Africa's Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (4 of 2000), commonly referred to as the Equality Act, safeguards individuals in educational settings against discrimination on any grounds, including nationality or legal status (South Africa Department of Education, 2018).

In addition, Section 15 of the South African National Admission Policy (1996) allows for the conditional admission of undocumented learners, although its application remains inconsistent across different schools (Crush et al., 2017). South Africa is a signatory to major international initiatives—including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child—which guarantee universal rights for all children, specifically their right to education, and obligate the country to uphold these rights (United Nations, 1989; Organization of African Unity, 1990; UNICEF, 2020). These policies, when effectively implemented, play a crucial role in mitigating the barriers faced by undocumented migrant children and promoting their equitable access to education in South Africa (Sayed & Motala, 2012).

Despite the existence of these legal frameworks, undocumented Zimbabwean

migrant children in South Africa continue to encounter numerous barriers to accessing quality education (Chiweshe, 2023). Therefore, it is imperative to address these policy gaps and ambiguities within the South African educational system to safeguard the rights of these vulnerable children and facilitate their successful integration.

Intersectional Elements in Migrant Children Discrimination

Intersectionality theory, first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), offers a valuable framework for understanding the complex challenges faced by undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa's education system. This theory posits that individuals experience multiple, intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination based on their various social identities, such as race, gender, class, and nationality. In the context of this paper, intersectionality can elucidate how the overlapping identities of being a child, a migrant, undocumented, and potentially of a different race or ethnicity compound to create unique barriers to educational access and integration (Scuzzarello & Moroşanu, 2023).

Using intersectionality theory, we examine how the multiple marginalised identities of undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children interact to produce specific forms of disadvantage within the South African education system. For instance, these children may face discrimination not only due to their migrant status but also because of their race, ethnicity, local people's perceptions, language barriers, and socioeconomic status (Hanna, 2022). This intersectional approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the structural and institutional challenges these children

encounter, moving beyond single-axis analyses that might overlook the complexity of their experiences. Furthermore, intersectionality can inform policy recommendations by highlighting the need for multifaceted interventions, such as the development of intercultural competence, that address the interconnected nature of discrimination and exclusion faced by these vulnerable students (Vižintin, 2022; Collins & Bilge, 2020; Yuval-Davis, 2015).

Intercultural Competency Model in Education

In trying to offer a sustainable solution to the ongoing discrimination of undocumented migrant children in education fraternity, Milton Bennett's (1986) intercultural theory has remained relevant in intercultural education, including the successful integration of migrant children into the education sector. The model is a framework for understanding how individuals perceive, think, and act in cross-cultural situations (Bennett, 1986). This theory identifies that individuals go through several stages as they become more inter-culturally competent. These stages include denial, defence, minimisation, acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Bennett, 1986). These stages of cultural adaptation from denial to integration provide the lens through which this study can borrow insights. Recently, scholars have now used the theory to assess how the development of intercultural competence within schools can mitigate discrimination and foster inclusion (Vižintin, 2022; Chiswick & Miller, 2002), highlighting the model's significance in addressing educational disparities and promoting equitable outcomes for migrant children. The development of an intercultural competent education environment is a

pedagogical approach that fosters an inclusive and respectful learning environment by developing intercultural competence among students and educators (Bennett, 1986). This model emphasizes understanding and valuing cultural diversity, promoting dialogue, and encouraging engagement with different cultural perspectives (Bennett, 1986).

Researchers have consistently emphasised the importance of intercultural competence in educational settings (Grant & Portera, 2017; Vižintin, 2022), advocating for its theoretical and practicality to promote the successful integration of migrant children. Considering its tenets, the development of intercultural competence can be ideal for the South African school system, and it might be a critical strategy to ensure inclusion and academic success of undocumented migrant children. Notable scholars (Palaiologou & Dietz, 2012; Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt, 2013; Hahl et al., 2015; Rignarsdóttir & Blöndal, 2015; Grant & Portera, 2017; Vižintin, 2022) have contributed significantly to the discourse on intercultural education, underscoring its potential to bridge cultural divides and foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Educators can help students navigate these stages by providing cross-cultural learning and adaptation opportunities. Understanding the challenges and opportunities of educating migrant children from diverse cultural backgrounds becomes easier through cognisance of levels of intercultural competence. From this model, Bennett suggests that societies will reach the integration stage, where individuals can synthesize diverse cultural perspectives and create new ways of thinking and behaving.

Several studies (Aguado-Odina et al., 2017; Hernandez et al., 2013; Leeman & Reid, 2006) have examined the applicability of Bennett's theory in the education of migrant children. For example, in a survey conducted by Leeman and Reid (2006) in Australia and the Netherlands, researchers suggested cultural awareness training for teachers, cross-cultural dialogue among students, and creating a culturally responsive learning environment to incorporate migrants' children. Similarly, Hernandez et al. (2013) adds that educators can help students move through intercultural stages by providing opportunities to support the development of language skills and create a culturally inclusive learning environment. Moreover, a study conducted in Spain reveals that intercultural competence fosters mutual respect and understanding of underlying barriers to integrating migrant children, supporting their academic success (Aguado-Odina et al., 2017).

In this paper, our argument concurs with Bennett's (1986) intercultural education's relevance, as we suggest a need to develop intercultural competence in the South African education system to reduce discrimination and ensure the successful integration of undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children. This would help undocumented migrant children and other local students develop intercultural competence. Educators can support equitable academic success by creating a favourable learning environment.

DEFACTO DISCRIMINATION OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANT CHILDREN IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

In South Africa, there is an expanding body of literature regarding the inclusion and exclusion of migrant children, including refugees (Gordon, 2010; Landau & Amit, 2014; Landau et al., 2011; Nyamnjoh, 2010; Pinson & Arnot, 2010; White & Rispel, 2021). White and Rispel identified policy gaps and their adverse effects on undocumented migrant children in South Africa, leading to discrimination, xenophobia, and racism, phenomena often overlooked in migration studies focusing on the Global South (White & Rispel, 2021). Anti-immigrant rhetoric from politicians and the general public is prevalent in South African media (Crush et al., 2017; Ruedin, 2019) and shapes societal attitudes toward migrants. These attitudes translate into socioeconomic exclusion, limiting individual rights of irregular migrants, particularly those of the undocumented children (Crush & Dodson, 2017; Landau & Amit, 2014).

Pinson and Arnot (2010) highlighted the significant barriers undocumented migrant children face in accessing education, primarily due to discriminatory attitudes within school environments that hinder their access to quality educational opportunities. In amplifying the implications of such discriminatory attitudes towards migrant learners in South Africa, Helen Hanna's publication on multi-vocal storytelling and migrant learners in South Africa underscores that racialised and ethnicised perceptions about migrant children contribute to xenophobic and Afrophobic sentiments, fostering a discriminatory and hostile learning atmosphere (Hanna, 2022). Hanna's findings corroborate with several studies focusing on the educational challenges experienced by refugee children in South Africa (Meda, 2017; South African Human Rights Commission, 2019) highlighting the prevalence of discrimination against undocumented children, albeit the fact that these studies often fall short of proposing sustainable solutions to address the issue.

As efforts to ensure educational support to these undocumented migrant children, the South African government subscribed to and implemented some supporting legal frameworks. The South African government is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Both charters and the Children's Act advocate for children's universal rights. Soon after apartheid in South Africa, the school system implemented transformative policies to address historical racialised inequalities (Soudien, 2007). Learners have the right to quality, non-discriminatory education under international and national law (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, section 29; South African Schools Act, 1996b; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Section 27(g) of the South African Refugee Act No. 130 of 1998 guarantees access to primary education and healthcare to the children of refugees and asylum applicants, including undocumented immigrant children (South African Refugee Act, 1998). In addition to that, there is a national curriculum, an extensive schedule of

assessment, and a range of policies on inclusion in education (Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, 2018). These efforts aim at buttressing the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000, South Africa's anti-discrimination law covering all grounds. The Act prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth (Republic of South Africa, 2000).

Despite legislation that forms the basis for the right to education in South Africa, undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children continue to face various forms of discrimination, which deny them the opportunity to enrol in public schools (Chiweshe, 2023). The genesis of the discrimination lies within the legal contradictions between the constitutional right to education for everyone and sections 39 and 42 of the Immigration Act, which restricts the provision of training or teaching to irregular immigrants ('illegal aliens'). The Immigration Act No. 13 of 2002 gives a mandate to the Department of Home Affairs to "detect and deport illegal foreigners" as well as "inspect institutions of learning to ensure that illegal foreigners are not enrolled therein" (Government of South Africa, 2002). These ambiguities remain a legal barrier limiting undocumented migrant children from being recognised by the South African government, and schools responded likewise by restricting the admission of these undocumented migrant children (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019).

There are some ambiguities regarding policy interpretations in different contexts concerning educational access for undocumented migrant children. It is still unclear whether Section 15 of the South African National Admission Policy (1996), which states that schools may conditionally admit undocumented learners, creates a discretionary right of admission for undocumented migrant children in South Africa. Giving exclusive rights to schools creates street-level bureaucracy, and schools act as gatekeepers or agents of immigration control (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014).

Additionally, schools have intrinsic administrative structures and fee systems that disadvantage undocumented migrants (Sayed & Motala, 2012). Previous research on Zimbabwean migrant families in South Africa has shown that high fee structures present significant barriers to children's education, especially for those whose undocumented parents often work in informal, unregulated market sectors and face acute financial hardship (Buckland, 2011; Crush & Tawodzera, 2014). The financial burden extends beyond tuition fees to include additional costs such as uniforms, transportation, and extracurricular activities (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019). Consequently, undocumented migrant children are frequently excluded from full participation in educational programs, further exacerbating their marginalisation (UNICEF, 2020). Addressing these financial barriers is crucial to ensuring equitable access to education for all students, irrespective of their legal status (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014).

Moreover, the South African Human Rights Commission (2019) noted the cost of schooling (including meals and stationery) as a significant blow to undocumented Zimbabwean migrant learners. Despite facing other burdens, such as transportation, schools are not allocating fee waivers and grant support for the most vulnerable undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014). The curriculum does not address the lack of support, as the media and politicians consider Zimbabweans in South Africa as the source of continued inequality among the local population, criminality, and unemployment (Nhemachena et al., 2022). Failure to support vulnerable migrant children creates a discriminatory barrier for undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children from low-income families who cannot afford living costs.

Undocumented migrant learners encounter documentation-related discrimination that prevents them from accessing education at par with the local children (Hanna, 2022). Discrimination is based on entrance documents (e.g., birth certificate, evidence of immunisation, transfer card from previous school, and proof of age) (Motha et al., 2005), which are a nightmare for the undocumented parents to access. Such a hindrance was highly pronounced by UNESCO (2018), which highlights that the lack of documentation, combined with xenophobia and prejudice, significantly heightens the risk of undocumented migrant children being denied entry to schools. This has been exacerbated by the failure of school curricula to address these forms of discrimination, which can intensify exclusion rather than foster protection or inclusion for migrant learners (UNESCO, 2018).

Sayed & Motala (2012) further emphasise that educational institutions often mandate a certain level of proficiency in Afrikaans for undocumented migrant learners. This requirement poses significant challenges for these students, as their primary languages of instruction in their home countries are typically English and their native mother tongues, such as Shona or Ndebele. The linguistic hegemony ultimately leads to linguicide of these children's local dialects and champions acculturation rather than integration. Consequently, this linguistic barrier hinders their ability to access some of the material and adapt to the South African educational system, which failed to recognise their linguistic marginality. Thus, language proficiency requirements exacerbate the educational marginalisation of undocumented migrant children and impede their academic progress and social inclusion in the school environment.

Research done by White and Rispel (2021) shows that undocumented Zimbabwean children cannot access their metric examination certification, evidence of educational success in South Africa. A metric certificate is a university/college or job market entry qualification (Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, 2018). While a child may not be denied the national senior certificate due to a lack of a birth certificate, the exam certificate cannot be issued without one, leaving the learner without proof of success (Motha et al., 2005; UNESCO, 2018). The South African Human Rights Commission (2019) confirms that limiting undocumented migrant children's access to proof of educational success affects their integration into the job market. In most cases, Zimbabwean un-

documented parents cannot approach Home Affairs to process documentation for their children, as they fear deportation and sometimes, they lack precise information on how, where, and when they may file birth certificates for their children (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019).

Many Zimbabweans in South Africa are economic migrants, which is not within the international framework of refugee status. To be granted asylum or refugee status in South Africa, a person must fall under the categories of the Refugee Act. Unfortunately, many Zimbabweans do not fall under this category, and they live in liminal spaces as undocumented migrants invisibilising themselves, fearing and evading arrests from law enforcement agencies (Bloch, 2008). Even if they try to access documentation services for themselves and their children, the Department of Home Affairs is frequently known for its systematic exclusion of undocumented migrants, soliciting bribes in exchange for services, delaying the provision of study permits, resulting in registration delays, and displaying xenophobic attitudes through derogatory remarks or generally acting belligerently.

The education curricula do not address the language barrier to enhance the successful integration and inclusion of migrant children in South Africa. Undocumented Zimbabwean children often come from homes that speak Shona and Ndebele. Research by Hanna (2022) identified that migrant children face social exclusion due to speaking English in a 'foreign' accent or having 'blacker' skin than other South African learners and being negatively stereotyped by teachers and co-learners. The language of command only recognises diversity among local students rather than migrant children (Hanna, 2022). Such incidences fall short of the aim; ideally, there is disconnect between the societal endeavour of creating a rainbow nation vis-à-vis the aspect of xenophobia and Afrophobia (Hanna, 2022). The policy did not give leeway to ensure recognition of migrants' linguistic challenges and how to assist them.

Widespread xenophobic and Afrophobic attacks directly impact Zimbabwean migrant children. Mawadza and Banda (2016) argue that undocumented Zimbabweans are mis-represented in the media and migration literature, resulting in criminalisation and victimisation. This has been highly pronounced by the Democratic Alliance (DA) Limpopo (2025), attributing irregular Zama Zamas, including Zimbabweans, to robbery, vandalism, violence, and accidents in South Africa. Madimu (2022) further documented that unlawful gold miners are regularly arrested, prosecuted, and deported. These are usually the parents of those undocumented children who face such a tragedy. With the basic understanding that schools are a microcosm of more com-prehensive social processes, it is conceivable that learners in the school space will be affected by negative attitudes and actions toward migrants that exist outside the school gates (Hanna, 2022).

Moreso, Zimbabwean undocumented migrant children face discrimination and prejudice from their peers and teachers based on their nationality, with the broader sentiment that their parents are taking jobs from the local

people (Krige & Panchia, 2020). Parental non-involvement and non-recognition in broader societal transformations reduce and disrupt intercultural dialogue, which considers parents as informed role-players in the assessment and development of their children (Vižintin, 2022). Living in such an environment can lead to social isolation and a lack of support, negatively impacting migrant children's academic performance.

The systematic provision of guidance is mainly limited to local students. This support includes the routine provision of advice (e.g., teaching assistants and homework support) and the systematic provision of financial resources (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019). Additionally, undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children may not have access to support services, such as tutoring or counselling, to help them succeed in school (Ruedin, 2019). Lack of support excludes undocumented Zimbabwean children from competing with native South African children, ultimately affecting their access to quality education (Krige & Panchia, 2020). Such de facto discrimination and prejudice are intersecting inequalities (Keller et al., 2023), which create detrimental barriers limiting the integration of people with diverse cultures. States, schools, and communities must work together to create an inclusive and supportive environment that values diversity and provides equal opportunities for all students, herein referred to as the development of intercultural competence.

The exclusion of undocumented children in the South African education sector is an orchestrated discrimination hinged on policy, xenophobia, and Afrophobia. Utterances of the non-discrimination approach by the Department of Basic Education seem to be rhetoric, as discrimination against undocumented Zimbabwean children is an ongoing challenge, as these children face prejudice and stereotypes by peers and educators, reducing their integration into the education system (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019). The subsequent section explains the significance of advocating for intercultural competence for the inclusion of undocumented migrant children in South Africa.

AN APPRAISAL OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Based on the challenges mentioned earlier and the nature of vulnerabilities among undocumented migrant children, there is a need to develop intercultural competence in the South African education sector. The model may enhance the successful integration of these undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa. Intercultural education is essential for educators working with diverse student populations, including migrant children (Vižintin, 2022). The intercultural education concept focusses on the integration of migrant children in a process described by Vižintin as a 'two-way (or indeed multi-directional) process as the programs and measures of integration policies are directed toward migrants and the majority population and encourage reciprocal adaptation' (2022 p. 2). The concept follows seven steps illustrated

by Vižintin (2022): 1. Interculturality as a principle, 2. Systematic support for Inclusion, 3. Intercultural competence, 4. A multi-perspective curriculum, 5. Intercultural dialogue, 6. Cooperation with migrants' parents, and 7. Cooperation with the local community. The suggestion of this paper is on the development of intercultural competence, aiming at addressing discrimination of undocumented learners at the school level.

The Council of Europe defines intercultural competence as the ability to understand and appreciate the differences between cultures and to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (Council of Europe, 2016). The capacity is driven mainly through acquiring knowledge by teachers so that they will 'professionally and competently react to intolerance and prejudice against migrant children' (Vižintin, 2022, p. 90). Since teachers are products of discriminatory educational models (Nieto & Bode, 2008), acquiring knowledge about migration encourages them to analyse discriminatory teaching materials and address other exclusionary elements in an everyday school environment (Vižintin, 2022). These elements include essential grey areas of the policy, promoting social cohesion, and reducing cultural tensions between local and migrant children in South African schools.

Intercultural competence promotes understanding, tolerance, and respect for different cultures (Portera, 2008). The model fosters understanding and tolerance between people of different cultures, which can help to reduce prejudice and discrimination. The model creates an inclusive educational environment that recognises and values diversity (Palaiologou & Dietz, 2012; Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt, 2013), which can, in turn, help to overcome some of the challenges faced by undocumented Zimbabwean learners in South Africa. The idea translates that teachers with intercultural competence can better create inclusive and supportive learning environments for migrant children.

Through developing intercultural competence, teachers and learners combine knowledge, skills, and relations appropriate to the environment and involve emotions, values, and motivations (Vižintin, 2022). When equipped with the knowledge, South African teachers will be promoting interculturality that is reciprocal, where undocumented children's language is valued, learned, and supported, which makes migrant learners become part and parcel of the education system that respects their culture. The idea reduces discriminatory speech purported against undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa.

A study conducted in the United States found that teachers with intercultural competence were more likely to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices, which can enhance the academic achievement and social-emotional well-being of migrant children (Lee et al., 2014). Culturally responsive teaching involves adapting instructional strategies to meet the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Adaptive mechanisms bring a friendly environment where parents of migrant children participate in the intercultural dialogue and assist in the decision-making of child education (Vižintin, 2022). The OECD (2015) noted that educators who possess

intercultural competence can better understand the needs and perspectives of migrant children and their families and are more likely to create welcoming and inclusive learning environments. Teachers and school authorities became crucial in assisting undocumented migrant children with immediate needs, such as grant support and fee waivers (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019). In this regard, interculturality is particularly important in multicultural societies, where individuals from different backgrounds may come into contact regularly.

The European Parliament (2016) and the Council of Europe (2016) emphasise that intercultural competence is a lifelong process, comprised of critical skills that promote diversity, mutual understanding, and inclusion in democratic societies (European Parliament, 2016; Council of Europe, 2016). According to Vižintin (2022), teachers play a crucial role in developing a competent intercultural environment. If South African teachers establish intercultural competence, they will have empathy (a condition for understanding others), respect for other people's opinions, open-mindedness to new cultures, tolerance for various misunderstandings, eagerness to acquire new knowledge, self-reflexivity, interpersonal skills to interact with different cultures, and the ability to adapt to other people's values (Vižintin, 2022). Considering this, policies need to support continuous learning for teachers and other significant players to ensure the integration of migrant children.

Following all the seven steps highlighted by Vižintin (2022) would not be feasible in this short paper but highlighting them would give an overview to understand how successful integration of migrant children can be enhanced through developing intercultural competence. However, this section dwells upon intercultural competence, a critical skill for educators working with undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa. Embracing and encouraging this competency can help promote understanding and empathy, facilitate communication, adapt teaching strategies, address language barriers by introducing migrants' languages in school curricula, and encourage cultural exchange, all of which can contribute to the successful integration of undocumented migrant children into the South African education system.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the discrimination of undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa, which affects their successful integration into the education system. It emphasises the need to develop intercultural competence in the South African school system to address these challenges. The paper employs qualitative exploratory research by analysing policies, relevant literature, and think tank reports. It adopts Milton Bennett's intercultural theory to understand the challenges and suggests developing intercultural competence to integrate undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa successfully. Intercultural competence, as proposed by Milton Bennett, provides a practical approach

to addressing the discrimination and exclusion faced by migrant children.

Undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa face various forms of discrimination and barriers to education, hinged on policy inconsistency, limited financial resources, discriminatory school admission policies, language barriers, and societal prejudices. We argued that de facto discrimination exists vis-à-vis some legal resources in South Africa, as schools create an externalised border that limits participation of these undocumented children. Moreover, these undocumented migrant children face unprecedented marginalities emanating from the negative stereotypes that paint them as products of illegal immigration, which is responsible for poverty, unemployment, and increased crime rates. Hence, their vulnerability is heightened. Amid policy exclusions and human-driven discriminations, school systems act as street-level bureaucratic structures and anti-immigration agencies, making it imperative to develop intercultural competence that makes educators and learners critical players in guaranteeing the successful integration of undocumented migrant learners.

As a remedy to challenges faced by undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children, there is a need to implement intercultural competence to promote inclusivity, respect, and understanding among all students in South Africa. Intercultural competence development suggested in this paper emphasises the importance of cross-cultural learning, adaptation, and integration. Strategies such as cultural awareness training for teachers, promoting cross-cultural dialogue, and creating inclusive learning environments become feasible with intercultural competence development. By adopting an intercultural model, the South African education system would be better supporting the successful integration of undocumented migrant children and ensuring their access to quality education.

To mainstream this model in South Africa's education system, the curriculum should be revised to integrate intercultural competence as a core component, and educator training programs should include modules on managing culturally diverse classrooms (Grant & Portera, 2017). Schools should collaborate with local communities to facilitate cross-cultural exchanges (Vižintin, 2022), and policies must be enforced to ensure undocumented migrant children have equal access to education (Chiswick & Miller, 2002). By embedding intercultural competence into the educational framework, South Africa can create a supportive environment for undocumented migrant children, fostering their academic success and integration into society.

This paper aligns with the existing body of literature by exploring the impact of discrimination on the educational access of undocumented Zimbabwean migrant children in South Africa and examining how intercultural competence can mitigate these challenges. Some studies (Chiswick & Miller, 2002; Crush et al., 2017) have reaffirmed the significance of intercultural competence in enhancing educational outcomes for migrant children. By integrating these insights, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between migration, education, and intercultural competence.

This ultimately contributes to policy recommendations aimed at fostering a more inclusive educational environment in South Africa.

More research and policies are still worthwhile to ensure the implementation and educational support for undocumented migrant children in South Africa. By integrating intercultural competence into the educational framework, educators can create a conducive learning environment that supports equitable academic success for all students, irrespective of their immigration status. This approach not only enhances the educational experiences of undocumented migrant children but also promotes mutual respect and understanding among the broader student population, ultimately contributing to a more cohesive and harmonious society.

REFERENCES

Aguado-Odina, T., Mata-Benito, P., & Gil-Jaurena, I. (2017). Mobilizing Intercultural Education for Equity and Social Justice. Time to React Against the Intolerable: A Proposal from Spain. Intercultural Education, 28(4), 408-423. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2017.1333874

Bennett, M. J. (1986). A Developmental Approach to Training for Intercultural Sensitivity. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10(2), 179-196. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2

Bloch, A. (2008). Gaps in Protection: Undocumented Zimbabwean Migrants in South Africa. Migration Studies Working Paper Series, 38, 1-19. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Gaps-in-Protection%3A-Undocumented-Zimbabwean-inBloch/f52cb824a3c7d4342ce57836035e12167c2131c8

Buckland, S. H. (2011). Lost in Transition: The Barriers to Educational Access for School-age Zimbabwe Migrant Children in South Africa and the Influences of Institutional and Social Networks on Overcoming them (Doctoral thesis, University of Sussex). https://sussex.figshare.com/articles/thesis/Lost_in_transition_the_barriers_to_educational_access_for_school-age_Zimbabwe_migrant_children_in_South_Africa_and_the_influences_of_institutional_and_social_networks_on_overcoming_them/23317040/1/files/41104514.pdf

Castles, S. (2009). Development and Migration or Migration and Development: What Comes First? Asian and Pacific Migration Journal, 18(4), 441-471. doi.org/10.1177/011719680901800401

Chiswick, B. R., & Miller, P. W. (2002). Immigrant Earnings: Language Skills, Linguistic Concentrations, and the Business Cycle. Journal of Population Economics, 15(1), 31-57. https://doi.org/10.1007/PL00003838

Chiweshe, M. K. (2023). Analysing the Lived Experiences of Undocumented and Unaccompanied Child Migrants from Zimbabwe to South Africa. South African Yearbook of International Law, 47, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.25159/2521-2583/10950

Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). Intersectionality. www.wiley.com/en-us/Intersectionality%2C+2nd+Edition-p-9781509539673

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf

Council of Europe. (2016). Living Together as Equals in Culturally Diverse Democratic Societies. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/16806ccc07

Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: 1989(8). chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8/

Crush, J., & Dodson, B. (2017). Harnessing Migration for Inclusive Growth and Development in Southern Africa. Southern African Migration Programme. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh8r3q1

Crush, J., & Tawodzera, G. (2014). Exclusion and Discrimination: Zimbabwean Migrant Children and South African Schools. Journal of International Migration and Integration, 15(4), 677-693.www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Exclusion-and-Discrimination%3A-Zimbabwean-Migrant-Crush-Tawodzera/f92343c312e3ea884d687c76a67a0812bfee86c6

Crush, J., Tawodzera, G., Chikanda, A., & Tevera, D. (2017). Living With Xenophobia: Zimbabwean Informal Enterprise in South Africa. Waterloo, ON: Southern African Migration Programme. SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 77. https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=samp

Democratic Alliance. (2025, September 22). DA Demands Crackdown on Armed Zama-zama Gangs in Limpopo. Democratic Alliance Limpopo. https://limpopo.da.org.za/2025/09/da-demands-crackdown-on-armed-zama-zama-gangs-in-limpopo

de Haas, H., Czaika, M., Flahaux, M. L., Mahendra, E., Natter, K., Vezzoli, S., & Villares-Varela, M. (2019a). International Migration: Trends, Determinants, and Policy Effects. Population and Development Review, 45(4), 885-922. https://ideas.repec.org/a/bla/popdev/v45y2019i4p885-922.html

de Haas, H., Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (2019b). The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World. Bloomsbury Publishing. https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/age-of-migration-9781352007121/

de Haas, H. (2021). Theory of Migration: The Aspirations-Capabilities Framework. CMS 9(8). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00210-4.

European Parliament. (2016). Resolution of 19 January 2016 on the Role of Intercultural Dialogue, Cultural Diversity, and Education in Promoting EU Fundamental Values (2015/2139(INI)). Official Journal of the European Union. www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0005_EN.pdf

Government of South Africa. (2002). Immigration Act, No. 13 of 2002. Government Gazette No. 23478, 31 May 2002. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a13-020.pdf

Gordon, S. L. (2010). Migrants in a State of Exception. Transcience Journal, 1(1), 3-21. www2.hu-berlin.de/transcience/Vol1_Issue1_2010_3_21_gordon.pdf

Grant, C., & Portera, A. Grant, C.A. (Eds.). (2017). Intercultural Education and Competencies: Challenges and Answers for the Global World. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Hahl, K., Niemi, P.M., Johnson, L.R., & Dervin, F. (Eds.). (2015). Diversities and Interculturality in Textbooks: Finland as an Example. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Hanna, H. (2022). Being a Migrant Learner in a South African Primary School: Recognition and Racialisation. Children's Geographies, 21(3) 1-15. doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2022.2084601

Hernandez, C. M., Morales, A. R., & Shroyer, M. G. (2013). The Development of a Model of Culturally Responsive Science and Mathematics Teaching. Cultural Studies of Science Education, 8(4), 803-820. doi.org/10.1007/s11422-013-9544-1

Keller, L., Lüdtke, O., Preckel, F. & Brunner, M. (2023). Educational Inequalities at the Intersection of Multiple Social Categories: An Introduction and Systematic Review of the Multilevel Analysis of Individual Heterogeneity and Discriminatory Accuracy (MAIHDA) Approach. Educational Psychology Review 35(31). doi.org/10.1007/s10648-023-09733-5

Koegeler-Abdi, M., & Parncutt, R. (Eds.). (2013). Interculturality: Practice Meets Research. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ptb.univie. ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/k_ptb/ Literatur/Rasse_Kattmann_Genes__Race_ and_culture__Interculturality_Practice_ meets_Research_hard_man_v1.pdf

Krige, J., & Panchia, Y. (2020, January 22). South Africa's Stateless Children: 'I Thought I Would be Shot.' Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera. com/features/2020/1/22/south-africas-stateless-children-i-thought-i-would-be-shot

Landau, L. B., & Amit, R. (2014). Wither Policy? Southern African Perspectives on Understanding the Law, Refugee Policy, and Protection. Journal of Refugee Studies, 27(4), 534-552. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feu005

Landau, L. B., Segatti, A., & Misago, J. P. (2011). Governing Migration & Urbanisation in South African Municipalities: Developing Approaches to Counter Poverty and Social Fragmentation. South Africa Local Government Association (SALGA). www.migration.org.za/wp-content/ uploads/2017/08/Governing-Migration-Urbanisation-in-South-African-Municipalities-Developing-Approaches-to-Counter-Poverty-and-Social-Fragmentation-1.pdf

Lee, A., Williams, R. D., Shaw, M. A., & Jie, Y. (2014). First-Year Students' Perspectives on Intercultural Learning. Teaching in Higher Education, 19(5), 543-554. http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1080/13562517.2014.880687

Leeman, Y. & Reid, C. (2006). Multi/ Intercultural Education in Australia and the Netherlands. Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 36(1), 57–72. doi.org/10.1080/03057920500382325

Madimu, T. (2022). 'Illegal' Gold Mining and the Everyday in Post-apartheid South Africa. Review of African Political Economy, 49(173), 436-451.www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.1080/03056244.2022. 2027750

Maunganidze, O. A., Fakhry, A., & Rietig, V. (2021). Migration Policy in South Africa: Lessons from Africa's Migration Magnet for European Policymakers. German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) Report No. 17. https://dgap. org/en/research/publications/migration-policy-south-africa

Mawadza, A., & Banda, F. (2016). 'Kids Sold, Desperate Moms Need Cash': Media Representations of Zimbabwean Women Migrants. Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 34(2), 121-134. DOI: 10.2989/16073614.2016.1201773

Meda, L. (2017). Resilience Among Refugees: A Case of Zimbabwean Refugee Children in South Africa. Child Abuse Research in South Africa, 18(1), 62-69. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-77dd01855

Motha, S., Ramadiro, B., & Vally, S. (2005). The Education Rights of Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants in South Africa. Education Rights Project, 39(3). https://www.uj.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/the-education-rights-of-refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants-in-south-africa.pdf

Nhemachena, A., Mawere, M., & Mtapuri, O. (2022). Operation Dudula: Xenophobic Vigilantism and Sovereignty in Twenty-First Century South Africa. Sovereignty Becoming Pulvereignty: Unpacking the Dark Side of Slave, 4, 153-174.

Neocosmos, M. (2008). The Politics of Fear and the Fear of Politics: Reflections on Xenophobic Violence in South Africa. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 43(6), 586-594. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909608096655

Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2008). School Reform and Student Learning: A Multicultural Perspective. In Banks, J. A. & McGee, C. A. (Eds.). Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives (6th ed., pp. 425–443). John Wiley & Sons.

Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2010). Racism, Ethnicity and the Media in Africa: Reflections Inspired by Studies of Xenophobia in Cameroon and South Africa. Africa Spectrum, 45(1), 57-93. https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971004500103

OECD. (2015). Immigrant Students at School: Easing the Journey Towards Integration. OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/9789264249509-en

Organization of African Unity. (1990). African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Addis Ababa: OAU. au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36804-treaty-african_charter_on_rights_welfare_of_the_child.pdf

Palaiologou, N., & Dietz, G. (Eds.). (2012). Mapping the Broad Field of Multicultural and Intercultural Education Worldwide: Towards the Development of a New Citizen. Cambridge Publishing. https://books.google.com/books/about/Mapping_the_Broad_Field_of_Multicultural.html?id=Ol5YLwEACAAJ

Pinson, H., & Arnot, M. (2010). Local Conceptualizations of the Education of Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Students: From Hostile to Holistic Models. International Journal of Inclusive Education. 14(3), 247-267. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802504523

Portera, A. (2008). Intercultural Education in Europe: Epistemological and Semantic Aspects. Intercultural Education. 19(6), 481-491. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980802568277

Ragnarsdóttir, H., & Blöndal, H. (2015). Multicultural and Inclusive Education in Two Icelandic Schools. In H. T. Layne (Ed.), Making the Most of Intercultural Education (pp. 35–57). Cambridge Scholars. https://iris.hi.is/is/publications/multicultural-and-inclusive-education-in-two-icelandic-schools/

Republic of South Africa. (2000). Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000. Government Gazette, 20876. www.gov.za/documents/promotion-equality-and-prevention-unfair-discrimination-act

Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education. (2018). Circular S1 of 2018: The Implementation of the National Curriculum Framework and Assessment Policy. South African Department of Basic Education. https://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/NationalCurriculumStatementsGradesR-12.aspx

Robson, G., Trémion, V., & Dervin, F. (Eds.). (2015). Making the Most of Intercultural Education. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. https://books.google.de/books/about/Making_the_Most_of_Intercultural_Educati.html?id=aGUHCgAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

Ruedin, D. (2019). Attitudes to Immigrants in South Africa: Personality and Vulnerability. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45(7), 1108-1126. DOI:10.1080/1369183X.2018.1428086

Sayed, Y., & Motala, S. (2012). Equity and 'No Fee' Schools in South Africa: Challenges and Prospects. Social Policy and Administration, 46(6), 672-687. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9515.2012.00862.x

Scuzzarello, S., & Moroşanu, L. (2023). Integration and Intersectionality: Boundaries and Belonging "From Above" and "From Below." Introduction to the Special Issue. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 46(14), 2991-3013. doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2182649

Soudien, C. (2007). The Asymmetries of Contact: An Assessment of 30 Years of School Integration in South Africa. Race Ethnicity and Education, 10(4), 439-456. DOI: 10.1080/13613320701658464

South Africa Department of Social Development. (2021). Annual Report 2020/2021. Republic of South Africa. https://www.gov.za/documents/annual-reports/department-social-development-annual-report-20202021-28-oct-2021

South Africa National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act No. 27 of 1996). Admission Policy for Public Schools. https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Admission%20Policy%20for%20ordinary%20public%20schools%20(Notice%202432%20of%201998).pdf?ver=2009-10-13-135307-413

South African Government News Agency (October 18, 2017). South Africa Takes on the Plight of Undocumented Migrant Children. SA News.www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/sa-takes-plight-undocumented-migrant-children

South African Human Rights Commission (2019). Position Paper: Access to Basic Education for Undocumented Learners in South Africa. https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/SAHRC%20Position%20Paper%20on%20Access%20to%20a%20Basic%20Education%20for%20Undocumented%20Learners%20in%20South%20Africa%20-%2012092019.pdf

South African Refugees Act No. 130 of 1998. https://lawlibrary.org.za/akn/za/act/1998/130/eng@2023-01-04

South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996. https://lawlibrary.org.za/akn/za/act/1996/84/eng@1996-11-15

UNESCO. (2018). Global Education Monitoring Report 2019: Migration, Displacement, and Education—Building Bridges, Not Walls. UNESCO Publishing. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366946

United Nations. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. New York: United Nations. https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/Convention%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20a%20Child%202013.pdf?ver=2015-04-08-101801-837

UNICEF (2020). UNICEF and the South African Red Cross Partner to Assist Migrant Children. UNICEF. https://southafrica.un.org/en/106912-unicef-and-south-african-red-cross-partner-assist-migrant-children

Vižintin, M. A. (2022). The Role of Teachers in the Successful Integration and Intercultural Education. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. https://isim.zrc-sazu.si/en/publikacije/the-role-of-teachers-in-the-successful-integration-and-intercultural-education-of

White, J. A., & Rispel, L. C. (2021). Policy Exclusion or Confusion? Perspectives on Universal Health Coverage for Migrants and Refugees in South Africa. Health Policy and Planning, 36(8), 1292-1306. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czab038

Yuval-Davis, N. (2015). Situated Intersectionality and Social Inequality. Raisons Politiques, 58(2), 91-100. https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.058.0091

The intersection between childcare and eldercare: climate impacts on unpaid childcare by grannies in Mafarana, South Africa

Jamela Basani Hoveni – Department of Economics, American University iD

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how childcare intersects with the well-being of grandmothers, mainly poor elderly women dependent on social grants who are charged with looking after their grandchildren in Mafarana village, Limpopo, South Africa. Like many rural villages in the South African countryside, Mafarana has been ravaged by climate change, leading to droughts and failed crops, intensifying the care burden. The paper draws upon ethnographic, original field research conducted in Mafarana. The paper establishes that there are various reasons why grandchildren find themselves under the care of their grandmothers instead of their parents. These include the death of parents, inadequate wages to support the children in rural areas, single/divorced mothers' financial constraints, among other reasons. There is also a reciprocal dynamic to these caring relations in that both the grandmothers and grandchildren benefit from each other's companionship – grandmothers in dealing with their loneliness and grandchildren in the parental guidance, financial support, and emotional care. Grandmothers also receive remittances to help support the household from children working in cities like Johannesburg. The paper argues that the reliance on grandmothers' unpaid childcare labour funded by social grants, constitutes a significant subsidy to South Africa's low-wage capitalist economy. This gendered burden of social reproduction is dangerously intensified by climate change, pushing these households into a deeper state of precarity.

Key words: Intergenerational childcare, social reproduction, grandmothers and climate change

INTRODUCTION

In rural South African communities, young women who are mothers rely on networks of kin (sisters, parents, and aunts) to provide childcare in their absence (see Cassidy, 2019; Burman, 1995; Cantilon, Moore & Tesdale et al., 2021). Women, particularly those who are poor and unemployed, rely on their mothers, who, despite their advanced age, undertake childcare for them. There is a need to understand childcare-giving dynamics in these rural areas to inform policy and strategies for gender equality. Such a policy should aim to recognise and redistribute unpaid care work to ease the burden on women in rural areas. This paper investigates the intersection between child and elder care in rural areas, drawing from the lived experiences of grandmothers charged with looking after their grandchildren. The author also draws from her lived experience as a mother and someone who was also raised by a grandmother. Growing up in this context and coming from this background, as a researcher, she has unique insights into this topic.

The specific research questions that the paper focuses on are: In rural contexts,

- What are the reasons why childcare is undertaken by grandmothers despite their advanced age?

- What are some of the benefits and challenges of this form of childcare for both the child and the grandmother?

- How has climate change intensified the care burden?

- What form of support, if any, is given to grandmothers by the state in their roles as caregivers?

South Africa has not achieved universal access to health and education, with the result that most children in the villages are not in a formal preschool or Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres (Shikwambane, 2023; Ilifa, 2024). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 4 target good health and well-being, as well as access to quality education. South Africa is falling behind on both goals (UN, n.d.). In addition to the poor access to health and education, child poverty is a big problem in South Africa. According to Statistics South Africa (STATS SA 2021), in South Africa, 3 million of the 21 million children live below the poverty line, with children aged between 0 and 4 years being the hardest hit. Disturbingly, 23% of children in South African households experience hunger (UNICEF, 2024).

Child poverty has a spatial dimension, with children living in rural areas being hit hardest compared to those in urban areas (STATS SA, 2021). There are also racial differences in child poverty and deprivation, showing that children from the Black African population group (73.2%) are more likely to live in poverty compared to 43.6% of interracial children, 6.1% of white children and 20.1% of Indian children (STATS SA, 2021). More recently, the SDG country report (2023) notes that high levels of poverty, poor quality ECD programmes for children aged 0–4 years, and gender-based violence are still a serious challenge for development in South Africa.

According to Moore (2023) South African multi-generational households are characterised by diverse care arrangements. Sello et al., (2023) concurs, noting that multiple childcare arrangements are common in South Africa. In poor resource-constrained environments households tend to rely on the extended family for childcare including children's involvement in care (Bray & Brandt, 2007). A practice also common in Namibia see (Leonard et al., 2022). The childcare offered by kin in multi-generational households has a long history in African societies. Mathambo and Gibbs (2009) consider the role of the extended family in the care of children, especially the role of grandmothers. The unpaid childcare provided by co-resident grandmothers in multi-generational households, for example, is important as it allows mothers to participate in the labour market or to pursue further education. Existing in resource-constrained environments, and relying on social grants, these households experience various socio-economic and environmental inequalities (Monasch & Boerma, 2004). In skip-generation households, households with only resident grandparents and grandchildren, research shows that grandmothers are playing an important role financially and psychosocially as household heads and caregivers (Cantillon et al., 2021). Cantillon et al. (2021) emphasises the contextual specificity of grandparental childcare. Elderly women need support in their role as caregivers and any support given should centre on their lived experiences as caregivers and care recipients.

The care economy concept is a useful way to conceptualise the distribution of care work across society. The care economy, which comprises the unpaid care work performed in households and communities as well as jobs in the paid care sector and domestic work (UN Women, 2021), shows who ultimately carries the burden. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), globally, the unpaid care work carried out by women in households and communities, amounts to 11 trillion, 9% of global GDP (ILO, nd). Despite the role played by women, the state, through legislating welfare policies and implementing fiscal policy that funds crucial sectors, can re-shape the distribution of care in society.

For women in rural settings, converting unpaid care work into subsistence is complicated by climate change. Sub-Saharan Africa is considered a climate change hotspot and is expected to heat at twice the global average; as a result, severe and extreme weather events like hurricanes, flooding and wildfires are predicted for the region (Thornton et al., 2008). In recent years, agricultural plots have been destroyed by climate change, destroying livelihoods for the majority involved in agriculture in particular rural women. As the intensity and frequency of droughts in the region increase, food security in rural areas is compromised. Beenie et al., (2025) discuss some of the climate change-induced gendered impacts on women in sub–Saharan Africa asincluding for example: worsening care burdens, a loss in agricultural livelihoods and food insecurity. These effects are particularly severe due to a lack of physical and social infrastructure that allows people to cope.

In South Africa, apartheid racial policies and the migrant labour system have historically shaped the distribution of care, resulting in Black women shouldering the burden of care (Kasan, 2023). Moore (2023) argues that in South Africa diverse care arrangements must be understood in the context of inequalities that remain in post-colonial settings where there is highly uneven access to material resources, poverty and limited social welfare provision. Thus, women's position in care relations reveals elements of differentiation based on socioeconomics, racial and class positions.

Elderly women have particular needs and the inadequate state provision of care leads to women being burdened with unpaid care work. In fact as shown by Zhong and Peng (2024), in most households, families prioritise childcare while eldercare is neglected and only attended to in a crisis. This results in significant vulnerabilities due to neglect of elders and simultaneously burdening them with childcare. Moore and Kelly (2024) advocate for a socio-political contextual lens to understanding elder care neglect and state failures that emphasises the state's reliance on a familialist care regime and how it impacts the everyday personal relationships between paid and unpaid carers of older persons.

The reliance on family caregiving as an approach to meeting society's crucial care needs results in care work remaining invisible, carried out by Black and migrant women (Shamase & Sekaja, 2025). This paper contributes a social reproduction approach to understand the childcare arrangements in rural communities such as Mafarana and the role of elderly grandmothers in the context of climate change.

To do this, the paper adopts an ethnographic approach where 12 interviews were conducted with grandmothers taking care of young grandchildren to understand the distribution of care arrangements, the challenges they faced, and the specific reasons why elderly grandmothers provide childcare for their grandchildren. Whilst statistics in South Africa (STATS SA, 2025) has focused on the number of children in the care of extended family members, these studies have not adequately focused on care arrangements and dynamics within these households to explain the socio-economic and socio-cultural factors driving them. This paper does exactly that, and by doing so, fills an important gap in the literature where there are few qualitative studies in South Africa that have focused on the intersection between childcare and elder care.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theorising Unpaid Child Care: The Care Economy

The care economy comprises both paid and unpaid care work performed in households and communities primarily by women (Muller, 2019). In many societies in sub-Saharan Africa, women are still the main caregivers for children and the elderly. Women are also engaged in various unpaid activities such as cooking and cleaning, water collection and food processing. Significant gender inequalities mark underpaid care work, and rural provinces are among the most affected, with the highest gender disparity, possibly due to disparities in childcare infrastructure.

Adopting a social reproduction lens shows that this unpaid care work, largely invisible, is indispensable to societies and communities. In the first place, (i) it contributes to the reproduction of the next generation of workers and (ii) contributes to caring for the elderly and the sick. In fact, women's unpaid care work subsidises capitalist low-wage regimes, and it is considered by Feminist scholars (Exploring Economics, 2016) as productive work, along with market work. The 3 R framework, originally developed by Diane Elson (2009) as a call to recognise, reduce, and redistribute, subsequently expanded by UN Women (2019) to include calls to revalue and reward care work, is in line with this thinking. Given that everyone benefits from the care work, it should be characterised as a public good and be properly resourced through the national budget.

To understand the distribution of unpaid care work and who ultimately has the responsibility, in any society, we adopt the care diamond conceptualised by Razavi (2007). The care diamond maps out the distribution of care work among key actors and institutions within the macro-political space (Peng, 2019) and therefore how society arranges and finances care. The care diamond (see Figure 1) comprises households, the state, the private sector and non-government institutions, revealing not only the distribution but also the provision of care. By analysing the care diamond, we can determine who shoulders the most responsibility in care work, even though there is significant overlap in care responsibilities. Peng (2019) posits that the care diamond shows the institutional and policy configurations in society across various political regimes. It can, for example, show a

political dispensation that relies more on market solutions rather than the state by reducing funding to state-provided care.

Figure 1: Care diamond: adapted from Razavi (2007)

In South Africa, care has historically been shaped by apartheid policies, particularly the migrant labour system that regulated the flow of labour in and out of the native reserves (Kasan, 2023). The migrant labour system facilitated the outward migration of males of working age, leaving Black women in the rural countryside to care for children and the elderly. The result of the policy was a racialised and gendered care regime where Black women shouldered the unpaid care of those left behind (Kasan, 2023). Another dynamic that has shaped the care regimes in South Africa is the inflow of migrant women workers from neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe and Lesotho (ILO, 2024). This has tended to reinforce the position of Black women in the racialised care regime. The end of apartheid did not lead to an undoing of these patterns. Instead, as Kasan (2024) argues, the care policy in South Africa post-apartheid, underpinned by neoliberal approaches adopted, a familialist approach, relying on vulnerable households.

Over the past decades, rural-to-urban labour migration rates among African women have increased in South Africa. Mthiyane et al. (2022) note that the mass inflow of economic migrants has strained government resources due to a lack of preparedness.

Due to high unemployment, the economic migrants who find themselves in the urban areas become jobless and homeless, adding to the masses residing in the informal sector. Most of the Black women who migrated to the cities under apartheid found themselves employed in the care sectors as nannies and caregivers for white people (Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie, Unterhalter et al., 1983). Even though in post-apartheid South Africa masses of Black women are also employed by the black middle-class as nannies, for these women, domestic work remains a nexus of a triple exploitation – by race, class and gender. Shai (2025) asserts that chronic underfunding and the state's' failure to invest in ECD, has created a care deficit. This means that Black women who are employed as caregivers in the urban areas rely on kin, often their mothers or grandmothers, to take care of their own children back home.

Climate and environmental effects are exacerbating women's unpaid care burdens (SCIS, 2024) and further reshaping unpaid care. Women in rural areas are engaged in two types of unpaid care work – direct care for persons and indirect care related to caring for the environment (Macgregor et al., 2022). Relying on women's work means that climate change impacts make caring even more time-consuming for them. As climate change intensifies, it increases the care burden for both care for

people - for example grandmothers need to walk longer distances for water collection or alternatively reuse water. On the other hand, in these rural communities, women are regarded as environmental stewards, caring for the environment and animals. This often results in women being burdened with caring for the environment while also bearing the cost of environmental degradation.

Grandmothers as Key Actors: Intergenerational Childcare and the Role of Grandmothers

A higher percentage of African children in South Africa, compared to white, coloured and Indian children, live without their mother or father (African Health Research Institute, 2025) and in households where the grandmother is the primary caregiver. For example, among the various population groups in South Africa, only 32% of Black children are raised with their biological fathers at home. This is compared to 51% of Coloured children, 86% of Indian or Asian children and 80% of white children (STATS SA, 2018). Although South African children are far more likely to co-reside with their mother instead of their father, a significant number of them live with neither parent (STATS SA, 2019; Hatch & Posel, 2018). Monasch and Boerma (2004) consider orphanhood and childcare in South Africa and reveal that orphaned children are less likely to attend school and have higher multi-dimensional poverty rates compared to other children.

Increasing life expectancy in the face of an ageing population naturally raises care needs

and increases the burden of care in any population (Himmelweit & Land, 2010). Combined with the rising cost of both child and elder care, this results in a care deficit, which means that a significant proportion of the population is vulnerable and without access to proper care. Although single parents face challenges in balancing work and the unpaid care of children, given the gender imbalances (Hatch & Posel, 2018) and the cultural expectation of childcare being a woman's responsibility, women in South Africa make more sacrifices and are likely to drop out of the labour market due to childcare demands (Conolley, 1992; Floro & Komatsu 2011; Maurer-Fazio et al., 2011).

In South Africa, elderly women play a significant role as caregivers of young children, along with other female relatives in multi-generational households where parents are absent. According to STATS SA (2019), nationally, an estimated 39.9% of households are classified as nuclear, 34.2% as extended, and only 2.4% as complex households, meaning they contained non-related persons. While nuclear households were common with 1 or 2 children, extended households were most common in households with many children, more than 3. In poor multi-generational households in South Africa, research shows that grandmothers are playing an important role financially (relying on the old-age grant) and psychologically as household heads and assuming the role of breadwinner.

Mathambo and Gibbs (2009) discuss the African family as a dynamic network of individuals with mutual ties, including parents, children and grandparents as well as aunts and uncles. In this dynamic setting, individuals mutually care for each other, most prominently involving childcare by grandparents. In Igbo culture for example, this practise is underpinned by the African philosophy of Ubuntu, and the belief that a child belongs to the community and society (Nnama-Okechukwu, Chukwu & Okoye, 2023). In this context where family denotes an array of relations beyond biological parents and their children (Mathambo & Gibbs, 2009), there are benefits to co-resident childcare provided by a grandmother. Specifically, mothers of younger children benefit from childcare provided by grandparents, while the grandparents also receive companionship. Children are also materially better off (when left in the care of a grandparent than other relatives, especially where the mother is away for a prolonged period. Helle et al. (2024), for example, contend that investments by maternal grandmothers buffer children against the impact of adverse early life experiences. In Schrijner and Smits (2017), the effect of co-residing grandmother is positive for girls schooling in sub Saharan Africa. The caring for younger children by a grandmother benefits children growing up in the extended family (STATS SA, 2019), who also enjoy the benefits of growing up in close contact with other relatives, which enhances their socialisation.

There is also a reciprocal dynamic to these caring relations in that both the grandmothers and grandchildren benefit from each other's companionship – grandmothers in dealing with their loneliness and grandchildren in receiving parental guidance, financial support, and emotional care. However, childcare by grannies adds to the grandmother's physical and

psychological burden. In poor rural households where resources are already stretched, this may lead to the prevalence of stress as grand-mothers worry about making ends meet.

To the extent that elder and childcare intersect, significant vulnerabilities exist for the elderly. The neglect of elder care needs while simultaneously burdening them with childcare results in deficiencies in health and care outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODS: ETHNOGRAPHY

Mafarana Village

Mafarana is a village in the Greater Tzaneen municipality, located off the R37 road, 30 kilometres from the nearest town of Tzaneen. As a result of its location and distance from the nearest town, in recent years the village of Mafarana has witnessed a decline in its population as most people moved to the cities in search of employment. Like many villages in rural South Africa, in this village the main concerns are unemployment, poverty and lack of sanitation. Mirroring the general economic and social developments in South Africa a consistent thread throughout is, therefore, high youth unemployment (33%) coupled with high birth rates, leaving communities under severe socio-economic pressure.

The village of Mafarana is surrounded by commercial farms, which include some of the biggest citrus and avocado growers in the country which employ most people in Mafarana, especially women. While this provides them with some income, the employment is characterised by precarity and exploitation. These seasonal workers, who are mostly female, do not have job security and benefits such as paid leave and childcare.

There is a distinct feminisation of subsistence agriculture that is undertaken by the elderly women whom I interviewed. Most of the women in the area are seasonal subsistence farmers growing crops such as maize, groundnuts, pumpkin, tomatoes and other indigenous plants. In this rural community, subsistence farming and collecting water take up a lot of the women's time, but they are also engaged in other forms of unpaid work, such as childcare. This unpaid care work contributes to time poverty and reduced well-being. However, without this life-making and sustaining work, life in the rural countryside would not be sustainable; many households would largely go hungry.

Study Participants

If research is formed in the spaces between participants and the researcher (Browne, 2005), a view that assumes that the researcher is intimately involved with the subject of research, the researcher needs to acknowledge their standpoint about the study. The researcher was born in Mafarana village, where her paternal grandparents settled beginning in the early 1900s and where the researcher's father was born in 1950. Through her involvement with the community, the researcher has cultivated and nurtured unique relationships with the women in the area

This paper is based on data collected from 14 ethnographic interviews with grandmothers over the age of 50 who live with their

grandchildren and are residents of Mafarana village. In addition to the grandmothers, key informant interviews were also held with the manager and care givers of the Tiololeni elder pensions association of Mafarana. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from American University Ethics Board, in August 2023. All participants provided signed informed consent prior to the interviews. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms (e.g., 'Granny 1').

A Tsonga speaking community member recruited the participants and initial participants were identified and approached; thereafter, snowball sampling was used to make referrals. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide to allow the grandmothers to tell their stories, drawing from their lived experiences, and for the researcher to follow up on emergent issues. The discussions were audio recorded and later transcribed and translated into English.

The transcripts were subjected to qualitative thematic analysis to highlight the broader themes. An initial phase of open coding was conducted to identify recurrent concepts and ideas. These initial codes were then grouped into broader, more abstract themes (e.g., 'care work, reciprocity and love,' 'resources, financial strain and sacrifice,' 'climate-induced hardship and granny well-being'). This process was iterative, involving a constant comparison between the data and the emerging thematic structure to ensure the final themes were robustly grounded in the participants' narratives. The findings in the following section

are presented with respect to the research questions identified.

- Who cares for children and why?

- What resources are available to grandmothers?

- What is the impact on grandmothers

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Nwana u vava e handle na le ndzeni (ka khwiri)
Children are a pain before and after they are born.

Who Cares For Children And Why?

How did the grannies interviewed become caregivers for their grandchildren? A range of different circumstances resulted in the grannies assuming sole custody of the children. Most young parents in this community are unemployed or have moved away or migrated to the city to seek employment. "Vana va hina a va na mintirho" (*Our children do not have jobs.*) comments Granny 8, remarking on the joblessness in the area. 'It is very sad,' she says, 'all her children are unemployed, and because of that, they rely on her.' In this household, there are 3 children, a daughter in law married to her son and five grandchildren. Her son and the daughter-in-law are co-resident with their children because of their financial situation. Her two other children live in the household but periodically leave the household for lengthy periods of time to look for employment in Johannesburg. Similarly, most of the parents of the children in the care of their grandmothers are absent from the household due to annual migration to find work in the cities. These

migrant labourers are still a part of the household as they travel back home once or twice a year. In fact, the homestead, which is referred to as ekaya, which has been passed on from one generation to the next, is a site of constant movement – for example, others moving out and others moving in.

Sometimes the parents of the children have died due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic leaving orphans behind (Rehle & Shisana, 2003). Orphaned children are the most vulnerable in the community due to the lack of a living parent and poverty associated with households where they reside. Within multi-generational households, childcare is distributed among the members, although it retains a gendered aspect, predominantly undertaken by women who are either a mother, a grandmother or a female relative. Even where fathers have sole custody because the mother is ill, has died or has abandoned the children, the fathers often rely on their own mothers for unpaid childcare.

Granny 2 and her husband are looking after twins who are 18 months old. Her husband assists with childcare, for example, driving the children to school and watching the children when the grandmother is not home. Despite this, the division of tasks is gendered, with the grandmother in charge of bathing, feeding and washing the children while the grandfather drives them to school and occasionally minds or plays with them when the grandmother is busy. Gender shapes all aspects, including sleeping arrangements, where the grandmother explains that she sleeps on the floor with the female child while her husband sleeps on top of the bed with the baby boy.

(i) Grandmothers perform childcare for their grandchildren as well as grandchildren of other kin, such as sisters

A common theme was that grandmothers perform childcare, most of the time as a sole or custodial caregiver of their grandchildren. Both maternal and paternal grandmothers undertake this role. For example, two of the grandmothers interviewed who were sole caregivers were also paternal grandmothers. The responsibility of childcare was also not limited to grandmothers caring for direct descendants. A grandmother (Granny 1) interviewed mentioned that she was caring for her sister's child, who was an orphan. The caregiving role also extends to the involvement of great-grandmothers where one great-grandmother over the age of 80 was undertaking childcare to assist her daughter-in-law. This intricate web of caregiving arrangements, in the context of the extended family, affirms the notion of kin is beyond biological or direct descendants.

There is a rich multi-generational network of women who see their role in childcare as extending beyond physical care. It encompasses the cultural work of socialising, teaching and imparting norms, customs and knowledge to the next generation. This is psycho-social and spiritual care work grounded in African epistemologies and ways of being. Tsonga grandmothers, for example, use oral storytelling to teach listening skills.

Grandmothers are entrusted with teaching children their genealogy, tracing it through the paternal line. Starting with the self and reading back to their origin, one read:

> *I am Basani,*
> *Basani wa Simon,*
> *Simon wa Shikwambana,*
> *Shikwambana wa...*

Grandmothers often invoke the African philosophy of Ubuntu "munhu i munhu hi vanhu" (A *person is shaped by the community and cannot exist independently of the community that raised them*). Ubuntu means that a person is a relational being, and to care for one's descendants and offspring sustains communities. It emphasises interdependence, reciprocity where care for persons and nature is intertwined. As a result of the social significance of this role, the grandmothers and great-grandmothers perceive their role to be important despite the challenges of ill health and poverty.

Sometimes children are abandoned and separated from their parents due to a parent remarrying. This exposes children to vulnerabilities and children can fall between the cracks, in a sense belonging nowhere when parents move on. When parents remarry it is usually up to the grandparents to take care of the child. Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991) find that most children adapt successfully as long as the mother does reasonably well financially and psychologically.

However, the declining relationship between the child and their fathers is usually the negative outcome of parental separation. A paternal grandmother (Granny 9), who is the caregiver of a 5-year-old grandchild, explains that the child's mother remarried, and her new husband rejected the child.

> *The child is here because that man does not want the child. The mother is unemployed and has two other children from a first marriage, so there is nothing she can do. She does receive the CSG, but I have never received anything.*

On the other hand, the father of the child is living in another village and has his own family, so it was up to her to look after the child. "The father is also unemployed," explains Granny 9.

(ii) Multi-generational living

In addition to grandchildren, most grannies live with some form of relative. Granny 3 and Granny 10 explain that they have raised many children, some of whom are adults and no longer in the household. This includes their own children, their siblings and their grandchildren, as well as cousins and in-laws. Granny 6 lives with two brothers and a sister, 2 children, and 5 grandchildren. Granny 6 mentioned that she is happy to care for her grandchildren since her own mother cared for her children in the same homestead. The homestead that she is referring to is a family home that has been in the family for years. She explains that the family home is a form of security for the children and grandchildren, ensuring that no one is ever homeless.

In the context of widespread unemployment, multi-generational living is a strategy to pool resources together. It is also a form of social protection in the absence of access to secure forms of employment and social welfare (Mtshali, 2015). Granny 8 explains that although the children are unemployed, they pool together whatever resources they have (income from part-time employment and social grants) to support the household.

(iii) Who else contributes to childcare?

Childcare takes place within a rich multi-generational network based on kinship, but also sometimes undertaken by friends and neighbours, underpinned by a community ethos. The childcare activities, such as watching and supervising children, extend beyond the boundaries of a single homestead. Many of the grandmothers remarked that there is always someone to keep an eye on the children in the village. Thus, grandmothers often rely on neighbours who are themselves grandmothers or mothers. One granny explains that when children come home, sometimes there is no one present, and thus neighbours help to keep an eye on them. However, "ni suka ni swekile..." (*Before I leave the house, I ensure that I have cooked*) so that the children can eat when they get back, and they know where to find the food. Granny 9's younger sister came to the homestead to assist her with childcare after she underwent an operation. Without this unpaid childcare, paid work for most mothers would not be possible, explains a granny who works at a farm with her daughter. Granny 4 and her daughter are seasonal fruit pickers, and without this unpaid childcare, undertaken by the younger daughter, who is unemployed, they both would be unable to go to work.

What Resources Are Available To Support Grandmothers In Their Caregiving Role?

(i) Reliance on social grants

> A *lot of grandmothers in this area are struggling; my neighbour is in pain after she had an operation to remove a tumour... She has kids, but none of them live with her;*

> *no one really knows where the kids are. I am also poor, and it is very painful; we are all in pain (Granny 8).*

As discussed earlier, grannies support families financially as the main caregivers of children in these households. Social grants constitute the main source of income for these households. The grannies who were eligible received an old age grant (OAG), which is a non-means-tested government grant for which South African citizens aged over 60 for women and over 65 years for men. At about R2100, it is not much, and in the majority of the households interviewed, the granny, who is also the household head, relies on this grant to support the family. Given that the OAG is the main source of income for unemployed and retired grannies, households where grannies are not eligible are extremely vulnerable. Granny 4 and Granny 6 are below the age of 60, the eligible age in South Africa to receive the Old Age grant. These grannies use income from their work as seasonal fruit pickers, as well as income for petty trading, to survive. Granny 6 explains:

> *The one who lives in the house uses grants to supplement the household income, but the other daughter receives a grant, and she's never shared it with me. The money that I have, which I use to supplement the food budget, is money gained from my petty trading. My child, who lives outside, sends me money and helps with stock for petty trading.*

As Granny 6 mentioned above, poor households use a combination of income and social grants. The child support grant (CSG), received by mothers of children below the age of 18, is also another important form of support to help meet

children's needs. The CSG, which recently increased to R530, is one of the main forms of financial support in these households. Unlike the OAG, the child support grant is means-tested (This is calculated as 5 times the grant amount) and paid to the mother of the child, following the principle of following the child. In the households interviewed, most of the mothers, irrespective of whether they lived in the household or not, contributed to household expenses by sending this money to the caregiver (granny). However, in the case of another granny, she admitted that she doesn't know what her daughter does with the money because although she collects it, she doesn't contribute to childcare expenses, even though her child lives in the household. It is important to note that although the child grant is an important source of income, at R530 on its own, it is insufficient to meet the needs of the child especially given that it has not kept up with food inflation, and as a result, majority of children remain below the food poverty line (FPL) (Hall & Prudlock, 2024).

The CSG has been hailed as one of the most successful grants and means of poverty alleviation, saving children from malnutrition and stunting. Of the 20 million children in South Africa, just over 13.2 million receive the CSG every month (STATS SA, 2021). The conversations with the grannies interviewed show the key role it plays and the fact that it is indispensable. Indeed, together with state-provided healthcare and free education, what is termed the social wage, serves the majority of children's needs, even if it is inadequate, says Granny 5.

According to Granny 6 not all the mothers who fail to send the money home are neglectful. She explains that her daughter works at a farm picking pepper and given that the income that she earns is not enough to even cover the transport to work, she uses the grant money to supplement the costs.

(ii) Other resources – Remittances

Some of the households interviewed had children working in Johannesburg and could thus send money home to support their children. Granny 2 explains that her husband receives his state pension as a retired policeman, and their mother sends money for their care to cover food, nappies and school. The grandmother looks after 18-month-old fraternal twins (a boy and a girl). She explains that her daughter works in the police force and every month is able to send money for school fees and has generous benefits, such as medical aid. Granny 3's son works in Johannesburg and can send money on a regular basis to cover school fees and transport for his 6-year-old daughter. He sent the money through his younger brother, who is able to collect it for his mother.

Granny 3 commented on the high un-employment and clarified that she believes that if her son had a stable job, he would send some money home. He is just doing piece jobs, she explains. Granny 2 is looking after the children of her son and daughter, who are based in Johannesburg. She explains that her children don't send her any money because they do not have secure jobs. Sometimes, the only thing that parents can afford to send home is the CSG. Granny 2 explains:

> *The CSG cards are with the parents of the children. My daughter can only afford to send the money from the CSG grant. My son and his wife said that they will send money when they receive it, since the card includes the younger children in their care; up to now, I have not received anything.*

Granny 6 has a sister who is a police officer based in Johannesburg. Her sister routinely sends money to the household. She explains that what helps her is the support from their aunt: "She is the one who sent my daughter to school in Musina because I couldn't afford the fees."

(iii) Tiololeni elder care association – the role of the non-profit sector.

The care deficit amidst the crisis of care is seen more in rural areas where care infrastructure is generally lacking. There are no parks for children in Mafarana, only a few under-resourced state ECD facilities with the challenges of these centres being similar to the challenges facing the community, which are a lack of water, sanitation and electricity. In this context, the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) sector plays a critical role and indeed, it is a lifeline for most grannies caring for younger children.

Tiololeni is an elder care organisation providing home based care, meals, recreation and education for grannies, based in Mafarana village. Most of the grannies interviewed are members of Tiololeni, and they mention the meals and support received from the non-profit organisation (NPO) as critical in the face of food insecurity. Granny 3 does not attend the sessions at Tioloeni, and she cites time poverty as a reason. She explains that she has a lot of work

to do, for example, working in the field, cooking, cleaning and childcare. She is aware of the benefits; however, it is just not practical for her to attend. Granny 10 cannot walk the 400 metres to the community grounds where grannies meet because of her legs. She wants to attend and believes that being in the company of others would benefit her.

Impacts On The Grandmothers

(i) Grandmothers feel responsible.

The interviews reveal that grannies feel responsible for childcare, but they are under a huge strain. The childcare activities, such as watching and supervising children, feeding, washing and cooking, are physically demanding. Grandmothers, for example, complain of arthritic-pains and body aches. They also highlight the stress of managing conflict over resources within the households and negotiating survival on a daily basis. This is reflected in how most of the grannies will say,

> *I have nothing; I give them what I have.*

Another granny who is raising a 2-year-old, 6-year-old and an 8-year-old (those are the youngest) says, if there is not enough food, I give it to my grandchildren.

Grannies often do not have much of a choice regarding their childcare responsibilities, given the poverty and lack of care infrastructure. Another granny explains that her daughter just gave birth so she had to come home so that she, her mother, can help her with the care of the infant. Another granny explained that the grandchildren came to stay with her because their mother was sick. Her older daughter is helping with the childcare responsibilities; she

explained that although the current co-resident grandchildren are older, one being 14 years old and the other 8 years old, she has cared for other younger grandchildren before them. Although grannies do not seem to have much of a choice, it's important to highlight the role of agency and how they perceive this unpaid care work, as discussed below.

(ii) Childcare is not a burden but a labour of love.

Childcare is not a burden, even though most grandmothers are not healthy. They celebrate their role and see it as a labour of love, shaping the next generations. The grannies acknowledge that childcare is physically demanding, and most of the grannies are physically unhealthy and suffer from various ailments. Granny 2 and Granny 6 both complained about pain following a car accident. Granny 2 says that "mbilu hi yoho yi lavaka ku va hlayisa vana lava" (*The heart wants to care for the children, even if the body is unable*). Awareness of mental health issues is generally very low among them. However, Granny 2 reports that her mental health is good and mentions mental health benefits such as feeling happy and that their lives have meaning.

The grannies perceive childcare responsibilities as an activity that brings meaning to their lives and is a source of joy. Granny 6 mentioned that providing for the children is hard, but she still does it out of love and care. Granny 8 mentioned that she was depressed and anxious because she lost 2 of her children last year. She was advised not to self-isolate and encouraged to be around people. She noted that taking care of children is not easy, but she feels that it is her responsibility, and it has improved her mental health. Granny 8 mentioned that the kids were given to her; she just had to take care of them. As a grandmother, she feels good, but the child is still young, so there are no benefits, but she is happy.

CONCLUSION

Co-resident grandmothers in rural households are bearing the burden of unpaid childcare work, where the state has failed to provide care. Childcare within these households is gendered, embedded in multi-generational networks headed by elderly Black African women. There are several reasons why grannies undertake childcare for their grandchildren.

Unemployment, illness and death of parents and inadequate earnings to support children are some of the reasons. Despite the challenges with ill health, the childcare is not viewed as a burden, even though most grandmothers are not healthy. They celebrate their role and see it as a labour of love that shapes the next generations.

The findings of this paper show that South African rural households headed by black elderly women are vulnerable, impacted by climate change and poverty. These households eke out some form of survival using social grants and precarious forms of employment. Grandmothers for example rely on remittances, the OAG and the CSG to support the household. The state's reliance on these households to provide unpaid care work is a major subsidy for the South African capitalist low wage regime economy.

What are the policy implications?

Grannies need financial, psychological and social support in their role as caregivers. This support should include a caregiver grant since both the OAG and the CSG are inadequate.

The triple R model provides a framework for thinking about redistributing and re-shaping unpaid care work among the main actors.

Better and more accessible care facilities, subsidised water and electricity can alleviate the burden of care on grandmothers.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

REFERENCES

Africa Health Research Institute. (2025). Realities of Fatherhood in South Africa today. https://www.ahri.org/realities-of-fatherhood-in-south-africa-today/

Beenie, A., Hoveni, J.B., Madhi, Y., Farr, V., & Ngcukana, L. (2025). A Care Approach to Achieving Gender Justice in Southern African Food Systems in the Context of Climate Change. Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ), Johannesburg, South Africa. https://iej.org.za/a-care-approach-to-achieving-gender-justice-in-southern-african-food-systems-in-the-context-of-climate-change/

Bray, R., & Brandt, R. (2007). Childcare and poverty in South Africa: An ethnographic challenge to conventional interpretations. Journal of Children and Poverty, 13(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/10796120601171187

Browne, K. (2005). Snowball Sampling: Using Social Networks to Research Non-Heterosexual Women. International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8(1), 47-60. https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000081663

Burman, S. (1995). Childcare by the elderly and the duty of support in multigenerational households. Southern African Journal of Gerontology, 4(1), 13-17. https://journal.ru.ac.za/index.php/sajog/article/view/57/49

Cantillon, S., Moore, E., & Teasdale, N. (2021). COVID-19 and the pivotal role of grandparents: Childcare and income support in the UK and South Africa. Feminist Economics, 27(1-2), 188-202. doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2020.1860246

Cassidy, J. (2019). Intergenerational Co-located Child and Eldercare. Tackling disadvantage through an assets-based approach to eldercare and childcare services. The Rank Foundation. https://media.churchillfellowship.org/documents/Cassidy_J_Report_2019_Final.pdf

Connelly, R. (1992). The effect of child care costs on married women's labor force participation. The review of Economics and Statistics, 74(1), 83–90.

Exploring Economics. (2016). Reproductive labour and care work. https://www.exploring-economics.org/de/entdecken/reproductive-labour-and-care/

Floro, S., & Komatsu, H. (2011). Gender and Work in South Africa: What Can Time-Use Data Reveal? Feminist Economics, 17(4), 33-66. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2011.614954

Furstenberg, F. F., & Cherlin, A. J. (1991). Divided families: What happens to children when parents part, 1. Harvard University Press.

Gaitskell, D., Kimble, J., Maconachie, M., & Unterhalter, E. (1983). Class, race and gender: Domestic workers in South Africa. Review of African Political Economy, 10(27-28), 86-108. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4005601?seq=1

Hall, K., & Prudlock, P. (2024). Child Support Grants. University of Cape Town (UCT). http://childrencount.uct.ac.za/indicator.php?domain=2&indicator=10

Hatch, M., & Posel, D. (2018). Who cares for children? A quantitative study of childcare in South Africa. Development Southern African, 35(2), 267-282. 10.1080/0376835X.2018.1452716

Helle, S., Tanskanen, A.O., & Coall, D.A., Perry, G., Daly, M., & Danielsbacka, M. (2024). Investment by maternal grandmother buffers children against the impacts of adverse early life experiences. Scientific Reports, 14(1), 6815. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-56760-5

Hernando, R. C. (2020). Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Counting the Costs. APEC Policy Support Unit Policy Brief No. 43. https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2022/3/unpaid-care-and-domestic-work-counting-the-costs/222_psu_unpaid-care-and-domestic-work.pdf

Himmelweit, S., & Land, H. (2010). Change, choice and cash in social care policies: Some lessons from comparing childcare and elder care (No. 74). Open Discussion Papers in Economics.

ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_633166.pdf

ILO. (2024). The labour market situation of women migrant workers in the SADC region. https://www.sammproject.org/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/The-Labour-Market-Situation-of-Women-Migrant-Workers-SADC-.pdf

Kasan, J. (2023). Engaging the care economy in the global south: debates and contestations. Working paper series no 1. Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ), Johannesburg. https://iej.org.za/engaging-the-care-economy-in-the-global-south/

Kasan, J. (2024). Mapping South Africas care regime pathways to a care focused social policy. Working paper series no 2. IEJ, Johannesburg. https://iej.org.za/mapping-south-africas-care-regime-pathways-to-a-care-focused-social-policy/

Leonard, E., Ananias, J., & Sharley, V. (2022). It takes a village to raise a child: everyday experiences of living with extended family in Namibia. British Academy, 10(2), 239-261. https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010s2.239

MacGregor, S., Arora-Jonsson, S., & Cohen, M. (2022). Caring in a changing climate: Centering care work in climate action. Oxfam research report. https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/caring-in-a-changing-climate-centering-care-work-in-climate-action-621353/

Mathambo, V., & Gibbs, A. (2009). Extended family childcare arrangements in the context of AIDS: collapse or adaptation? AIDS Care, 21(S1), 22-27. doi.org/10.1080/09540120902942949

Maurer-Fazio, M., Connelly, R., Chen, L., & Tang, L. (2011). Childcare, eldercare, and labor force participation of married women in urban China, 1982–2000. Journal of human resources, 46(2), 261-294. www.iza.org/publications/dp/4204/childcare-eldercare-and-labor-force-participation-of-married-women-in-urban-china-1982-2000

Monasch, R., & Boerma, J.T. (2004). Orphanhood and Childcare patterns in Sub-Saharan Africa: an analysis of national surveys from 40 countries. Aids, 18, S55-S65. https://doi.org/10.1097/00002030-200406002-00007

Moore, E. (2023). Family care for older persons in South Africa: heterogeneity of the carer's experience. International Journal of Care and Caring, 1(aop), 1-22. doi.org/10.1332/239788221X16740630896657

Moore, E., & Kelly, G. (2024). Struggles over elder care in South Africa. Development Southern Africa, 41(6), 1062-1077. https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2024.2374823

Mthiyane, D. B., Wissink, H., & Chiwawa, N. (2022). The impact of rural–urban migration in South Africa: A case of KwaDukuza municipality. Journal of Local Government Research and Innovation, 3 (0), a56. https://jolgri.org/index.php/jolgri/article/view/56/218

Mtshali, M. N. G. (2015). The relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren in the black families in South Africa. Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 46(1), 75-83. https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.46.1.75

Müller, B. (2019). The careless society—Dependency and care work in capitalist societies. Frontiers in Sociology, 3, 44. https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sociology/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2018.00044/full

Nnama-Okechukwu, C. U., Chukwu, N. E., & Okoye, U. O. (2023). Alternative childcare arrangement in indigenous communities: Apprenticeship system and informal child fostering in South East Nigeria. Indigenization Discourse in Social Work: International Perspectives, 373-388. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37712-9_22

Peng, I. (2019). The Care Economy: a new research framework. Hal-03456901. https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03456901/

Rehle, T. M., & Shisana, O. (2003). Epidemiological and demographic HIV/AIDS projections: South Africa. African Journal of AIDS Research, 2(1), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.2989/16085906.2003.9626554

Schatz, E., & Seeley, J. (2015). Gender, ageing and carework in East and Southern Africa: A review. Global public health, 10(10), 1185-1200. https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2015.1035664

Shamase, L. Z., & Sekaja, L. (2025). Mothering away from home: experiences of Zimbabwean domestic workers in South Africa. Frontiers in Sociology, 10, 1607624. www.frontiersin.org/journals/sociology/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2025.1607624/full

SCIS, (2024). The climate care nexus: a conceptual framework. Working paper number 70. Southern Centre for inequality studies, Johannesburg. climateandcareinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Working-Paper-70-Care-Climate-Nexus-Conceptual-Framework.pdf

Schrijner, S., & Smits, J. (2018). Grandmothers and children's schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa. Human Nature, 29(1), 65-89. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-017-9306-y

Sello, M., Adedini, S. A., Odimegwu, C., Petlele, R., & Tapera, T. (2023). The Relationship between Childcare-Giving Arrangements and Children's Malnutrition Status in South Africa. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 20(3), 2572. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20032572

Shai, L. (2025). Unlocking affordable and quality childcare to benefit women, children, and the broader society A review of the South African childcare system. Ilifa la bantwana, Johannesburg. https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Childcare-Report.pdf

STATS SA. (2018). https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=14044

STATS SA. (2019). Families and parents are key to well-being of children. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=14388

STATS SA. (2020). South Africa's poor little children. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=13422

STATS SA. (2021). Trends in selected health indicators regarding children under 5 years in South Africa. http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-00-16/03-00-162020.pdf

STATS SA. (2023). SDG goal country report South Africa. https://www.statssa.gov.za/MDG/SDG_Country_report.pdf

STATS SA. (2025). Millions of South African Children Raised by Grandparents. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=18066

Thornton, P. K., Jones, P. G., Owiyo, T., Kruska, R. L., Herrero, M., Orindi, V., & Omolo, A. (2008). Climate change and poverty in Africa: Mapping hotspots of vulnerability. African Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics, 2(1), 24-44. https://hdl.handle.net/10568/663

UNICEF. (2024). 23 percent of children in South Africa live in severe child food poverty. https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/press-releases/23-cent-children-south-africa-live-severe-child-food-poverty

UN. (nd). What are the sustainable development goals? https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals

UN Women. (2019). A toolkit on paid and unpaid care work. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/A-toolkit-on-paid-and-unpaid-care-work-en.pdf

UN Women. (2021). A Guide to Public Investments in the Care Economy Policy Support Tool for Estimating Care Deficits, Investment Costs and Economic Returns. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Policy-tool-Care-economy-en.pdf

Zhong, X., & Peng, M. (2024). Eldercare or childcare: intergenerational distribution in Chinese families facing care deficits. The Journal of Chinese Sociology, 11(1), 20. https://journalofchinesesociology.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40711-024-00221-z

Gender, Culture, and Leadership Dynamics: Women and Men Shaping Western Kenya's Influence on National and Continental Politics

Peter Gutwa Oino – School of Art and Social Sciences, Kisii University iD

ABSTRACT

Leadership across Africa remains a complex and contested domain, deeply intertwined with cultural norms and gender dynamics. This paper explores the intersection of gender, culture, and leadership in Western Kenya, focusing on how cultural practices shape leadership roles and the growing influence of both men and women in political leadership at national and continental levels. Grounded in Social Role Theory which offers insight into the cultural shifts needed to empower women's leadership, while Culturally Sustaining Leadership Theory (CSLT) provides a model for understanding how leadership emerges and evolves in complex and interdependent environments. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study drew from a carefully determined sample size of 361 respondents from the general population, 25 key informants, 16 focus group discussions, and 25 direct observations. Data collection included questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, with ethical considerations fully observed. The findings reveal that patriarchy strongly influences male leadership development, particularly in Kakamega and Kisii Counties, while female leaders face nuanced challenges, including exclusion due to cultural practices like female circumcision. However, women are playing an increasingly significant role in development at local, regional, and global levels. The study emphasises the need to integrate cultural structures that promote gender inclusive leadership while addressing practices that hinder constitutional values. In doing so, Western Kenya's leadership can be elevated to thrive on both national and Pan-African political stages.

BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aiming to eradicate poverty, protect the environment, and achieve equitable well-being globally (UN, 2016). As Africa embarks on this ambitious journey, the role of both women and men in leadership has become central to the discourse on socio-political progress. The intersection of gender, culture, and leadership dynamics raises critical questions about how these factors shape political landscapes at national and continental levels, especially in regions like Western Kenya. This paper examines the multifaceted ways in which women and men from Western Kenya influence politics within Kenya and beyond, with a particular focus on how gender roles and cultural frameworks shape leadership in this context.

Historically, leadership in African societies, including those in Western Kenya, has been predominantly viewed through a male lens, driven by patriarchal structures rooted in traditional, cultural, and social norms (Ogbodo et al., 2022). Communities like the Luhya and Kisii in Western Kenya have long adhered to patriarchal hierarchies that position men in leadership roles. However, with increasing global advocacy for gender equality and inclusivity, there has been a notable shift toward recognising the leadership capacities of women. In Kenya, this shift is manifesting through policies and initiatives aimed at empowering both women and men in political and economic spheres, resulting in new models and structures of leadership that challenge established cultural norms. This transformation is anchored in the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which introduced the two-thirds gender rule (Articles 27[8] and 81[b]) to promote gender parity in elective and appointive positions (Republic of Kenya, 2010). The establishment of the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) and other gender-responsive institutions has advanced gender main-streaming within governance and policy frameworks (NGEC, 2023).

Government-led programs such as the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) and Uwezo Fund have enhanced economic participation among women and youth, creating new pathways for inclusive leadership and entrepreneurship (Ministry of Public Service, Gender and Affirmative Action, 2022). Empirical evidence further supports this transformation: women now occupy 23% of National Assembly seats and 31% of Senate seats, up from 9% in 2013 (UN Women, 2023), while seven female governors were elected in 2022 compared to none in 2013 (IEBC, 2022).

At the county level, initiatives such as the Council of Women Governors have institutionalised mentorship and gender-responsive budgeting (Council of Governors, 2022). Moreover, studies demonstrate growing acceptance of women's leadership and participation in governance. For instance, Mutinda, Magutu, and Tshiyoyo (2025) show that gender-sensitive economic policies and empowerment programs have significantly improved women's agency and political engagement in urban and rural Kenya. Similarly, according to Minja, Kimani, Makhamara, Gachanja, Moi, Mdoe, Oringo, and Onditi

(2025), deliberate capacity-building programs and affirmative action policies have reshaped leadership structures, promoting shared decision-making and enhanced inclusivity of both men and women in governance processes

The discourse on gender and leadership in Africa has gained significant momentum in recent years, spurred by international frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, both of which call for gender parity in leadership roles (African Union, 2020). Western Kenya offers a compelling case study for exploring these dynamics, as both women and men from this region increasingly rise to positions of influence within local, national, and continental political arenas. However, as Mikell (1997) argues, the intersection of gender and culture in African political and social life remains deeply complex cultural norms, social organiszation (such as dual-sex systems), and traditional values continue to influence leadership opportunities, especially for women, within frameworks of power, survival, and social belonging.

Leadership, particularly in African contexts, is often defined by cultural and social structures. In traditional Western Kenyan communities, such as the Luhya and Kisii, leadership was historically determined by factors like age, clan affiliations, and wealth, often excluding women from formal political leadership. Obara and Nyanchoga (2025) show that among the Abagusii, leadership has historically been structured around clan affiliations and elder councils, which has marginalized certain clans and constrained equitable political representation. As described by Gumo (2018),

Luhya communities traditionally organized socially and politically through clan-based governance led by elders, with decisions on conflict, land, and resource management largely made by these elder councils rather than centralized authority. Today, both women and men leaders from Western Kenya face the dual challenge of negotiating deeply ingrained cultural norms while aligning with national and continental political agendas that emphasise gender inclusivity. In a region where cultural identity is as important as political affiliations, leadership styles that embrace cultural awareness are emerging as effective tools for bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. While traditional values remain influential, leaders like Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi and Martha Karua also reflect a modern political vision-blending their cultural identity with progressive leadership as documented in their public careers (Pulselive, 2025; Kenya Yearbook, 2022).

Cultural norms, economic expectations, and local political traditions continue to shape leadership dynamics in Kenya. For instance, Nzomo (2011) shows that patriarchal values remain deeply embedded in governance structures, while studies in counties such as Kakamega reveal how ethnic and clan affiliations influence women's access to leadership. Furthermore, the Ubuntu philosophical tradition underscores how communal values can both support and limit women's political participation in modern Kenya (Aringo & Odongo, 2025).

The discourse on leadership in Africa has historically been dominated by Western paradigms that often marginalise indigenous

systems (Kuada, 2010). Recent scholarship, however, highlights that African cultural frameworks, encompassing both men's and women's leadership traditions, provide alternative governance models that challenge patriarchal power and foster social equity (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). This study positions both women and men from Western Kenya as transformative agents redefining leadership and political participation within a context still marked by deep-rooted cultural expectations.

At the heart of this transformation lies a persistent challenge: while constitutional reforms and global advocacy have expanded opportunities for women, patriarchal ideologies and cultural constructs continue to limit their participation in formal political leadership. In communities such as the Luhya and Kisii, women who exert influence in domestic and civic spheres often face systemic barriers including exclusion from party politics, gender stereotyping, and limited access to economic and educational resources. These structural inequalities do not only marginalise women but also restrict men's potential to engage as champions of gender-equitable governance.

Across the continent, countries such as Rwanda, Ethiopia, and South Africa demonstrate how gender-inclusive leadership can advance national unity, peacebuilding, and sustainable development (Sow, 2019). Kenya's own experience, though promising, remains uneven. Persistent socio-cultural biases and institutional barriers continue to frustrate the realisation of the two-thirds gender rule (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Yet, the growing visibility of both women and men leaders from Western Kenya ranging from grassroots mobilisers to global figures like Prof. Anyang' Nyong'o and Lupita Nyong'o illustrates the region's evolving contribution to national and continental leadership narratives (Mwaniki, 2017).

In essence, the leadership transformation unfolding in Western Kenya represents a negotiation between cultural continuity and social progress. While patriarchy remains deeply entrenched, increasing advocacy, education, and policy interventions are reshaping leadership to embrace both genders as partners in governance. This study seeks to unpack these dynamics, examining how cultural and gendered experiences shape leadership trajectories in Western Kenya and how such transformations can inform inclusive political development across Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, gender continues to shape leadership trajectories, as cultural and social norms influence who is perceived as capable or legitimate to lead. Across diverse societies, men have historically dominated political, corporate, and community leadership spaces, while women have often been relegated to the margins of power (UN Women, 2025; ALIGN Platform, 2019). This disparity is underpinned by deeply embedded patriarchal ideologies that privilege male authority and constrain women's access to decision-making opportunities.

Nevertheless, global frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goal 5 have stimulated progress toward gender equality. They provide both normative and strategic

foundations for states to promote inclusive leadership. Within Africa, these commitments have inspired countries like Kenya to institutionalise affirmative action and create gender-responsive policy mechanisms. Such global–local linkages affirm that gender equality in leadership is not merely a legal issue but a transformative social process that requires dismantling structural inequalities and redefining cultural meanings of power (Adichie, 2017; UN Women, 2023).

In most African contexts, cultural traditions and patriarchal systems have historically defined leadership as a male prerogative (Tripp et al., 2009). Leadership is often embedded within lineage, age, and patriarchal authority structures, which symbolically associate leadership with masculinity. These traditions remain influential in Kenya, particularly in rural regions such as Western Kenya, where women's leadership roles have often been restricted to informal or domestic spheres. Yet, Kenyan society has undergone significant cultural transformation due to education, religious change, urbanisation, and globalization all of which have opened new spaces for women's agency.

Women's participation in church leadership, self-help groups, savings cooperatives, and county assemblies reflects this gradual redefinition of authority. While men still dominate formal political offices, women increasingly exercise leadership through socially acceptable and community-based platforms. As observed by Kamau (2010), these emergent roles are reshaping the moral and cultural narratives surrounding leadership, allowing women to "lead from within" their

cultural systems rather than outside them. This indicates that gendered leadership in Kenya is best understood as an evolving negotiation between cultural expectations and changing socio-political realities.

Kenya's 2010 Constitution introduced the two-thirds gender rule, mandating that no more than two-thirds of elective or appointive bodies should be of the same gender. This legal framework, although inconsistently implemented, represents a major policy step toward women's inclusion in governance (Tripp et al., 2009). The Kenyan experience draws from successful models in Rwanda and South Africa, where gender quotas have dramatically improved women's political representation. At the grassroots level, women's networks such as the Western Kenya Women's Leadership Network (WKWLN) have taken a culturally sensitive approach to empowerment by combining mentorship, economic support, and civic education. These initiatives translate national policy into everyday practice by cultivating leadership competencies within community settings. Theoretically, such approaches align with empowerment and social change paradigms that emphasise participation, collective action, and the transformation of everyday gender relations (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015).

Despite significant legislative progress, Kenyan women continue to face persistent obstacles including cultural resistance, economic marginalisation, and gender-based violence (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2020). Patriarchal political networks, limited access to campaign financing, and stereotypes portraying women as "unfit" for leadership further constrain their

advancement (Paxton et al., 2020). These challenges are particularly acute in Western Kenya, where customary norms still shape perceptions of authority and constrain women's entry into formal politics.

Nonetheless, there are growing spaces of optimism. The increased visibility of women in local assemblies, advocacy organisations, and education institutions signals a slow but steady shift in gender relations. Exposure to global women's movements and the diffusion of feminist discourses through media, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and faith-based organisations have empowered women to redefine leadership in relational and community driven ways. This redefinition situates leadership not only in hierarchical authority but also in service, empathy, and collective responsibility traits often associated with women's leadership styles in African contexts (Ngunjiri, 2010).

Empirical research in Kenya increasingly highlights the lived realities behind gendered leadership statistics. Genga and Babalola (2023) found that women in the banking sector experienced persistent gender bias, describing a subtle yet pervasive "think manager, think male" culture that shaped promotion pathways and leadership. Despite demonstrating competence, many felt compelled to conform to masculine leadership norms to gain credibility, reflecting broader sociocultural constraints on women's expression of authority. Similarly, Kasera et al. (2021) analysed women's participation in rural electoral politics, showing how women are active in campaign mobilisation yet systematically excluded from candidacy and strategy roles. They termed this exclusion a "gendered architecture of politics,"

whereby women's visibility is high but their voice and power remain constrained. This echoes everyday experiences in Western Kenya, where women often support male politicians as organisers or mediators rather than as political contenders.

Njenga and Njoroge (2019) examined cooperative movements in Nyeri County and observed that social expectations particularly regarding domestic responsibilities and limited mobility restricted women's participation in cooperative leadership. Their findings underscore how culture becomes internalised: women themselves often self-limit by perceiving leadership as socially inappropriate. Shumbamhini and Chirongoma (2025) propose that the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasises interconnectedness and communal well-being, offers a culturally grounded alternative for conceptualising leadership. Within this framework, leadership is relational rather than hierarchical, collective rather than individualistic. In the Kenyan context, particularly in community-based governance, women have leveraged Ubuntu-like values of care, collaboration, and moral integrity to lead in ways that align with cultural expectations while subtly transforming them.

This body of literature provides a nuanced foundation for analysing gendered leadership in Western Kenya. It demonstrates that leadership is both a structural and a cultural phenomenon constructed through interactions among institutions, norms, and personal agency. Theoretical insights from empowerment theory, intersectionality, and relational leadership frameworks are useful in interpreting these dynamics. They suggest that

women's leadership emerges not merely through legal quotas but through cultural negotiation, community affirmation, and everyday practices of resilience and adaptation.

In Western Kenya, where lineage, age, and tradition continue to influence social legitimacy, understanding leadership through a culturally embedded lens becomes crucial. Women leaders navigate between respecting tradition and challenging exclusion, often using relational networks and moral authority to claim leadership spaces. By focusing on these lived, culturally grounded strategies, this study contributes to an anthropological understanding of gender and leadership one that recognises the human agency, emotions, and meanings behind structural change.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional design and phenomenology to explore leadership learning and development in Western Kenya. Respondents were selected using both simple random sampling (for household questionnaires) and purposive sampling (for key informants and focus group discussions). Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires, while qualitative data was gathered via interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The data sets were analysed separately but integrated to understand how leadership is influenced by culture and constitutional factors. Two Bantu-speaking ethnic groups, the Luhya and Kisii, were randomly selected from 6 dominant groups in Western Kenya due to their cultural significance in leadership. The study specifically focused on the Wanga people of Matungu Sub County, known for their Nabongo Wanga Kingdom, to examine how culture impacts leadership. Other subgroups, including the Banyala and Batsotso, were also studied. Using the Morgan and Krejcie formula, 384 cases were selected for questionnaire administration, with a response rate of 94% (361 cases). Additionally, 16 focus group discussions (8 in each county), 25 key informant interviews, and 25 observations were conducted across Kakamega and Kisii Counties.

Theoretical Framework

Social Role Theory (SRT)

Social Role Theory, developed by Eagly (1987), explains how societies assign certain behaviours, expectations, and responsibilities to men and women based on culturally defined gender roles. Over time, these expectations shape what people believe men and women can or should do including who is seen as a "natural leader." In most patriarchal contexts, men are expected to be assertive, ambitious, and authoritative, while women are associated with nurturing, supportive, and communal roles. In leadership studies, this theory helps to explain why women often face stereotypes that question their ability to lead, especially in political and public life (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When women show confidence or authority, they are sometimes judged as "too aggressive" or "unfeminine," while men showing the same traits are praised as strong leaders. These biases affect how both men and women view themselves and how others respond to their leadership. In the Kenyan context particularly in Western Kenya Social Role Theory helps to explain why women's leadership is often viewed

through the lens of culture and tradition. For instance, men are typically seen as public decision-makers, while women are expected to influence indirectly through family or community service. Understanding these social expectations provides a basis for analysing how women leaders challenge and redefine traditional gender roles through education, advocacy, and grassroots mobilisation.

Culturally Sustaining Leadership Theory (CSLT)

Culturally Sustaining Leadership Theory (Paris & Alim, 2017) builds on the idea that effective leadership must recognise, respect, and nurture the cultural identities of the communities it serves. Rather than forcing conformity to dominant (often Western or patriarchal) leadership norms, CSLT promotes leadership that values diversity, collective wisdom, and cultural integrity. It sees culture not as a barrier to progress, but as a source of strength and guidance for inclusive change. In practice, this means leaders should use their cultural knowledge and values to inspire transformation from within the community. For example, in Western Kenya, women leaders often draw on local cultural principles such as Ubuntu (shared humanity), obonyore (collective welfare), and mutual respect to frame their leadership as service to the community rather than individual ambition. This culturally grounded approach not only makes leadership more acceptable in traditional societies but also helps redefine what leadership looks like for future generations. CSLT therefore provides a framework for understanding how women navigate and reinterpret cultural norms to sustain their communities while asserting their right to lead. It highlights that leadership is not only about power or position, but about maintaining social harmony, moral integrity, and collective progress values deeply rooted in African communal life. Combining Social Role Theory and Culturally Sustaining Leadership Theory offers a more complete understanding of gender and leadership in the Kenyan context. Social Role Theory helps to explain why gender inequalities persist by showing how social expectations shape opportunities and behaviours. In contrast, CSLT shows how leaders, especially women, can use culture itself as a tool for empowerment and transformation. Together, these theories reveal that cultural norms are not fixed; they can evolve. Women leaders in Western Kenya are not merely breaking traditions they are reworking them. They respect cultural values but also reinterpret them to make leadership more inclusive. This dual framework therefore highlights both the barriers that limit women's leadership and the creative strategies they use to overcome them.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Patriarchy And Masculinity On Men To Become Leaders In Western Kenya

Table 1 reveals a complex and somewhat paradoxical relationship between the perceived influence of patriarchy and its effects on leadership aspirations in Western Kenya. For respondents who believed that patriarchy had a very low influence on leadership learning, (39.7% believed that this had a very low effect

on men who aspired to leadership.), However there was a significant portion (27.6%) who noted a very high effect on men aspiring to leadership roles despite saying that patriarchy had very low effect on leadership development and learning. This is counterintuitive, as one would expect a lower influence to correspond with a diminished effect. However, one possible explanation is that while the overall influence of patriarchy appears weak, some aspects of societal structures such as family inheritance patterns, traditional ceremonies, or male-centric leadership expectations still exert significant pressure on male leadership ambitions. Additionally, 20.7% reported low effects, while 10.3% mentioned an average effect, further indicating variability influenced by individual or contextual factors. This could reflect a more nuanced reality where patriarchal norms persist even in subtle forms, though less overtly than before.

Table 1: How does patriarchy influence leadership learning and development in western Kenya? * How does the above affect Men who want to become leaders?

| | | | How does the above affect Men who want to become leaders? | | | | | |
			Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high	Total
How does patriarchy influence leadership learning and development in western Kenya?	Very low	Count	23	12	6	1	16	58
		Percent*	40%	21%	10%	2%	28%	100%
	Low	Count	2	6	17	5	7	37
		Percent*	5%	16%	46%	14%	19%	100%
	Average	Count	5	7	42	13	21	88
		Percent*	6%	8%	48%	15%	24%	100%
	High	Count	2	3	12	33	12	62
		Percent*	3%	5%	19%	53%	19%	100%
	Very high	Count	28	4	8	9	67	116
		Percent*	24%	3%	7%	8%	58%	100%
Total		Count	60	32	85	61	123	361
		Percent*	17%	9%	24%	17%	34%	100%

* % within patriarchy influence?

In contrast, others argue that this variation may suggest a different interpretation: that individuals in regions with lower patriarchal influence are more adaptable to modern, egalitarian views of leadership. Some respondents may not perceive patriarchy's impact on leadership as significant because they are in environments where leadership opportunities for both men and women are expanding due to education and socio-economic advancements. This perspective could explain why, despite low perceived

patriarchal influence, a notable proportion still reported substantial effects on male leadership aspirations.

Among respondents who felt patriarchy had a low influence, the majority (45.9%) indicated an average effect on men aspiring to leadership. This finding suggests that although patriarchy may not dominate leadership learning and development, it retains a moderate, pervasive impact, subtly influencing leadership pathways. The 18.9% among them who noted a very high effect points to persistent traditional gender expectations in certain areas, where patriarchal structures, though weakened, still shape leadership roles. However, critics of this view argue that the persistence of patriarchal norms in these areas might be overemphasised, and instead, leadership aspirations could be more closely tied to other factors such as economic status, access to education, or exposure to urban, cosmopolitan ideals. This alternative view challenges the assumption that patriarchal influences alone are the primary drivers of leadership dynamics, suggesting that the effects of modernity and global cultural exchanges might also play crucial roles in shaping leadership aspirations.

For respondents who perceived patriarchy's influence as average, there was a strong consistency with 47.7% reporting an average effect on leadership aspirations. This predictable correlation suggests that in environments where patriarchy holds moderate power, its impact on leadership development tends to be more uniform. However, a significant 23.9% of them reported a very high effect, which raises the question of whether "average" patriarchal influence could still

reinforce strong male-centric leadership aspirations in certain communities. Proponents of this perspective argue that even moderate patriarchal norms can act as invisible social forces, subtly reinforcing male leadership roles through cultural expectations that are passed down generationally.

On the other hand, some may argue that this finding demonstrates a contradiction. In communities where patriarchy is only moderately influential, the expectation would be for men and women to have increasingly equal leadership opportunities. The 23.9% reporting a very high effect could therefore reflect specific local factors such as strong leadership traditions in particular families or clans that do not necessarily indicate widespread patriarchal dominance. These contrasting views highlight the complexity of patriarchy's influence and suggest that its impact may not be universally felt in the same way across different communities.

Among respondents who viewed patriarchy's influence as high, there was a strong correlation with 53.2% reporting a high effect on leadership learning and development. This reinforces the idea that in regions where patriarchal values are deeply entrenched, male leadership aspirations are reinforced by these traditional structures. However, a smaller percentage (19.4%) reported an average effect, which could be explained by the fact that even in highly patriarchal settings, external factors such as education, exposure to modern leadership models, or individual ambition may moderate patriarchy's influence. Dissenting opinions might argue that the high impact of patriarchy in these regions should not be

overstated, as the global shift toward gender equality in leadership is increasingly influencing even traditionally conservative areas. The presence of average and lower effects might indicate that patriarchal values are being increasingly challenged by new societal norms, particularly among younger generations.

For those who identified patriarchy's influence as very high, the majority (57.8%) correlated this with a very high effect on leadership aspirations. This suggests that in communities where patriarchal norms are deeply ingrained, leadership roles remain overwhelmingly male-centric. Yet, 24.1% of them reported a very low effect, which could indicate a divergence where certain individuals or sub-groups within these communities are able to defy or reinterpret traditional gender expectations, leading to leadership practices that do not align with strict patriarchal norms. Some scholars argue that this finding is evidence of shifting dynamics in these communities, where education and modernisation are gradually eroding patriarchal strongholds. Others contend that the resilience of patriarchy in these communities remains strong and that the minority reporting low effects may represent a small, isolated segment of the population, rather than a broader trend toward egalitarianism.

The qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions further illustrate these contrasting views. Participants frequently emphasised the role of cultural rituals and inheritance in shaping male leadership. A participant from Kakamega County stated, "Leadership here is passed down, especially to men in certain families. It's just expected that

boys will take charge." This aligns with the high effect of patriarchy reported in highly patriarchal communities. However, others noted changing dynamics. An informant in Kisii County reflected, "Things are changing, but for a long time, leadership was just for men; it's how our elders taught us." These varying perspectives suggest that while patriarchal traditions remain influential, modern forces such as education, urbanisation, and changing social norms are increasingly challenging these expectations.

The findings of this study align with other research that highlights the complex relationship between traditional gender norms and leadership pathways. For instance, Anyango et al. (2019), in their study on gender and leadership in rural Kenya, found that while patriarchy remained a key determinant of leadership positions, there was an increasing shift toward more gender-inclusive models of leadership, particularly in regions exposed to educational interventions and economic changes. This study mirrors our findings where, even in communities with low perceived patriarchal influence, significant portions of the population still report strong effects on male leadership aspirations, indicating that patriarchy may linger in subtler, less visible ways.

Ntarangwi (2016), who explored cultural practices and leadership in East Africa, argued that in some regions, leadership remains closely tied to male inheritance practices and traditional ceremonies. This parallels our findings, where respondents from regions with strong patriarchal structures noted that leadership roles are often passed down within male-dominated family lineages. One

participant's statement, "Leadership here is passed down, especially to men in certain families," corroborates Ntarangwi's argument that leadership structures in rural Kenya often remain male-centric due to cultural inheritance systems, despite changing societal norms.

However, contrasting studies offer a different lens on the role of patriarchy in leadership. For instance, Mbote and Akech (2021), in their examination of leadership dynamics in Kenya's urban centers, found that while patriarchy historically shaped leadership norms, new urbanisation trends and exposure to global leadership models are increasingly reshaping these norms. Their study suggests that patriarchal influence is waning in urban areas, with more women aspiring to leadership roles. Although this study was situated in Western Kenya, where patriarchal traditions are still significant, the contrasting data on urban areas highlights a key point: even within regions that report high patriarchal influence, modern forces such as education, urbanisation, and gender equality initiatives are beginning to dismantle long-held traditions. This can also explain the responses from some of our participants, particularly in Kisii County, who noted, "Things are changing, but for a long time, leadership was just for men." Such statements indicate a shift in perception, even in areas with entrenched patriarchal structures.

As a researcher, I found these contrasting views particularly intriguing, especially the variations in responses based on the perceived influence of patriarchy. While some respondents viewed patriarchy as having a diminished effect, they still acknowledged its lingering impact on male leadership aspirations. This paradox echoes Sifuna and Chege's (2017) research, which argued that in regions undergoing socio-economic transitions, patriarchal norms often evolve into more covert forms, maintaining their influence but in less visible ways. Sifuna and Chege's work helped me understand how, despite the reported low influence of patriarchy, many respondents in this study still reported significant effects on leadership, suggesting that these norms might be adapting rather than completely disappearing.

Moreover, the findings of this study are corroborated by Oduol (2019), who explored the role of education in challenging patriarchal leadership norms in Kenya's rural communities. Oduol's research demonstrated that educational interventions significantly influenced leadership aspirations by providing alternative models of leadership that challenge traditional, male-dominated structures. In this study, education emerged as a key factor in moderating the effects of patriarchy on leadership, particularly in regions where respondents reported low to moderate levels of patriarchal influence. This suggests that educational programs in Western Kenya could play a crucial role in shifting leadership norms, aligning with global trends toward gender parity in leadership.

Patriarchy, Leadership Learning And Development And Its Effects On Women In Western Kenya

Table 2 illustrates how patriarchy continues to shape women's leadership learning and aspirations in Western Kenya, though its influence varies widely. The findings reveal that perceptions of patriarchy's impact range from

"very low" to "very high," suggesting that women's experiences are far from uniform. Most respondents (34.5%) among those who viewed patriarchy as having a very low influence on leadership learning believed that it had little effect on women's desire to pursue leadership roles. This finding may indicate that patriarchal barriers are weakening in certain spaces or that women are finding ways to navigate them successfully. As one participant explained, "Women today see leadership as achievable; culture no longer silences everyone." This observation echoes Nkomo and Ngambi's (2009) argument that African women increasingly reinterpret gender norms to expand leadership opportunities rather than passively accept restrictions.

Table 2: How does patriarchy influence leadership learning and development in western Kenya? * How does the above affect women who want to become leaders?

			How does the above affect Women who want to become leaders?					
			Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high	Total
How does patriarchy influence leadership learning and development in western Kenya?	Very low	Count	20	10	11	7	10	58
		Percent*	35%	17%	19%	12%	17%	100%
	Low	Count	7	14	10	5	1	37
		Percent*	19%	38%	27%	14%	3%	100%
	Average	Count	17	15	40	6	10	88
		Percent*	19%	17%	46%	7%	11%	100%
	High	Count	12	11	19	8	12	62
		Percent*	19%	18%	31%	13%	19%	100%
	Very high	Count	47	6	10	8	45	116
		Percent*	41%	5%	9%	7%	39%	100%
Total		Count	103	56	90	34	78	361
		Percent*	29%	16%	25%	9%	22%	100%

* % within patriarchy influence?

However, even among respondents reporting a low influence of patriarchy, some (17.2%) still perceived a high effect on women's leadership aspirations. This apparent contradiction suggests that even minimal patriarchal attitudes can have an outsized psychological or social impact especially when reinforced by economic or institutional barriers. Tamale (2020) similarly notes that patriarchal systems endure in subtle ways through everyday practices and beliefs that normalise male dominance, even in settings where formal equality has advanced. Respondents who viewed patriarchy's influence as average reflected a moderate stance. Many recognised that traditional norms still shape leadership

access but do not entirely prevent women from aspiring to lead. This shift may be attributed to expanded education, gender quotas, and leadership mentorship programmes that have begun to soften patriarchal effects (Nzomo, 2015). A participant noted, "Training and women's groups give us courage to speak and lead." Such voices demonstrate the gradual transformation of gender roles through collective empowerment and education.

Conversely, those who perceived high or very high patriarchal influence tended to associate it with greater barriers to women's leadership. For these respondents, patriarchal norms remain deeply rooted in family and community hierarchies, often limiting women's visibility in decision-making. As Kabeer (2016) observes, such structural inequalities are not evenly distributed: women in rural and traditional settings face stronger cultural restrictions than their urban counterparts. Still, it is notable that even within highly patriarchal contexts, some women reported finding ways to lead. Cornwall and Goetz (2005) highlight this adaptive agency, showing that women often use informal networks, grassroots activism, and social capital to bypass formal patriarchal structures.

In summary, Table 2 presents a complex but hopeful picture. While patriarchy remains influential, its impact on women's leadership aspirations is gradually being contested through education, empowerment initiatives, and cultural negotiation. This aligns with CSLT, which posits that leadership transformation often begins within, rather than outside culture. Women are not merely rejecting tradition; they are reworking it

fto crreate space for inclusive leadership that resonates with community values.

Masculinity Leadership Learning And Development In Western Kenya on Men Who Want To Become Leaders

Table 3 presents how masculinity shapes leadership learning and development in Western Kenya. While many (50%) of the respondents who said masculinity had a very low influence on leadership felt that this had a very low effect on the men who want to become leaders, the qualitative data revealed that masculine ideals remain subtly embedded in expectations of what a leader should be. As one male respondent explained, "Even when we say masculinity doesn't matter, you still have to look tough and firm to be respected." This echoes Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, where male dominance operates quietly through cultural assumptions that equate leadership with strength and assertiveness.

Interestingly, a quarter of respondents who rated masculinity's influence as very low still believed it had a very high effect on men aspiring to lead. This suggests an internalised pressure: even when men deny masculinity's influence, they continue to perform it subconsciously. Kimmel (2010) describes this as the "invisible script" of masculinity where men feel compelled to embody traits like control and confidence to sustain legitimacy as leaders. These findings point to an underlying contradiction: while overt gender roles are shifting, traditional masculine ideals still define how leadership is perceived and enacted.

Table 3: How does masculinity influence leadership learning and development in western Kenya? * How does the above affect Men who want to become leaders?

			Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high	Total
How does masculinity influence leadership learning and development in western Kenya?	Very low	Count	24	6	5	1	12	48
		Percent*	50%	13%	10%	2%	25%	100%
	Low	Count	2	12	16	5	2	37
		Percent*	5%	32%	43%	14%	5%	100%
	Average	Count	1	4	21	10	6	42
		Percent*	2%	10%	50%	24%	14%	100%
	High	Count	5	2	6	37	15	65
		Percent*	8%	3%	9%	57%	23%	100%
	Very high	Count	25	8	8	8	80	129
		Percent*	19%	6%	6%	6%	62%	100%
Total		Count	57	32	56	61	115	321
		Percent*	18%	10%	17%	19%	36%	100%

How does the above affect Men who want to become leaders?

* % within patriarchy influence?

Participants who viewed masculinity as having an average influence largely associated it with an average effect on leadership aspirations. Their responses reveal a gradual cultural shift where leadership is no longer tied exclusively to dominance but increasingly to competence and community trust. Yet, the expectation to project authority remains. As one participant said, "You can lead in different ways now, but people still expect a man to show strength when it matters." This insight aligns with Messerschmidt's (2012) work, which argues that evolving masculinities coexist with older ideals, particularly in traditional settings.

Those who perceived masculinity as a high or very high influence overwhelmingly associated it with stronger effects on leadership. In these cases, leadership was still viewed as a masculine domain, reinforcing the social belief that authority and control are "natural" male attributes. One participant stated, "here, you can't lead without being seen as a strong man-it's just how it is." These views mirror Messner's (2007) findings that hegemonic masculinity remains deeply tied to community perceptions of legitimate leadership in conservative societies.

Integrating these findings with global literature, the study reaffirms that masculinity continues to shape leadership expectations through enduring gendered power structures (Acker, 1990; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Yet, there is evidence of transformation. Scholars such as Eagly and Carli (2007) describe a shift

toward transformational leadership a style characterised by empathy, collaboration, and inclusivity. Similarly, Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013) show that both men and women who adopt relational and participatory approaches increasingly thrive in leadership roles. These emerging models suggest that men in regions like Western Kenya could benefit from leadership development that encourages emotional intelligence and shared decision-making rather than dominance and control.

Fletcher's (2004) notion of post-heroic leadership further underscores this transition, advocating for collective and humble forms of leadership that transcend gendered expectations. Within Western Kenya, such a shift aligns with the principles of CSLT, which encourages adaptation rather than rejection of local norms. Men can still embody strength and authority, but in ways that are inclusive, ethical, and community-centered.

From the foregoing presentation, while masculinity remains a strong cultural marker of leadership in Western Kenya, its influence is gradually evolving. Traditional masculine ideals coexist with emerging notions of shared, empathetic, and collaborative leadership. This balance reflects a broader transformation one where leadership effectiveness is increasingly measured not by dominance, but by cultural authenticity and social responsiveness.

Masculinity Leadership Learning and Development In Western Kenya On Women Who Want To Become Leaders

Table 4 illustrates that a majority of respondents (52.1%) who perceived masculinity as having a very low influence on leadership learning and development in Western Kenya believed it had a very low impact on the aspirations to leadership of women. This perception translated into varied implications for women's aspirations toward leadership. Over half of the participants noted that reduced masculine influence corresponded with increased space for women's participation in leadership. This observation resonates with Oduol (2007), who argues that in patriarchal societies, when masculine dominance is relaxed, women often gain new though still limited opportunities to lead. However, 12.5% of these respondents paradoxically believed that even when masculinity appears weak, its residual cultural power continues to shape women's ambitions. This highlights how patriarchal norms may persist subconsciously, even when their overt influence diminishes (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Similarly, 37.8% of respondents who perceived masculinity as having a low influence also reported a correspondingly low effect on women's leadership prospects. This finding supports Githinji's (2012) view that cultural perceptions of gender, even when softened, subtly constrain women's public participation.

*Table 4: How does masculinity influence leadership learning and development in western Kenya? * How does the above affect Women who want to become leaders?*

			How does the above affect Women who want to become leaders?					Total
			Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high	
How does masculinity influence leadership learning and development in western Kenya?	Very low	Count	25	8	6	3	6	48
		Percent*	52%	17%	13%	6%	13%	100%
	Low	Count	8	14	10	3	2	37
		Percent*	22%	38%	27%	8%	5%	100%
	Average	Count	5	7	18	8	4	42
		Percent*	12%	17%	43%	19%	10%	100%
	High	Count	16	13	14	11	11	65
		Percent*	25%	20%	22%	17%	17%	100%
	Very high	Count	41	11	16	9	52	129
		Percent*	32%	9%	12%	7%	40%	100%
Total		Count	95	53	64	34	75	321
		Percent*	30%	17%	20%	11%	23%	100%

* % within patriarchy influence?

Yet, 21.6% associated the same "low influence" of masculinity with an even lower impact on women's leadership suggesting a nuanced reality where the erosion of male dominance may, in some cases, open genuine pathways for women. These contrasting responses capture the transitional nature of Western Kenya's cultural landscape, where gender norms are neither static nor uniform across communities (Mkutu et al., 2021).

Of those who perceived masculinity as having an average influence, (42.9%) believed it had an average effect on women's leadership aspirations. This "middle ground" reflects an ongoing tension in which patriarchal ideas continue to influence leadership learning but coexist with emergent forms of gender inclusivity. Ngugi (2014) previously observed that cultural practices tied to masculinity still profoundly affect women's leadership trajectories, especially in rural Kenya. The divergence between his findings and the current study may signal shifting norms or generational differences within Western Kenya, underscoring the importance of localised gender studies (Ampofo & Boateng, 2011).

When masculinity was perceived as having a high or very high influence, responses were sharply polarised. Those who saw masculinity as "very high" also reported a similarly high suppression of women's leadership (40.3%). This reinforces Odinga's (1967) early observation that patriarchal systems systematically restrict women's participation in

authority structures. Yet, 31.8% of those respondents held the opposite view that even with high masculine dominance, women's leadership was minimally affected. This apparent contradiction may reflect shifting power dynamics in which women increasingly assert leadership despite cultural resistance. Similar patterns have been noted by Nnaemeka (2005), who argues that African women often exercise "nego-feminism" a form of negotiation and resilience within male-dominated systems.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) provided deeper cultural insights. Participants observed that Kenya's progressive Constitution simultaneously protects cultural heritage ("mila yetu") while guaranteeing gender equality. This duality means that the same legal framework that empowers women can also reinforce traditional male authority. This aligns with Cornwall (2005), who contends that legal reforms alone cannot dismantle deeply entrenched social hierarchies. In Kakamega, for example, women expressed frustration that while the Constitution affirms equal opportunities, it also legitimises traditional structures like the Nabongo Kingdom that remain patriarchal in composition and practice.

An even more delicate contradiction emerged regarding the ban on female circumcision. Both male and female respondents noted that, traditionally, initiation rites were seen as legitimising women's social maturity and readiness for community leadership. While the ban rightly protects women's health and dignity, its unintended consequence has been the loss of certain cultural pathways to recognition as leaders. This echoes Amadiume

(1997), who argues that colonial and postcolonial legal regimes often misunderstood or erased indigenous gender systems that once enabled female authority. Key informant interviews revealed both resistance and progress. Older male respondents from Kakamega argued that "a woman cannot be a leader" due to long-held cultural divisions of labor. Yet, the increasing visibility of female assistant chiefs and village elders demonstrates gradual but tangible shifts in leadership norms. This transition aligns with Chilisa and Ntseane (2010), who note that African women are increasingly redefining leadership through community-based and moral authority rather than positional power.

Finally, the study identified enduring forms of traditional female leadership such as women guiding others on moral and social matters though these roles remain confined largely to domestic or informal spaces. As Tamale (2004) contends, traditional leadership systems often undervalue women's contributions by categorising them as "private" rather than "public" leadership. Nonetheless, the growing presence of women in formal administrative roles suggests an evolving redefinition of authority, where women's participation is not merely tolerated but increasingly normalised.

Overall, the findings portray a complex but hopeful picture. Masculinity continues to shape leadership learning and development in Western Kenya, but its dominance is gradually being renegotiated. While entrenched gender norms remain, new spaces for women's agency are emerging supported by education, constitutional reforms, and shifting

generational attitudes. As Kenya continues to balance cultural preservation with gender equality, the challenge lies not in erasing tradition but in reimagining it to accommodate inclusive leadership ideals that reflect the aspirations of all citizens.

These findings make it clear why Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) and Contextualised Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) are useful for understanding leadership in Western Kenya. Social Role Theory helps explain how cultural expectations about men and women influence who is seen as a leader. Men are often expected to be strong, assertive, and in control, while women are associated with care and support. These expectations affect leadership opportunities, even when communities are starting to change. Contextualised Social Learning Theory shows how these roles are learned and passed on through everyday social interactions. People watch how others act and learn what is acceptable. For example, when women see other women successfully taking leadership positions, such as female assistant chiefs or village elders, they begin to imagine themselves in similar roles. Over time, these examples can change community attitudes about who can lead.

Together, the two theories help us see that leadership is not just about individual ability or ambition. It is shaped by social norms, cultural expectations, and learning through observation. Leadership learning and development happens as people observe, practice, and adjust their behaviors in their social environment. In Western Kenya, this means that women are gradually finding ways to navigate traditional barriers, while men are also learning to adapt to more inclusive leadership expectations. This connection between theory and practice shows that efforts to promote women's leadership need to consider both cultural expectations and the social learning processes that reinforce them. Programs that provide role models, mentorship, and community support can help challenge traditional gender norms and open spaces for more inclusive leadership. By linking these findings to theory, we can better understand not only the challenges women face but also the strategies that allow them to succeed in leadership roles.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights how leadership in Western Kenya is closely linked to cultural practices, values, and traditional institutions. Leadership development is not a single event but a process shaped by socialisation, mentorship, and cultural activities, such as initiation rites. The Nabongo Kingdom in Kakamega County and initiation practices in Kisii County illustrate how traditional structures continue to influence leadership selection today. The findings show that leadership emerges from the interaction of cultural institutions, community rituals, and learning experiences rather than being solely the result of individual effort. This aligns with Hazy's (2008) idea of leadership as a complex system, where multiple factors cultural expectations, guidance from elders, and community engagement work together to shape leaders.

Key conclusions include: first, the identification of potential leaders often begins in childhood, with families and communities playing a central role through mentorship and cultural norms. Second, the use of technology in Western Kenya is enhancing communication between leaders and communities while helping preserve cultural heritage. Finally, leadership remains community-centered, with most leaders focused on local development, though some also contribute at national and continental levels. This study contributes to the literature on culturally-informed leadership, supporting the work of Dorfman et al. (2012), Jogulu (2010), and Inyang (2009), who emphasise that understanding cultural influences is essential for effective governance. It also responds to Edwards and Turnbull (2013), who argue that leadership learning processes are underexplored. By examining the role of culture in leadership development, this research provides practical insights into how traditional values can support effective and inclusive leadership today.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engage Elders in Gender-Inclusive Mentorship Programs: Establish mentorship programs involving both male and female elders to pass on leadership skills, cultural knowledge, and values. This will preserve cultural integrity while promoting inclusive leadership for both men and women.

- Promote Gender and Youth Inclusivity in Leadership: Ensure women, men, and youth have equal opportunities to participate in leadership. Promote diversity in leadership to allow women and youth to contribute to political and cultural decision-making locally and nationally.

- Strengthen Culturally Inclusive Leadership Structures: Recognise and integrate leadership practices that respect both cultural heritage and gender inclusivity. Collaborative frameworks that honor tradition while adhering to legal and constitutional requirements can enhance community engagement and socio-political development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. Gender & Society, 4(2), 139–158.

Adichie, C. N. (2017). Dear Ijeawele, or a feminist manifesto in fifteen suggestions. Anchor Books.

African Union. (2020). Agenda 2063: The Africa we want. African Union.

ALIGN Platform. (2019). Gender Report: Building Bridges for Gender Equality. Align Platform. https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/gender-report-building-bridges-gender-equality

Amadiume, I. (1997). Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, religion, and culture. Zed Books.

Ampofo, A. A., & Boateng, P. (2011). Localized gender studies: A case for contextual research in Ghana. Gender & Development, 19(3), 351–362.

Anyango, P., Chege, M., & Omondi, L. (2019). Gender and leadership in rural Kenya: The influence of patriarchy on women's political participation. Journal of Gender and Development Studies, 10(3), 112–125.

Aringo, S. M., & Odongo, O. (2025). Women in Kenyan Political Culture in Light of the Ubuntu Spirit. International Journal of Geopolitics and Governance, 4(1), 70-82. https://doi.org/10.37284/ijgg.4.1.2802

Bandura, A. (1977). Social learning theory. Prentice Hall.

Chilisa, B., & Ntseane, P. G. (2010). African women redefining leadership through community-based and moral authority. International Journal of Educational Development, 30(4), 346–355.

Connell, R. W. (2005). Masculinities (2nd ed.). University of California Press.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. Gender & Society, 19(6), 829–859.

Cornwall, A. (2005). Democratic governance and gender: The challenge of change. Journal of International Development, 17(7), 903–912.

Cornwall, A., & Goetz, A. M. (2005). Democratising democracy: Feminist perspectives on power and transformative politics. Critical Asian Studies, 37(4), 539–559.

Cornwall, A., & Rivas, A. M. (2015). From gender equality to women's empowerment: The history of a concept. Development, 58(2–3), 195–201.

Council of Governors. (2022). Institutionalising gender-responsive budgeting and mentorship: Initiatives of the Council of Women Governors. Council of Governors.

Dorfman, P. W., Javidan, M., Hanges, P., Dastmalchian, A., & House, R. (2012). Globe: A twenty-year journey into the study of culture and leadership. Journal of World Business, 47(4), 504–514.

Eagly, A. H. (1987). Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). Women and the labyrinth of leadership. Harvard Business Review, 85(9), 62–71.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. Psychological Review, 109(3), 573–598.

Edwards, J., & Turnbull, S. (2013). The underexplored process of leadership learning. Journal of Leadership Studies, 7(4), 1–4.

Fletcher, J. K. (2004). The paradox of post-heroic leadership: An affirmative deconstruction. The Leadership Quarterly, 15(5), 647–661.

Genga, J. A., & Babalola, S. O. (2023). Gender bias and the 'think manager, think male' phenomenon in the Kenyan banking sector. East African Management Review, 12(1), 1–15.

Githinji, S. (2012). Cultural perceptions of gender and their subtle constraint on women's public participation in Kenya. African Review of Economics and Finance, 3(2), 154–171.

Gumo, S. (2018). The Traditional Social, Economic, and Political Organization of the Luhya of Busia District. Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 6(06), 1245–1257. https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2018.v06i06.010.

Hazy, J. K. (2008). The leadership system: An initial assessment of the conceptual framework. Emergence: Complexity and Organization, 10(1), 58–78.

Ibarra, H., Ely, R. J., & Kolb, D. M. (2013). Women and the labyrinth of leadership. Harvard Business Review, 91(4), 16–18.

IEBC. (2022). Kenya general election report. Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission.

Inyang, B. J. (2009). The challenge of culturally informed leadership for effective governance. International Journal of Business and Management, 4(12), 163–172.

Jogulu, U. (2010). Culturally informed leadership for effective governance. International Journal of Leadership Studies, 5(3), 227–236.

Kabeer, N. (2016). Gender, policy and inequality: Briefing paper for the development committee. Journal of International Development, 28(4), 565–586.

Kamau, E. W. (2010). Leading from within: Women's agency and emerging leadership roles in Kenyan community settings. Journal of African Women's Studies, 2(1), 34–49.

Kasera, L., Ndung'u, R., & Wanjiku, M. (2021). The gendered architecture of politics: Women's roles and exclusion in rural electoral processes in Kenya. International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 13(2), 65–78.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2021). The status of the two-thirds gender rule implementation in Kenya. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

Kenya Yearbook Editorial Board. (2022). Martha Karua – Kenya's iron lady of politics. Kenya Yearbook Editorial Board.

Kimmel, M. S. (2010). Guyland: The perilous world where boys become men. Harper Perennial.

Krook, M. L., & Restrepo Sanín, J. M. (2020). The perpetuation of violence against women in politics. European Journal of Politics and Gender, 3(2), 163–182.

Kuada, J. (2010). Culture and management in Africa. Sage Publications.

Mbote, P., & Akech, M. (2021). Leadership dynamics in Kenya's urban centers: The impact of urbanization on patriarchal norms. Urban Studies and Development Review, 6(1), 45–60.

Messerschmidt, J. W. (2012). Masculinities and crime: A critique and reconceptualization. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Messner, M. A. (2007). The masculine order of things: The hidden history of the American sports bar. Gender & Society, 21(6), 859–882.

Mikell, G. (1997). African feminism: The politics of survival in sub-Saharan Africa. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Minja, A. W., Kimani, B. N., Makhamara, E. D., Gachanja, S. K., Moi, T. C., Mdoe, R. J., Oringo, G. E., & Onditi, J. L. (2025). Capacity-building programs and affirmative action: Reshaping leadership structures for inclusivity in Kenyan governance. Journal of Public Policy and Governance, 9(3), 145–160.

Ministry of Public Service, Gender and Affirmative Action. (2022). Impact assessment of the Women Enterprise Fund and Uwezo Fund. Ministry of Public Service, Gender and Affirmative Action.

Mkutu, K., Wanjala, S., & Bokea, F. (2021). Gender norms, political violence, and the transitional cultural landscape in Western Kenya. Journal of Eastern African Studies, 15(2), 201–222.

Mutinda, M., Magutu, J., & Tshiyoyo, M. (2025). Determinants of Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women Traders in Nairobi County: Case of Kenya Trade Policy Financial Inclusion Strategies. Journal of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v5i1.222.

Mwaniki, S. (2017). Prof. Anyang' Nyong'o and Lupita Nyong'o: Western Kenya's evolving contribution to national and continental leadership narratives. The East African Chronicle, 5(2), 30–45.

National Gender and Equality Commission. (2023). Annual report 2022–2023. National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC). https://www.ngeckenya.org/Downloads/NGEC%202022-2023%20Annual%20Report%20Final%20.pdf

Ngugi, P. (2014). Cultural practices tied to masculinity and their profound effect on women's leadership trajectories in rural Kenya. Journal of Gender Studies, 23(3), 304–318.

Ngunjiri, F. W. (2010). Women's spiritual leadership in Africa: Tempered radicals and critical servant leaders. State University of New York Press.

Njenga, F. W., & Njoroge, A. K. (2019). Social expectations, domestic responsibilities, and constraints on women's cooperative leadership in Nyeri County, Kenya. Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management, 7(1), 1–10.

Nkomo, S. M., & Ngambi, H. (2009). Emerging leadership models in Africa: The role of cultural frameworks. International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, 9(2), 173–193.

Nnaemeka, O. (2005). Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and critiquing gender in Africa. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 29(2), 357–381.

Ntarangwi, M. (2016). Cultural practices and leadership in East Africa: Beyond the colonial legacy. Routledge.

Nzomo, M. (2011). Impacts of women in political leadership in Kenya: Struggles for participation in governance through affirmative action [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Nairobi.

Obara, M., & Nyanchoga, S. (2025). Clannism and political representation among the Abagusii of Kisii County, Kenya (1907–2022). Cuea Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences, 2(1).

Oduol, J. (2007). The relaxation of masculine dominance and women's limited opportunities to lead in patriarchal societies. Feminist Africa, 8(1), 12–25.

Oduol, J. (2019). The role of education in challenging patriarchal leadership norms in Kenya's rural communities. African Journal of Rural Development, 4(2), 101–115.

Odinga, O. (1967). Not yet Uhuru: The autobiography of Oginga Odinga. Heinemann.

Ogbodo, E. C., Obidike, C. E., & Nwokolo, I. C. (2022). Patriarchal structures and traditional norms: Revisiting leadership in African societies. African Studies Quarterly, 21(3), 45–62.

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world. Teachers College Press.

Paxton, P., Hughes, M. M., & Painter, M. (2020). Women, politics, and power: A global perspective. SAGE Publications.

Pulselive. (2025). Mukhisa Kituyi biography: education, political career, leadership. Pulselive.

Republic of Kenya, [RoK]. (2010). The 2010 Constitution. Government Printer.

Ridgeway, C. L., & Correll, S. J. (2004). Unpacking the gender system: A theoretical analysis of gender inequality. Gender & Society, 18(4), 510–536.

Shumbamhini, N., & Chirongoma, L. (2025). Ubuntu philosophy as a culturally grounded alternative for relational leadership in Africa. Journal of African Culture and Society, 8(2), 99–115.

Sifuna, D. N., & Chege, M. (2017). Socio-economic transitions and the evolution of patriarchal norms in Kenya. Journal of African Cultural Studies, 9(3), 190–205.

Sow, F. (2019). Gender-inclusive leadership, peacebuilding, and sustainable development: Lessons from Rwanda, Ethiopia, and South Africa. African Security Review, 28(4), 385–400.

Tamale, S. (2004). Eroticism, sensuality, and 'women's empowerment' in contemporary Africa. Feminist Africa, 4(1), 7–20.

Tamale, S. (2020). Decolonisation and afro-feminism. Daraja Press.

Tripp, A. M., Kwesiga, J., Mbugua, E., & Tadesse, S. (2009). African women's movements: Transforming political landscapes. Cambridge University Press.

UN. (2016). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations.

UN Women. (2023). Gender equality in leadership and political participation in Kenya: Progress and challenges. UN Women.

UN Women. (2025). Global leadership trends and women's political participation. UN Women.

The Interplay Between Financial Inclusion and Banking Stability in Zimbabwe: A Quantitative Examination Using Fully Modified Cointegration Methodology

Japhet Mutale – Homelink Pvt Limited iD
Darold Shumba – Homelink Pvt Limited

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between financial inclusion and financial stability in Zimbabwe over the period 2000–2020, with an emphasis on broader implications for economic development and livelihoods. The objective is to assess how efforts to enhance financial inclusion influence the stability of the banking system, which is critical for sustainable economic growth and improving livelihoods, particularly in marginalised communities. Using the Fully Modified Ordinary Least Squares (FMOLS) cointegration technique, the study analysed time series data on financial inclusion, financial stability, domestic credit, gross domestic product (GDP), and the size of the financial sector. The findings indicate a significant negative relationship between financial inclusion and financial stability, suggesting that increased financial inclusion adversely impacts bank system stability. Similarly, domestic credit exhibited a negative and significant relationship with financial stability. However, GDP and financial sector size positively and significantly contributed to financial stability, reinforcing their role in supporting inclusive economic development. These results underscore the complexities of balancing financial inclusion and stability within Zimbabwe's financial sector. The study concludes that while expanding financial inclusion is essential for promoting access to financial services and advancing economic development and livelihoods, it poses risks to financial stability if not accompanied by appropriate risk management and regulatory measures. Factors such as relaxed lending standards, insufficient oversight of microfinance institutions, and reputational risks associated with outsourcing credit functions can exacerbate these challenges. The study concludes that expanding financial inclusion without robust regulatory oversight and risk management poses significant risks to banking stability and recommends a balanced policy approach that integrates technological innovation with stronger institutional frameworks to foster sustainable and inclusive growth.

Key words: Financial inclusion, financial stability, economic development, livelihoods, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Financial inclusion and banking stability are critical pillars of sustainable economic development, improved livelihoods, and systemic resilience. Financial inclusion enhances access to savings, credit, insurance, and payment systems—particularly for marginalised populations thereby fostering economic participation and social equity (World Bank, 2020; Allen, Demirgüç-Kunt, Klapper, & Peria, 2016). Banking stability, on the other hand, ensures that financial institutions can absorb shocks, maintain confidence, and sustain the investment necessary for long-term growth (Adrian & Shin, 2010; Bank for International Settlements, 2019).

Technological advances have accelerated financial inclusion in developing countries with limited banking infrastructure. Mobile money and digital financial platforms have notably expanded access, though they also pose new risks such as cyber threats and fraud (Mandić, Marković, & Žigo, 2025). The 2007–2008 global financial crisis underscored the importance of balancing inclusion with prudential regulation to safeguard systemic stability (Brunnermeier, 2009).

Despite global progress, substantial disparities remain. As of 2017, about 1.7 billion adults lacked access to formal financial services, with women and low-income groups in Sub-Saharan Africa being most affected (World Bank, 2022; Demirgüç-Kunt, Klapper, Singer & Van Oudheusden, 2015). Countries like Kenya and South Africa have achieved notable inclusion gains, whereas others, such as Burundi and Niger, remain heavily excluded (Demirgüç-Kunt, Klapper, Singer, Ansar & Hess, 2018).

This unevenness reveals that while financial inclusion can strengthen stability through deposit mobilisation and risk diversification, weak oversight may amplify vulnerabilities (Tshuma, Tshuma, Mpofu & Sango, 2023).

In Zimbabwe, persistent exclusion remains a barrier to inclusive growth. According to the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ, 2020), 23% of the population was financially excluded in 2014, prompting the launch of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) in 2016. The strategy prioritises digital finance and outreach to marginalised populations, especially in rural areas. Yet, stark provincial disparities persist: Matabeleland North records a 60% exclusion rate, followed by Mashonaland Central (58%), Mashonaland East (53%), and Matabeleland South (50%), reflecting limited financial infrastructure, low literacy, and high poverty levels (Chivasa & Simbanegavi, 2016; Mhlanga, 2020). Conversely, urban centres such as Bulawayo (20%) and Harare (17%) enjoy better access due to higher incomes and proximity to financial institutions.
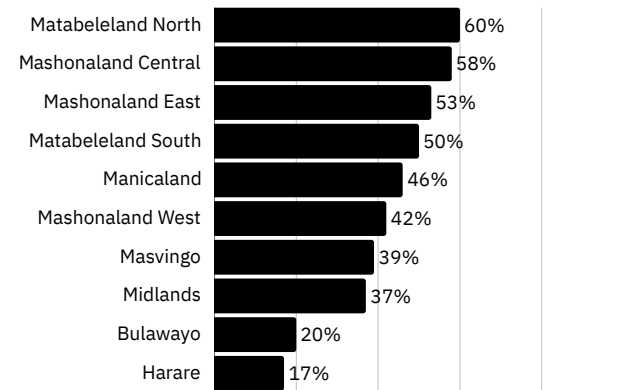
Exclusion in Zimbabwe

Figure 1: Financial Exclusion by Province in Zimbabwe

Source: Chivasa & Simbanegavi (2016), adapted from Zimbabwe National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2016), Mhlanga (2020a).

Figure 1 highlights clear regional disparities in financial exclusion across Zimbabwe, with rural provinces experiencing the most acute challenges. Matabeleland North, with an exclusion rate of 60%, reflects the compounded effects of limited financial infrastructure, low levels of financial literacy, and pervasive poverty, which together restrict access to formal financial services and economic opportunities. Mashonaland Central (58%), Mashonaland East (53%), and Matabeleland South (50%) also face significant exclusion, suggesting that residents in these regions encounter similar structural barriers that hinder financial participation. The persistence of such high exclusion rates indicates that without targeted interventions—such as expanding branch networks, promoting financial education, and addressing poverty— these areas will continue to lag in financial inclusion, perpetuating economic inequalities. In contrast, urban centres like Bulawayo (20%) and Harare (17%) demonstrate lower exclusion rates due to better infrastructure, higher incomes, and greater proximity to financial services, underscoring how geographic and socio-economic factors directly influence access to finance (Chivasa & Simbanegavi, 2016; Mhlanga, 2020).

These inequalities hinder inclusive economic growth and reinforce regional poverty traps. The Institute for Inclusive Social and Public Policy Research (IISPR, 2023) emphasises that expanding financial access in underserved regions is crucial for poverty reduction and resilience-building. Mutale and Shumba (2024) find that financial inclusion strengthens banking stability through enhanced deposit mobilisation and improved credit performance, particularly in rural areas. Similarly, Chivasa and Simbanegavi (2016) argue that expanding rural financial services reduces reliance on informal lenders and helps stabilise the formal banking system. Collectively, these findings underscore that improving access to financial services is both an inclusion and stability imperative— enhancing liquidity, reducing vulnerability, and fostering sustainable development.

Financial literacy is equally pivotal in this relationship. It promotes responsible borrowing, improves repayment behaviour, and strengthens overall financial stability (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2018; Beck, Demirgüç-Kunt & Levine, 2007). Mutale and Nyathi (2024) further argue that inclusive financial policies targeting women, youth, and rural populations promote equity and reduce income inequality— key ingredients for economic and systemic stability. However, infrastructure deficits, low digital literacy, and high service costs continue to hinder progress, particularly in rural Zimbabwe (Mhlanga, 2020). Policy makers and financial institutions must therefore strengthen digital financial inclusion, improve regulatory frameworks, and invest in financial education to enhance both inclusion and banking stability (RBZ, 2022).

Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to quantitatively examine the relationship between financial inclusion and banking stability in Zimbabwe using the Fully Modified Ordinary Least Squares (FMOLS) technique.

RELATED LITERATURE ON FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND BANKING STABILITY

Financial Inclusion: Definition and Overview

Financial inclusion refers to the accessibility and effective use of financial services by all households and businesses, especially the poor and small and medium enterprises (Yoshino & Morgan, 2016). The World Bank (2022) defines it as the availability of useful, affordable financial products—including payments, savings, credit, and insurance—delivered responsibly and sustainably. Similarly, the IMF (2015) and Atkinson and Messy (2013) highlight its role in improving economic well-being and resilience through financial education and empowerment.

According to the United Nations (2018), financial inclusion supports key development goals such as poverty reduction, social equity, and economic empowerment. Beyond accessibility, it also emphasises usability, affordability, and the ability to derive meaningful developmental outcomes (Patwardhan, 2018). Thus, financial inclusion operates not merely as a social policy instrument but as a macroeconomic lever for inclusive and stable economic growth.

Drivers of Financial Inclusion

Financial inclusion is driven by various factors. Technological innovations like digital payments, mobile banking, and fintech solutions help bridge financial gaps (GSMA, 2020). Supportive regulatory frameworks and consumer protection laws foster trust in financial systems (World Bank, 2018). Financial literacy programs increase awareness of financial products, while improved banking infrastructure—such as agent banking and mobile connectivity—expands access, particularly in remote areas (IMF, 2020). Access to microfinance, alternative credit scoring, and gender-inclusive business models also play key roles (Microfinance Gateway, 2017; UN, 2021).

Measuring Financial Inclusion

Measuring financial inclusion involves multiple indicators. Sarma (2008) proposes metrics such as the proportion of adults with bank accounts and bank branches per million people. The World Bank (2012) considers loan accounts per 1,000 adults a key indicator. Han and Melecky (2013) assess inclusion through deposit access and usage, while transaction volumes and household financial well-being provide additional measures (World Bank, 2015). Sarma's (2008) index combines depth, availability, and service usage to create a more comprehensive measurement.

Benefits of Financial Inclusion

Financial inclusion is critical for economic development and poverty reduction. It enables individuals to manage risk, invest, and build resilience against financial shocks (World Bank, 2022). It also fosters economic growth, employment, and formalisation of the economy (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, 2022). During crises such as COVID-19, financial inclusion facilitated access to emergency funds (UNSGSA, 2022). The United Nations Capital Development Fund [UNCDF] (2022) highlights its role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including poverty eradication, gender equality, and economic stability. By integrating underserved populations into formal financial systems, financial inclusion strengthens financial stability (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022).

Determinants of Financial Inclusion

Key determinants of financial inclusion include physical accessibility, financial literacy, technology, trust, and outreach (Kabakova & Plaksenkov, 2018). In Zimbabwe, gender, education, income levels, and trust significantly influence financial inclusion (Barugahara, 2021). Studies in Peru (Camara, Peña, & Tuesta, 2014) and Africa (Allen, Demirgüç-Kunt, Klapper, & Pería, 2012) emphasise the role of education and mobile banking in increasing financial participation. Technology, particularly digital banking and mobile money services, plays a crucial role in expanding access (Ramakrishna & Trivedi, 2018).

Barriers to Financial Inclusion

Despite progress, barriers remain. Gwalani and Parkhi (2014) identify high service costs and inadequate technology in India. Similarly, Indonesia's Ministry of Finance (2014) notes demand-side barriers like low financial literacy and supply-side challenges such as distance and complex banking procedures. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Ulwodi and Muriu (2017) found geographical barriers, cost, and literacy to be major impediments. In Zimbabwe, financial illiteracy, lack of formal identification, and high transaction costs hinder inclusion (Barugahara, 2021). The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (2020) highlights additional challenges such as mistrust and inadequate documentation among women, youth, and rural populations. Addressing these barriers is crucial for enhancing financial inclusion.

Bank Stability

Banking stability refers to the ability of the financial system to withstand internal and external shocks while maintaining its core functions (European Central Bank, 2019). The World Bank (2022) defines financial stability as the absence of systemic crises, emphasising resilience under stress. A stable financial system efficiently allocates resources, manages risks, sustains employment, and maintains price stability.

A stable banking system also fosters economic growth by promoting trust, ensuring efficient resource allocation, and maintaining confidence in financial institutions (Bhattacharya & Thakor, 1993). Novotny-Farkas (2016) views stability as a continuum, where financial elements interact to sustain systemic integrity. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (2022) emphasises the need for strong regulatory frameworks to support financial stability.

Theories Linking Financial Inclusion and Stability

The relationship between financial inclusion and bank sector stability is grounded in several theoretical perspectives from financial economics, institutional theory, and risk management.

Financial Deepening and Economic Growth

Financial inclusion expands access to financial services, fostering financial deepening by increasing the deposit base and diversifying bank risk. A more inclusive financial system enhances stability, particularly in emerging economies like Zimbabwe, where a larger depositor base strengthens banks against liquidity shortages (Honohan, 2008; Beck et al., 2007).

Financial Intermediation Theory

Diamond and Dybvig (1983) emphasise the role of financial institutions in facilitating savings and investments, promoting risk-sharing and stability. Financial inclusion bolsters banks by attracting deposits and expanding credit access, stimulating economic activity. However, rapid expansion, if poorly managed, can heighten system vulnerabilities. Stability improves when banks rely on a diversified deposit base to fund long-term loans, reducing liquidity risks (Greenwood & Jovanovic, 1990). In Zimbabwe, inclusive financial services are crucial during economic instability to prevent banking crises.

Stability vs. Inclusion Trade-off Theory

Khan (2011) and Sahay et al. (2015) highlight a trade-off between financial inclusion and banking stability. While increased access fosters economic growth, it can also elevate systemic risks if it leads to excessive credit expansion and weaker lending standards. Serving high-risk borrowers may expose banks to liquidity challenges, potentially undermining financial discipline. Thus, achieving financial inclusion without compromising stability requires prudent risk management.

Financial Inclusion and Bank Stability

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between financial inclusion and financial stability. Research by Danjuma (2018) and Morgan and Pontines (2014) suggests a positive link between these two variables. However, Amatus and Alireza (2015) found a mixed impact, noting that while bank deposits negatively affect stability, loans contribute positively. Morgan and Pontines (2014) further identified three key ways in which financial inclusion enhances stability: (1) diversification of bank assets through increased lending to smaller firms, which reduces risks in loan portfolios and lowers financial system interconnectedness; (2) stabilisation of the deposit base by incorporating more small savers, thereby reducing reliance on volatile non-core funding; and (3) improved monetary policy transmission, which strengthens financial stability.

Financial Inclusion and Financial Stability: A Review

Hannig and Jansen (2010) argue that including low-income groups in the financial system stabilises deposit and loan bases, enhancing resilience, as these groups are relatively insulated from economic cycles. Similarly, Prasad (2010) highlights that credit access for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) promotes employment and economic stability. However, Khan (2011) cautions that expanding credit access without robust lending standards can trigger crises, as seen during the U.S. subprime mortgage collapse, while poorly regulated microfinance institutions may further undermine stability.

Empirical studies report mixed results. Jungo, Madaleno, and Botelho (2022) found that financial inclusion enhances stability in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, particularly when strong regulatory frameworks exist. In Jordan, Al-Smadi (2018) applied the Fully Modified Ordinary Least Squares (FMOLS) method, showing a weak positive link between financial inclusion and stability, though risks from domestic credit expansion and global crises persist.

Broader access to deposits reduces funding volatility, strengthening bank stability (Han & Melecky, 2013). Likewise, Morgan and Pontines (2014) argue that Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) lending reduces non-performing loans. Yet, Pham and Doan (2020) observed only marginal stability benefits from financial inclusion in Asian economies with weak banking oversight. Khan (2011) identifies mechanisms linking inclusion and stability: diversified financial systems, stronger retail deposit bases, and improved monetary policy transmission. Nonetheless, Sahay et al. (2015) warn that in weakly regulated environments, expanded credit may erode bank capital buffers, heightening systemic risks.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Neaime and Gaysset (2018) confirmed a positive relationship between financial inclusion and deposit growth stability. Similarly, Siddik, Sun, Kabiraj, Shanmugan, and Yanjuan (2018) found that SME-focused inclusion improves banking stability. However, these findings are context-specific. The World Bank (2012) emphasises that financial inclusion generally supports stability in developing economies, though Ardic, Heimann, and Mylenko (2013) and Sahay et al. (2015) stress the critical role of effective regulation. Zimbabwe's unique economic and regulatory conditions, therefore, warrant further country-specific research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research design and employed an econometric modelling approach to systematically collect, analyse, and interpret numerical data for explaining relationships among economic variables (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2011). Specifically, the study utilised the Fully Modified Ordinary Least Squares (FMOLS) estimation technique developed by Phillips and Hansen (1990). The choice of FMOLS over conventional Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and Vector Error Correction Models (VECM) was based on its robustness in estimating long-run cointegrating relationships among non-stationary time series variables. Unlike standard OLS, FMOLS corrects for both serial correlation and endogeneity that typically arise in cointegrated systems, thereby producing unbiased and efficient estimators (Phillips & Hansen, 1990; Hansen, 1992). Additionally, while VECM can capture short-run dynamics, FMOLS is more suitable when the research objective focuses on long-run equilibrium relationships among variables (Pedroni, 2000). The FMOLS technique was also chosen because it is well-suited for small sample sizes and effectively corrects for serial correlation and endogeneity bias that often arise in cointegrated time series, ensuring robust long-run estimates (Phillips & Hansen, 1990). The model specified economic development (ED) proxied by real GDP per capita as the dependent variable, while financial inclusion (FI), domestic credit to the private sector (DCPS), and broad money supply (M2) served as key explanatory variables. Inflation (INF) and foreign direct investment (FDI) were included as control variables to capture macroeconomic influences, with all variables expressed in their natural logarithmic forms to stabilise variance and interpret coefficients as elasticities. The FMOLS approach was thus appropriate for achieving the study's objective of examining the long-run relationship between financial inclusion and economic development in Zimbabwe.

Model Specification

The time series data will be estimated and analysed using the Cointegration technique fully modified ordinary least squares method.

Financial Inclusion and Financial Stability Model

The model measures the impact of financial inclusion on bank system stability. Financial inclusion is measured by depositors with commercial banks (per 1,000 adults while bank Z-score proxies financial stability.

$$LBS_{it}=\alpha+\beta_1LFI_{it}+\beta_2LGDP_{it}+\beta_3LDC_{it}+\beta_4LBM_{it}+\varepsilon_{it}$$

α   the constant term;

β   the coefficient of the function;

ε_{it} the disturbance or error term (assumed to have zero mean and independent across the time period).

Variable Definitions and Proxies:

LBS   *Bank system stability*, proxied by the bank Z-score, which measures the probability of default and the overall soundness of the banking system.

LFI   *Financial inclusion*, measured by the number of depositors with commercial banks per 1,000 adults, indicating the extent of access to and use of formal financial services.

LGDP   *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP), included as a control variable to account for the level of economic growth and overall macroeconomic performance.

LDC   *Domestic credit to the private sector*, representing credit availability and financial sector depth, which can influence both inclusion and stability.

LBM   *Broad money* (M2), serving as a proxy for financial sector liquidity and monetary depth in the economy.

All variables are expressed in natural logarithmic form (log-linear specification) to stabilise variance, reduce heteroscedasticity, and interpret the coefficients as elasticities.

Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data was used, as it is cost-effective and pre-processed. Data was sourced from the World Bank database, IMF, Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe reports, POTRAZ, and AFDB. The World Bank database was preferred for its reliability and direct data collection, minimising errors and biases. Other relevant journals on financial inclusion and stability were also consulted.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

The findings were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included trend analysis over the years for the variables under study. Inferential statistical techniques, such as Pearson's correlation and regression analysis, were used to establish causal relationships between digital finance and financial inclusion. Time series data for the models were analysed using EViews 12. Fully Modified Ordinary Least Squares (FMOLS) and cointegration techniques were employed. Regression analysis assessed model fitness using the R-Square value and regression coefficients. Data were presented using tables and figures.

Diagnostic Tests

To ensure that estimated variables were Best Linear Unbiased Estimators (BLUE), several diagnostic tests were conducted. The

Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test confirmed stationarity, rejecting the null hypothesis of a unit root if the p-value was below 0.05. Multicollinearity was assessed through pairwise correlations, with coefficients above 0.8 indicating concern. The Jarque-Bera test confirmed normality of residuals, while the Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey (BPG) test confirmed homoscedasticity if the p-value exceeded 0.05. The Breusch-Godfrey LM test assessed autocorrelation, with p-values above 0.05 suggesting no autocorrelation. Cointegration tests confirmed a long-run relationship, ensuring model robustness and reliability.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS
Financial Stability and Financial Inclusion

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 provide an overview of the key variables: bank system stability (LBS), financial inclusion (LFI), domestic credit (LDC), broad money (LBM), and GDP (LGDP). These include measures such as the mean, median, maximum, minimum, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and normality tests (Jarque-Bera).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	LBS	LFI	LDC	LBM	LGDP
Mean	1.708165	1.364709	2.887746	3.336929	1.113946
Median	1.636515	2.890429	2.907758	3.166506	2.658591
Maximum	2.087876	3.291918	4.440437	5.020909	3.291918
Minimum	1.466817	-1.930708	1.77998	2.658987	-2.244401
Std. Dev.	0.172726	2.115544	0.61591	0.542536	2.2189
Skewness	0.764732	-0.530329	0.406053	1.62807	-0.352461
Kurtosis	2.457674	1.460668	3.887449	5.61926	1.314179
Jarque-Bera	2.304204	3.057719	1.266195	15.2801	2.921544
Probability	0.315972	0.216783	0.530945	0.000481	0.232057
Sum	35.87147	28.65888	60.64267	70.07552	23.39287
Sum Sq. Dev.	0.596686	89.51052	7.586905	5.88691	98.47037
Observations	21	21	21	21	21

Source: Author's computations from EViews version 12, 2025

The descriptive statistics indicate that the data exhibit normality, low variability, and minimal skewness, confirming their suitability for econometric analysis. The mean and median values for LBS (1.708 and 1.637) and LDC (2.888 and 2.908) are closely aligned, indicating symmetric distributions. Standard deviations for LBS (0.173) and LBM (0.543) reflect low variability around the mean. However, LBM shows non-normality, with a Jarque-Bera statistic of 15.280 (p = 0.00048), suggesting a need for robustness checks or data transformation to mitigate bias. Skewness values for LBS (0.765) and LDC (0.406) indicate

slight right-tail concentration, while LFI (-0.530) and LGDP (-0.352) exhibit left-tail skewness, reflecting a reasonably balanced dataset. The range for LFI (maximum: 3.292, minimum: -1.931) and LGDP (maximum: 3.292, minimum: -2.244) demonstrates sufficient variability for meaningful regression analysis.

Diagnostic Tests

Prior to regression, diagnostic tests were conducted, including Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) unit root tests, co-integration tests, autocorrelation, and multicollinearity assessments.

Normality Test

Residual analysis shows the model meets normality assumptions. The residual mean (0.023891) and median (0.015360) are close to zero, with low variability (standard deviation: 0.091330). Skewness (-0.083985) and kurtosis (2.745437) values indicate near-symmetry and a distribution close to normal. The Jarque-Bera statistic (0.348020, p = 0.840288) confirms

normality, validating the model's specification and reliability. Residuals range between -0.191184 and 0.151134, supporting accurate, unbiased predictions.
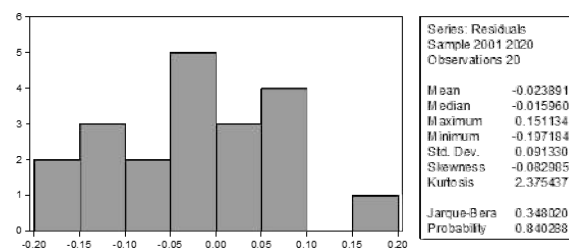

Figure 2: Normality graph

Source: Author's computations from Eviews version 12, 2025

Unit Root Test and Stationarity Analysis

This study employed the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test to assess the stationarity of variables, addressing the null hypothesis of a unit root against the alternative of stationarity. As emphasised by Gujarati (2004), the null hypothesis is rejected if the absolute ADF statistic exceeds critical values at 1%, 5%, or 10% significance levels, confirming stationarity.

Table 2: Unit root test

Variable	ADF Statistics	Test Critical Value	P–Value	Order of integration	Explanation
LBS	-4.271734	1% -3.831511 5% -3.029970 10% -2.655194	0.004	I(1)	Stationary
LFI	-3.963301***	1% -3.857386 5% -3.040391 10% -2.660551	0.0081	I(2)	Stationary
LBM	-4.841801***	1% -3.886751 5% -3.052169 10% -2.666593	0.0015	I(2)	Stationary
LGDP	-2.764356*	1% -3.857386 5% -3.040391 10% -2.660551	0.0832	I(1)	Stationary
DC	-4.757013***	1% -3.959148 5% -3.081002 10% -2.681330	0.0023	I(2)	Stationary
RESID	-6.272937***	1% -4.057910 5% -3.119910 10% -2.701103	0.0003	I(1)	Stationary

Source: Author's computations from Eviews version 12, 2025

The results in Table 2 demonstrate mixed orders of integration across the variables. For LBS, the ADF statistic of -4.2717 exceeds the 1%, 5%, and 10% critical values, with a p-value of 0.0040, indicating stationarity after first differencing (I(1)). Similarly, LGDP achieves stationarity at first difference (ADF = -2.7644; p = 0.0832), though with marginal significance, suggesting weak evidence of stationarity. Variables such as LFI, LBM, and LDC are non-stationary at both levels and first difference but become stationary at the second difference (I(2)). This is supported by significant ADF statistics: -3.9633 (LFI), -4.8418 (LBM), and -4.7570 (LDC), all exceeding critical thresholds with p-values below 0.01. The residuals (RESID) are stationary after first differencing (ADF = -6.2729; p = 0.0003), validating the regression model's stability and justifying further econometric procedures. Overall, the stationarity structure indicates that LBS, LGDP, and RESID are integrated of order one (I(1)), while LFI, LBM, and LDC are integrated of order two (I(2)). This mix of integration orders necessitates appropriate modelling techniques, such as cointegration analysis, to avoid spurious regressions and ensure robust, reliable inference on the relationships between financial inclusion, stability, and economic growth in Zimbabwe.

Cointegration Test and Long-Run Relationship Analysis

The cointegration test was conducted to determine whether a stable long-run relationship exists among the model variables, minimising the risk of spurious regression results. Given the mixed stationarity levels identified by the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test, cointegration analysis is essential to assess whether the variables move together over time despite short-term fluctuations. This study applied the Engle-Granger Residual-Based Cointegration Test, following the approach of Engle and Granger (1987) and Gujarati (2004). The test examines the stationarity of residuals from the long-run regression. If residuals are stationary, it implies that a long-run equilibrium relationship exists, even if individual variables are non-stationary.

The results indicate an ADF statistic for the residuals of -6.272937, exceeding critical values at the 1%, 5%, and 10% significance levels, with a p-value below 0.05. This provides strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no cointegration, confirming residual stationarity at level I(0). The findings demonstrate a significant long-run equilibrium relationship between financial inclusion, banking system stability, GDP, and banking models. This suggests that despite short-term instability, these variables are interconnected over time, reinforcing the role of financial inclusion in promoting sustainable economic development and banking sector resilience in Zimbabwe.

Autocorrelation Test

To test for autocorrelation, the Durbin-Watson (DW) statistic was used. The results show DW 1.845240, which is greater than 1.5, indicating no serial autocorrelation in the residuals, as supported by the p-values above 0.05.

Multi-collinearity Test

Regarding multi-collinearity, the correlation coefficients for the independent variables are generally below 0.8, except for RT and GDP. This suggests that multi-collinearity is not severe, and there is no significant linear relationship among the explanatory variables, allowing clear identification of each variable's influence on the dependent variable.

Table 3: Correlation matrix

	LBS	LFI	LDC	LBM	LGDP
LBS	1	0.592412	0.041535	0.78292	-0.532074
LFI	-0.592412	1	-0.583023	-0.448822	0.985573
LDC	0.041535	-0.583023	1	0.799347	-0.559249
LBM	0.078292	-0.448822	0.799347	1	-0.454277
LGDP	-0.532074	0.985573	-0.559249	-0.454277	1

Source: Author's computations from Eviews version 12, 2025

To this end, the researcher adopted the do-nothing school of thought as expressed by Blanchard (1967) in Gujarati (2004). This means that there is no linear relationship among the explanatory variables, and it is easy to establish the influence of each one variable on the dependent variable, financial inclusion, separately. The strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables were measured by performing a correlation matrix. It can be deduced from Table 3 that there is a moderate negative correlation between bank system stability (LBS) and both financial inclusion (LFI) (-0.592) and gross domestic product (LGDP) (-0.532). This indicates that as financial inclusion and economic activity increase, banking system stability tends to decline moderately. In contrast, domestic credit (LDC) and broad money (LBM) exhibit negligible positive correlations with bank stability, reflected by coefficients of +0.0415 and +0.0783, respectively. Moreover, there exists a strong positive correlation between financial inclusion (LFI) and GDP (LGDP) (0.986), suggesting a high degree of association between these two variables. This high correlation points to potential multicollinearity, which warrants the use of robust estimation techniques such as Fully Modified Least Squares (FMOLS) to obtain consistent and unbiased estimates.

Regarding multicollinearity, the correlation coefficients for the independent variables are generally below 0.8, except for LFI and LGDP. This suggests that multicollinearity is not severe overall, and there is no significant linear dependency among most explanatory variables. Thus, the influence of each variable on the dependent variable can be distinctly identified.

Heteroskedasticity

The Bruesch-Pagan Godfrey Test probability value of 0.0321 for the model is less than the significance level of 0.05. This therefore implies that the errors are homoscedastic and that we may fail to reject the null hypothesis that the errors are homoscedastic.

Regression results

The regression results from the Fully Modified Least Squares (FMOLS) method show that the variables LBM, LFI, LDC, and LGDP have significant relationships with the dependent variable. LBM has a positive effect, with a coefficient of 0.102876, indicating that for each unit increase in LBM, the dependent variable increases by approximately 0.103 units.

Table 4: Regression results _ fully modified least squares

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	T-statistic	Prob.	
LBM	0.102876	0.048379	2.126458	0.0505	***
LFI	-0.267849	0.044908	-5.964395	0	*
LDC	-0.220615	0.046617	-4.732459	0.0003	*
LGDP	0.195355	0.041819	4.671441	0.0003	*
C	2.162129	0.115227	18.76416	0	
Significance	1% *	5% **	10% ***		
R-squared	0.618463	Mean dependent var		1.68918	
Adjusted R-Squared	0.51672	S.D dependent var		0.15309	
S.E of regression	0.106426	Sum squared resid		0.169897	
Long run variance	0.004586				

Source: Author's computations from Eviews version 12, 2025

On the other hand, LFI and LDC exhibit negative relationships, with coefficients of -0.267849 and -0.220615, respectively, suggesting that higher values of LFI and LDC lead to decreases in the dependent variable. LGDP, with a positive coefficient of 0.195355, shows that as LGDP increases, the dependent variable also increases. The constant term (C) is 2.162129, meaning that when all independent variables are zero, the dependent variable equals this value.

The significance of the coefficients is confirmed by the t-statistics and p-values, with LFI, LDC, and LGDP being highly significant at the 1% level, while LBM is significant at the 10% level. The model explains 61.85% of the variation in the dependent variable (R-squared), with an adjusted R-squared of 51.67%, indicating a relatively good fit. The standard error of regression (0.106426) suggests a reasonable level of accuracy in the predictions, and the long-run variance value of 0.004586 reflects the variability explained by the model over time.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS
Financial Inclusion, Banking System Stability, and Economic Development in Zimbabwe

This study highlights the complex relationship between financial inclusion, banking system stability, and economic development in Zimbabwe. Regression results reveal that financial inclusion (LFI), banking system stability (LDC), and economic growth (LGDP) significantly influence financial system effectiveness, with implications for livelihoods and economic stability. The negative coefficient for LFI (-0.267849) suggests that financial inclusion may destabilise Zimbabwe's fragile financial system. This supports Minsky's (1986) Financial Instability Hypothesis, which posits that while access to finance can promote

growth, poorly managed inclusion increases systemic risk. Expanding access without adequate regulation may lead to defaults, over-indebtedness, and financial volatility. Zimbabwe's banking sector already faces inflation, liquidity constraints, and weak risk management, making rapid inclusion potentially destabilising.

Similarly, the negative coefficient for LDC (-0.220615) reflects the importance of a stable banking sector. According to Diamond and Dybvig's (1983) Theory of Bank Runs, confidence in banks is critical for economic stability. High non-performing loans (NPLs), liquidity shortages, and financial fragility undermine both inclusion and resilience. Tressel and Verdier (2008) emphasise that banking stability is a prerequisite for effective inclusion, a finding consistent with Zimbabwe's experience. Conversely, the positive coefficient for LGDP (0.195355) aligns with Beck, Demirgüç-Kunt, and Levine (2007) and Romer's (1990) Endogenous Growth Theory, which suggests that economic growth drives financial development. Zimbabwe's initiatives promoting mobile money and digital finance (World Bank, 2023) have improved financial access, though macroeconomic instability continues to limit broader financial sector development.

The positive coefficient for LBM (0.102876) highlights the importance of robust banking models. Nguyen and Dang (2022) argue that strong risk management and capital adequacy enable banks to absorb shocks while expanding services. Strengthening banking operations and regulatory oversight is essential for achieving sustainable inclusion without compromising system stability.

Schumpeter's (1911) theory of creative destruction suggests that while financial innovation promotes growth, unregulated expansion can destabilise institutions. Zimbabwe's mobile money growth has increased financial activity, but vulnerabilities persist due to inflation, currency volatility, and regulatory gaps (Gup, 2004). The Financial Intermediation Theory (Bagehot, 1873) explains the role of banks in linking savers and borrowers to promote growth and inclusion. Yet, Zimbabwe's banks face liquidity constraints, poor credit risk management, and growing competition from mobile money, exacerbating systemic weaknesses unless regulatory integration improves.

Empirical studies echo these findings. Hannig and Jansen (2010) caution that rapid inclusion in weak banking environments can destabilise the sector, a dynamic visible in Zimbabwe. Beck et al (2007) similarly stress that financial system stability underpins successful inclusion. Despite mobile money expansion, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ, 2023) reports persistent sectoral instability, including high NPLs and liquidity shortages. Dube (2023) emphasises the need for regulatory reforms, financial literacy, and improved bank capitalisation to balance inclusion with financial stability. Mavaza (2023) adds that ensuring banks can absorb growing demand for services is critical to supporting livelihoods and sector resilience.

The negative inclusion-stability relationship aligns with World Bank (2012) and Sahay et al. (2015), who found that in low-income countries with weak financial systems, increased credit access can undermine stability. Zimbabwe's

fragile banking sector, with liquidity shortages and high NPLs, reflects this risk. While some global studies report positive links between inclusion and stability (Jungo, Madaleno, and Botelho, 2022; Al-Smadi, 2018; Morgan and Pontines, 2014), their focus on more stable economies limits relevance to Zimbabwe. The World Bank (2012) and Sahay et al. (2015) emphasise that weak banking oversight amplifies the risks of expanded financial access. In conclusion, this study underscores the dual role of financial inclusion in promoting growth and livelihoods while posing stability risks in fragile economies like Zimbabwe. Strengthening regulation, improving risk management, and enhancing financial literacy are critical to ensuring that inclusion supports sustainable economic development.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a negative and statistically significant relationship between financial inclusion and financial stability in Zimbabwe, consistent with Minsky's (1986) Financial Instability Hypothesis and Diamond and Dybvig's (1983) Theory of Bank Runs. While financial inclusion promotes economic growth, its rapid expansion in a fragile banking environment increases systemic risks. The results show that financial inclusion and domestic credit negatively affect banking stability, while GDP and financial sector size positively influence stability. Poorly regulated microfinance institutions and weak credit assessments further amplify vulnerabilities. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing financial literacy, and improving bank capitalisation are essential to ensure that financial inclusion supports, rather than undermines, long-term economic stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Government and Regulators

The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe and relevant ministries should enhance cybersecurity to protect digital financial services and prevent fraud, building public confidence. Infrastructure development in rural areas, including roads and electricity, is essential, with incentives for private investment in ICT. A supportive legal framework should accommodate financial technology innovations without regulatory barriers.

Financial Institutions and Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)

Banks and MNOs should offer small loans via mobile banking to financially excluded individuals and support group savings schemes like burial societies with multi-signatory accounts. Expanding branchless banking—via mobile and agent banking—will cut costs and improve access.

Central Bank

To restore trust, the central bank must address high bank charges, low savings returns, and rigid account-opening procedures while ensuring financial stability.

Banking Sector

Banks should invest in financial literacy to educate underserved populations and collaborate on shared infrastructure like ATMs and mobile banking platforms. A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) can reduce costs and enhance service delivery.

Private Sector

Banks and MNOs should conduct educational campaigns on digital financial products, boosting financial inclusion and sector growth, especially in rural areas.

REFERENCES

Adrian, T., & Shin, H. S. (2010). Liquidity and leverage. Journal of Financial Intermediation, 19(3), 418–437.

Allen, F., Demirguc-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., & Peria, M. M. (2012). Foundations of financial inclusion. Policy Research Working Paper, 6290.

Allen, F., Demirgüç-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., & Pería, M. S. M. (2014). The foundations of financial inclusion: Understanding ownership and use of formal accounts. Policy Research Working Paper No. 6290. World Bank

Allen, F., Demirgüç-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., & Peria, M. S. M. (2016). The foundations of financial inclusion: Understanding ownership and use of formal accounts. Journal of Financial Intermediation, 27, 1-30.

Al-Smadi, M. (2018). Financial inclusion and stability in Jordan: An FMOLS approach. International Journal of Financial Studies, 6(3), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijfs6030071

Al-Smadi, M. O. (2018). The role of financial inclusion in financial stability: Lesson from Jordan. Banks and Bank Systems, 13(4), 31-39. https://doi.org/10.21511/bbs.13(4).2018.03

Amatus, H., & Alireza, N. (2015). Financial inclusion and financial stability in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). International journal of social sciences, 36(1), 2305-4557.

Ardic, O. P., Heimann, M., & Mylenko, N. (2013). Access to financial services and stability: A cross-country analysis. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Atkinson, A., & Messy, F. (2013). Promoting financial inclusion through financial education: OECD/INFE evidence, policies and practice. OECD Working Papers on Finance, Insurance and Private Pensions, No. 34. https://doi.org/10.1787/5k3xz6m88smp-en

Bagehot, W. (1873). Lombard Street: A description of the money market. London, England: Henry S. King and Co.

Bank for International Settlements (BIS). (2019). The stability of the financial system: Risks and regulation.

Barugahara, F. (2021). Financial inclusion in Zimbabwe: Determinants, challenges, and opportunities. Journal of African Finance and Economic Development, 8(2), 45-61.

Barugahara, I. (2021). Determinants of financial inclusion in Zimbabwe: Evidence from micro-data. African Journal of Economics and Finance, 5(2), 34–52.

Beck, T., Demirgüç-Kunt, A., & Levine, R. (2007). Finance, inequality, and poverty: Cross-country evidence. Journal of Economic Growth, 12(1), 27-49.

Bhattacharya, S., & Thakor, A. V. (1993). Contemporary banking theory. Journal of Financial Intermediation, 3(1), 2-50. https://doi.org/10.1006/jfin.1993.1002

Brunnermeier, M. K. (2009). Deciphering the liquidity and credit crunch 2007–2008. Journal of Economic Perspectives, 23(1), 77-100. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.23.1.77

Camara, N., Peña, X., & Tuesta, D. (2014). Financial inclusion and education in Peru: Evidence from household surveys. Central Bank of Peru Working Paper.

Camara, N., Peña, X., & Tuesta, D. (2014). Factors that matter for financial inclusion: Evidence from Peru. BBVA Research Working Paper No. 14/09. https://www.bbvaresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/WP14-09_Factors-that-matter-for-financial-inclusion

Chivasa, W., & Simbanegavi, W. (2016). Determinants of financial inclusion in Zimbabwe: A focus on rural areas. African Journal of Economic Review, 4(2), 1–20.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2011). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Danjuma, I. (2018). Financial inclusion and banking stability: Evidence from emerging markets. International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues, 8(5), 1–12.

Demirgüç-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., Singer, D., & Van Oudheusden, P. (2015). The Global Findex Database 2014: Measuring financial inclusion around the world (Policy Research Working Paper No. 7255). World Bank. https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-7255

Demirgüç-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., & Singer, D. (2017). Financial inclusion and inclusive growth: A review of recent empirical evidence (Policy Research Working Paper No. 8040). World Bank.

Demirgüç-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., Singer, D., Ansar, S., & Hess, J. (2018). The global Findex database 2017.

Demirgüç-Kunt, Asli, Leora Klapper, Dorothe Singer, Saniya Ansar, and Jake Hess. (2018). The Global Findex Database 2017: Measuring Financial Inclusion and the FinTech Revolution. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Demirgüç-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., Singer, D., Ansar, S., & Hess, J. (2018). The Global Findex Database 2017: Measuring financial inclusion and the fintech revolution. World Bank. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1259-0

Demirgüç-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., Singer, D., & Ansar, S. (2022). The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial inclusion, digital payments, and resilience in the age of COVID-19. World Bank Publications.

Diamond, D. W., & Dybvig, P. H. (1983). Bank runs, deposit insurance, and liquidity. Journal of Political Economy, 9(13), 401–419. https://doi.org/10.1086/261155

Dube, S. (2023). Digital financial inclusion and economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Evidence and policy implications. African Journal of Economic Policy, 30(2), 45-62.

Dube, T. (2023). Financial stability challenges and regulatory reforms in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe Economic Review, 18(3), 45–63.

Engle, R. F., & Granger, C. W. J. (1987). Co-integration and error correction: Representation, estimation, and testing. Econometrica, 55(2), 251–276. https://doi.org/10.2307/1913236

European Central Bank. (2019). Financial Stability Review.

Greenwood, J., & Jovanovic, B. (1990). Financial development, growth, and the distribution of income. Journal of Political Economy, 98(5), 1076–1107. https://doi.org/10.1086/261720

GSMA. (2020). Mobile money and financial inclusion: Emerging trends in developing countries. GSMA: London.

Gujarati, D. N. (2004). Basic econometrics (4 ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Gup, B. E. (2004). Banking and financial stability. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Gwalani, H., & Parkhi, S. (2014). Barriers to financial inclusion in India: Evidence from rural households. Indian Journal of Finance, 8(5), 25–38.

Gwalani, H., & Parkhi, S. (2014). Financial inclusion – Building a success model in the Indian context. Procedia -Social and Behavioral Sciences, 133, 372–378. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.203

Han, R., & Melecky, M. (2013). Financial inclusion for financial stability: Access to bank deposits and systemic risk. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 6371. https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-6371

Han, R., & Melecky, M. (2013). Financial inclusion for financial stability: Access to bank deposits and the growth of deposits in the global financial crisis. Policy Research Working Paper No. 6577. World Bank. https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-6577

Hannig, A., & Jansen, S. (2010). Financial inclusion and financial stability: Current policy issues. Asian Development Bank Working Paper Series.

Hansen, B. E. (1992). Consistent covariance matrix estimation for dependent heterogeneous processes. Econometrica, 60(4), 967–972. https://doi.org/10.2307/2951594

Honohan, P. (2008). Cross-country variation in household access to financial services. Journal of Banking & Finance, 32(11), 2493–2500. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbankfin.2008.05.004

IMF (International Monetary Fund). (2015). Financial inclusion: Policy and regulatory considerations. Washington, DC: IMF.

Indonesia Ministry of Finance. (2014). Financial inclusion strategy: Empowering Indonesia's unbanked population. Government of Indonesia.

Institute for Inclusive Social & Public Policy Research. (2023). Enhancing financial inclusion in underserved regions: Pathways to inclusive economic development. Institute for Inclusive Social & Public Policy Research.

International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2015). Financial inclusion: Can it meet multiple macroeconomic goals? IMF Staff Discussion Note SDN/15/17. International Monetary Fund. https://doi.org/10.5089/9781513562647.006

Jungo, J., Mara, M., & Anabela, B. (2022). Effect of financial inclusion and competitiveness on financial stability: Why financial regulation matters in developing countries. Journal of Financial Economic Policy, 45(5), 780–797.

Jungo, L., Madaleno, M., & Botelho, A. (2022). Financial inclusion and banking stability in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Journal of African and Latin American Finance, 10(1), 45–63.

Kabakova, I., & Plaksenkov, E. (2018). Determinants of financial inclusion in developing countries. Emerging Markets Finance & Trade, 54(10), 2241–2256. https://doi.org/10.1080/1540496X.2017.1416341

Kabakova, O., & Plaksenkov, E. (2018). Analysis of factors affecting financial inclusion: Ecosystem view. Journal of Business Research, 89, 198–205. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.01.066

Khan, H. R. (2011). Financial inclusion and financial stability: Are they two sides of the same coin? Address at BANCON 2011, November 4. Chennai, India: Reserve Bank of India.

Khan, H. R. (2011). Financial inclusion versus stability: Evidence from developing economies. International Journal of Economics and Finance, 3(2), 50–61.

Mandić, A., Marković, B., & Žigo, I. R. (2025). Risks of the use of FinTech in the financial inclusion of the population: A systematic review of the literature. Journal of Risk and Financial Management, 18(5), 250. https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm18050250

Mavaza, T. (2023). Banking system resilience and inclusive finance in Zimbabwe. African Journal of Finance and Economics, 11(1), 77–95.

Mhlanga, D. (2021). Factors that matter for financial inclusion: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa (The Zimbabwe case). Sustainability, 10(6), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.3390/su1006212

Mhlanga, M. (2020a). Digital financial inclusion in Zimbabwe: Trends and challenges. Journal of African Development Studies, 12(1), 45–63.

Microfinance Gateway. (2017). Expanding financial access: Key drivers and innovations. Washington, DC: CGAP.

Minsky, H. P. (1986). Stabilising an unstable economy. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Morgan, P., & Pontines, V. (2014). Financial stability and financial inclusion: Evidence from ASEAN economies. Journal of Financial Economic Policy, 6(2), 120–142. https://doi.org/10.1108/JFEP-03-2013-0011

Mutale, J., & Nyathi, L. D. (2024). An ARDL approach to evaluating illicit financial flows and economic development in Zimbabwe. International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation, 11(9), 22–33. https://doi.org/10.51244/ijrsi.2024.1109022

Mutale, J., & Shumba, D. (2024). The impact of digital finance on financial inclusion in Zimbabwe. African Journal of Inclusive Societies, 4(1), 15–28. https://doi.org/10.59186/SI.QRTY5NM3

Neaime, S., & Gaysset, I. (2018). Financial inclusion and stability in MENA: Evidence from poverty and inequality. Finance Research Letters, 24, 230-237. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.frl.2017.09.007

Nguyen, Q. K., & Dang, V. C. (2022). The impact of risk governance structure on bank risk management effectiveness: Evidence from ASEAN countries. Heliyon, 8(10).

Novotny-Farkas, Z. (2016). The interaction of the IFRS 9 expected loss approach with supervisory rules and implications for financial stability. Accounting in Europe, 13(2), 197–227. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449480.2016.1210180

Patwardhan, P. (2018). Financial inclusion, resilience and economic growth. International Journal of Economics and Finance, 10(4), 1–12.

Pedroni, P. (2000). Fully modified OLS for heterogeneous cointegrated panels. Advances in Econometrics, 15, 93–130.

Pham, H., & Doan, T. P. L. (2020). The impact of financial inclusion on financial stability in Asian countries. Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business, 7(6), 47–59. https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2020.vol7.no6.047

Phillips, P. C. B., & Hansen, B. E. (1990). Statistical inference in instrumental variables regression with I(1) processes. Review of Economic Studies, 57(1), 99–125. https://doi.org/10.2307/2297545

Prasad, E. S. (2010). Financial sector regulation and reforms in emerging markets: An overview.

Ramakrishna, G., & Trivedi, J. (2018). Digital banking and financial inclusion: An empirical study in India. International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences, 7(2), 77–88.

Ramakrishna, S., & Trivedi, P. (2018). Technology and financial inclusion in emerging economies. Journal of Financial Innovation, 4(2), 25–39.

Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ). (2020). National Financial Inclusion Strategy. Harare: RBZ.

Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ). (2022). Financial inclusion and banking stability report. Harare: RBZ.

Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ). (2022). Monetary policy statement. Harare: RBZ.

Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ). (2023). Financial sector stability update. Harare: RBZ .

Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. (2020). National Financial Inclusion P-Strategy Progress Report 2016–2020. Harare: Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe.

Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. (2022). National financial inclusion strategy II (2022–2026). Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe.

Romer, P. M. (1990). Endogenous technological change. Journal of Political Economy, 98(5), S71–S102. https://doi.org/10.1086/261725

Sahay, R., Čihák, M., N'Diaye, P., Barajas, A., Mitra, S., Kyobe, A., Mooi, Y. N., & Yousefi, S. R. (2015). Financial inclusion: Can it meet multiple macroeconomic goals? IMF Staff Discussion Note SDN/15/17. International Monetary Fund.

Sarma, M. (2008). Index of Financial Inclusion (ICRIER Working Paper No. 215). Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations.

Schumpeter, J. A. (1911). The theory of economic development: An inquiry into profits, capital, credit, interest, and the business cycle. Harvard University Press.

Siddik, M. A. & Kabiraj, S. (2018). "Does Financial Inclusion Induce Financial Stability? Evidence from Cross-country Analysis. Australasian Accounting, Business and Finance Journal, 12(1), 34-46. https://doi.org/10.14453/aabfj.v12i1.3

Tressel, T., & Verdier, T. (2008). Financial globalization and the governance of domestic financial intermediaries. Journal of Economic Theory, 133(1), 79–110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jet.2005.12.007

Tshuma, P., Tshuma, N., Mpofu, S., & Sango, E. (2023). An analysis of the impact of digital financial inclusion on financial stability. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 7(4), 994–1006. https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS

Ulwodi, D. W., & Muriu, P. W. (2017). Barriers of financial inclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa. Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development www. iiste. org ISSN, 8(14).

United Nations (UN). (2021). Financial inclusion for sustainable development: Building inclusive financial systems. New York, NY: United Nations.

United Nations. (2018). Building inclusive and resilient societies through financial inclusion. United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF).

United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). (2022). Financial inclusion and the Sustainable Development Goals. UNCDF.

United Nations Capital Development Fund. (2022). Advancing sustainable development through financial inclusion: UNCDF's role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). United Nations Capital Development Fund.

United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development (UNSGSA). (2022). Annual report 2022: Expanding access, amplifying impact.

World Bank. (2012). Financial inclusion strategies reference framework. World Bank Publications. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/702011468152092070/financial-inclusion-strategies-reference-framework

World Bank. (2015). World Development Report 2015: Mind, society, and behavior. World Bank Publications. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0342-9

World Bank. (2020). The global financial development report 2020: Bank regulation and supervision: a decade after the global financial crisis. World Bank Publications. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1451-7

World Bank. (2022). The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial inclusion, digital payments, and resilience in the age of COVID-19. World Bank Publications. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1897-3

World Bank. (2023). Zimbabwe digital financial services and inclusion report 2023. World Bank.

Yoshino, N., & Morgan, P. (2016). Overview of financial inclusion, regulation, and education. In N. Yoshino & P. Morgan (Eds.), Financial inclusion, regulation, and education. 1-20.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Synergies of Convenience: Gender-Responsive Climate-Smart Agriculture as Human Rights Practice—Evidence from Chivi District, Zimbabwe and Implications for Sub-Saharan Africa

James Tauya Muperi – Midlands State University (iD)

Tapiwa Patson Sisimayi – Midlands State University (iD)

ABSTRACT

In Zimbabwe, climate change and entrenched gender disparities in agriculture, where women form 70% of smallholder farmers, demand urgent policy action. Women face systemic barriers like patriarchal land ownership (only 28% with formal titles), time poverty (20-hour workdays), and exclusion from climate committees (61% barred). Using mixed methods (a survey of 420 households, 24 focus group discussions [FGDs], and 9 interviews; SPSS 28, NVivo 14), this study evaluates gender-responsive climate-smart agriculture (GR-CSA) effectiveness in Chivi District, with broader relevance for sub-Saharan Africa. Results show that while 89% of CSA programmes claim gender mainstreaming, only 14% offer childcare, a critical gap given 78% of women care for children under five. Solar irrigation schemes reduce water collection time by 32% and boost yields by 45%, but male-dominated extension systems (89% lack female agents) perpetuate knowledge asymmetries. The study quantifies a 9.8-hour daily gender labour gap, explaining low CSA adoption rates (OR=0.43 for female-headed households). The findings reposition GR-CSA as a practical human rights issue, aligning with CEDAW and the SDGs (notably SDG 5 and 13), which mandate equitable resource access, decision-making participation, and protection from systemic discrimination in climate adaptation. This research provides robust quantitative evidence on gendered adoption barriers and advocates for legally binding quotas, labour-saving technology subsidies, and gender-responsive budgeting to address the $100M annual productivity gap identified by UNDP (2022). The study underscores that gender equity in agriculture is both a legal and moral obligation, and that transformative policy is essential for realising women's rights and climate resilience in Zimbabwe and similar agrarian contexts.

Key words: Gender productivity gap, climate-smart agriculture, feminist political ecology, patriarchal land systems, human rights

INTRODUCTION

Climate change has intensified gender inequalities in Zimbabwe's agricultural sector, where women constitute 70% of smallholder farmers yet face persistent barriers to land, credit, and adaptive technologies (Nyathi et al. 2024). In Chivi District, a semi-arid area where droughts have cut crop yields by 50% since 2020 (Mugandani et al., 2022), women's livelihoods critically depend on gender-responsive climate-smart agriculture (GR-CSA), which addresses both productivity and equity. Globally, women's limited access to resources means climate-smart agriculture interventions often reinforce rather than reduce agricultural inequalities (FAO, 2024; Huyer et al., 2024). GR-CSA, as endorsed by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) (Saran et al., 2024), integrates key practices supporting food security (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [ICESCR] Article 11), gender equality (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW] Article 14), and climate resilience (Paris Agreement Article 7).

Despite these national and international commitments, only 37% of national climate policies incorporate gender-specific adaptation, leaving women more vulnerable to climate shocks (UNFCCC, 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa, this vulnerability is compounded by reliance on rain-fed agriculture and disproportionate time poverty caused by daily collection of water and firewood (Anderson & Sriram, 2019), a reality contravening CEDAW Article 14 yet with weak enforcement (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). Technical solutions such as CSA programmes have not closed the gender gap. Women's adoption rates lag men's by up to 40%, impeded by limited land ownership and financial exclusion (FAO, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Zimbabwe initiatives like Pfumvudza/Intwasa increased yields but did not redress intra-household labour disparities, where women perform most CSA-related work (Erel et al., 2017; Mugandani et al., 2022).

Over 70% of households rely on rain-fed agriculture with women contributing most labour but controlling less income from cash crops (Chidakwa et al., 2020). While Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration projects have increased tree cover, men dominate leadership and women's agroecological knowledge remains undervalued (Cavanagh et al., 2017; Khoza et al., 2021). This illustrates that effective climate interventions may perpetuate gender inequalities, limiting women's empowerment. Technocratic climate solutions, such as top-down interventions prioritising productivity over social equity, often reinforce colonial legacies and gender hierarchies by marginalising women's knowledge and leadership (Sato & Alarcon, 2019). Immediate survival needs often overshadow long-term adaptation, further marginalising women responsible for daily resource procurement (FAO, 2024). Although the Climate Change Gender Action Plan has increased women's participation in farmer groups, decision-making remains male-dominated and time poverty limits women's engagement (Farmonaut, 2024; Mugandani et al., 2022). Participatory varietal selection for drought-tolerant crops has improved adoption rates, yet systemic reforms in land tenure and credit access are lacking. National policies like the National Climate Policy (2020) and National Gender Policy (2025) mandate gender

mainstreaming but suffer weak enforcement, resulting in low adoption of labour-saving technologies and exclusion from decision-making (UN Women, 2022; World Bank, 2023).

Despite global recognition of links between gender equality, human rights, and climate resilience, women smallholder farmers in Chivi continue to bear disproportionate climate impacts due to structural inequalities (Belle et al., 2024). Zimbabwe's National Climate Policy (2020) shows that only 12% of women have secure land tenure and less than 30% access CSA technologies (Managa et al., 2023; Tanyanyiwa & Mufunda, 2019). This exclusion violates CEDAW Article 14 and undermines climate adaptation. The paradox lies in the selective synergy of interventions: The United Nations Development Programme's solar irrigation projects increased yields by 40% (Gundu-Jakarasi & Nhidza, 2021) but fail to dismantle intersecting barriers like discriminatory inheritance laws, financial exclusion, and unpaid care work consuming 8 hours per day during droughts (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2021). These approaches instrumentalise women's labour for resilience without transforming patriarchal systems, a tension highlighted by the Framework for Integrating Rights and Equality (FIRE) (Brisebois et al., 2022).

Research Questions

1. How do climate-induced livelihood shocks disproportionately affect women's rights to food security (ICESCR Art. 11) and land access compared to men in Chivi District, as evidenced by gendered divisions of labour and resource control?

2. To what extent do existing gender-responsive CSA initiatives in Chivi enhance women's decision-making power in farmer groups and control over agricultural income, as stipulated in Zimbabwe's National Climate Policy (2020)?

3. What policy and programmatic interventions, from government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and communities, could dismantle structural barriers to achieve synergistic climate resilience and gender equality in Chivi?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review examines key research on climate-smart agriculture in Zimbabwe, focusing on gendered climate impacts, adoption barriers, and policy frameworks addressing gender and climate resilience. It highlights key gaps in integrating gender considerations within CSA initiatives, particularly the persistent structural inequalities that constrain women's full participation and benefits in climate adaptation. Despite growing recognition of gendered vulnerabilities, current scholarship often prioritises productivity gains over transformative, rights-based approaches to gender equity in CSA. This review thus establishes the foundation for analysing how GR-CSA can advance both climate resilience and gender justice in Zimbabwe.

Existing literature shows strong consensus regarding the critical role of CSA in enhancing agricultural productivity and climate resilience in Zimbabwe's predominantly rain-fed farming systems (Khoza et al., 2021; Tanyanyiwa & Mufunda, 2019). However, studies also consistently reveal women's persistent marginalisation in access to land, credit, and adaptive technologies (Chidakwa et al., 2020; Elias et al., 2021; Nyathi et al., 2024). Gender

inequalities in agricultural labour and control over income persist despite the increasing adoption of CSA practices (Erel et al., 2017; Mugandani et al., 2022), highlighting a disconnect between technical interventions and social empowerment objectives. Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) initiatives, for instance, highlight this paradox: although successful in increasing tree cover, leadership remains male dominated and women's agroecological knowledge is often overlooked (Cavanagh et al., 2017; Saran et al., 2024). Such findings converge with critiques suggesting that technocratic solutions risk reinforcing existing patriarchal and colonial hierarchies by marginalising local gendered knowledge and authority (Sato & Alarcon, 2019).

The conceptual foundation of gender-responsive CSA, as endorsed by FAO and partners (Saran et al., 2024), posits that equitable adaptation requires recognition of gender-specific vulnerabilities and agency. This approach is reflected in international legal frameworks such as CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relating to gender equality and climate action (ICESCR Art. 11; CEDAW Art. 14; Paris Agreement Art. 7). Yet, empirical studies reveal that national policies in Zimbabwe often fall short of effective enforcement, resulting in the exclusion of women from key decision-making processes and adaptive resource allocation (UN Women, 2022; World Bank, 2023). This gap between policy rhetoric and lived realities exposes limitations in the design and implementation of CSA programmes, which frequently overlook structural barriers such as discriminatory inheritance laws, financial exclusion, and unpaid care burdens (Anitha, 2019; Belle et al., 2024).

The field divides around the extent to which CSA projects can transcend technical fixes to achieve gender-transformative outcomes. Some research emphasises incremental progress through participatory approaches and labour-saving technologies (Farmonaut, 2024; Mugandani et al., 2022), while others highlight the persistence of "selective synergies" whereby interventions optimise women's labour but fail to redistribute power or challenge patriarchal norms (Gundu-Jakarasi & Nhidza, 2021 ; Rao et al., 2025). This tension reflects a broader debate over the political economy of climate adaptation, underscoring the need for justice-oriented frameworks such as the FIRE, which foregrounds structural inequalities in access to land tenure and leadership (Brisebois et al., 2022; Mishra et al., 2019).

Methodologically, the literature shows growing use of mixed methods approaches combining quantitative household surveys with qualitative participatory research to capture nuanced gendered impacts (Allen, 2020; Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2021). However, gaps remain regarding longitudinal perspectives that track the sustainability of adaptation gains and the intersectional dimensions of vulnerability linked to age, marital status, and socio-economic status. Further, much of the research focuses on agricultural productivity metrics, with less attention to the broader human rights and empowerment dimensions of gender-responsive CSA. Consequently, this study aims to contribute conceptually and empirically by operationalising a rights-based approach to GR-CSA in Zimbabwe's Chivi District. It seeks to move beyond instrumental framings reliant on productivity gains to critically interrogate how adaptation interfaces with gendered power

dynamics and systemic inequalities. Integrating participatory methods and policy analysis within a feminist political ecology lens, the research intends to illuminate pathways for more transformative, context-responsive CSA policies and practices. This contribution is salient at a time when climate change exacerbates gendered vulnerabilities, and climate adaptation policies must reconcile productive efficiency with social justice imperatives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), which interrogates how intersecting power structures; gender, class, race, and coloniality, shape access to resources and environmental governance (Erel et al., 2017; Sundberg, 2016). FPE rejects technocratic, apolitical solutions to climate change, instead centring the lived experiences of marginalised women in the Global South. In Zimbabwe, patriarchal land tenure restricts women to just 12% of arable land (Tanyanyiwa & Mufunda, 2019), and CSA programmes often instrumentalise women's labour without addressing structural disempowerment, creating what Doukas, Nikas, Stamtsis and Tsipouridis (2020) call "green economy traps." FPE's focus on relational resource governance and Indigenous knowledge challenges market-driven sustainability models, which often overlook women's unpaid care work and its centrality to household survival (Nyathi et al., 2024; Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2021).

FPE's intersectional lens is vital for analysing "synergies of convenience" in gender-climate programming, questioning whether interventions like UNDP's solar irrigation in Chivi genuinely shift power or simply optimise women's productivity within patriarchal systems (Gundu-Jakarasi & Nhidza, 2021). The framework's four pillars; recognition, redistribution, representation, and reparation, guide this study's evaluation of whether CSA can be a site of feminist transformation (Rao et al., 2025). To deepen the analysis of agency, we draw on Kabeer's (1999) empowerment framework, which defines empowerment as expanding resources, agency, and achievements for those previously denied choice. Sen's capabilities approach complements this, focusing on substantive freedoms and opportunities (Frediani, 2010). Together, these frameworks enable a nuanced assessment of how CSA interventions can move beyond technical fixes to foster genuine empowerment and agency for women in rural Zimbabwe.
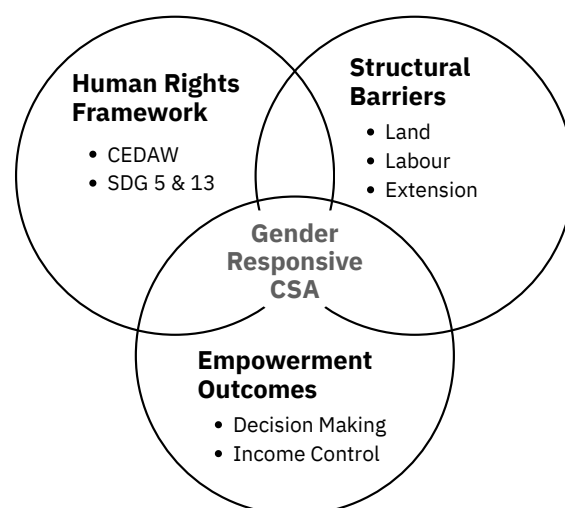

Figure 1: Gender-Responsive Climate Smart Agriculture as a Human Right Practice [Adapted synthesis based on findings from Brisebois et al. (2022), FAO (2024), Nyathi et al. (2024), Saran et al. (2024)]

As Figure 1 shows, gender-responsive CSA goes beyond technical adaptation to realise essential human rights, aligning with Zimbabwe's constitutional and international obligations, especially CEDAW, which mandates equal access to land, finance, and extension services for rural women. Dismantling gender-specific barriers through CSA directly advances SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), while integrating human rights into CSA policy ensures that climate resilience and gender equity are achieved together, positioning the advancement of rural women's rights as a central foundation of adaptation.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology was grounded in a feminist mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine gender disparities in CSA adoption in Chivi District. Using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations, a representative sample of 420 households was selected from 14,563 smallholder households, stratified by gender of household head and land tenure status to ensure equal representation of female-headed households with secure tenure, female-headed households without secure tenure, and male-headed households. Probability-proportional-to-size sampling was applied across 15 wards using the 2022 agricultural census as the sampling frame, and CSA participation was recorded for subgroup analysis. The survey instrument, adapted from the World Bank's LSMS, included 58 items on CSA uptake, labour allocation, resource access, and decision-making, with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.72 and 0.89 confirming reliability.

Qualitative data were collected through purposive sampling, comprising fifteen key informants (government agricultural extension officers, UNDP staff, traditional leaders, and women's rights activists) and three age-stratified focus group discussions with 24 women. Thematic saturation and information power guided final sample sizes.

Methodological innovations included time-use diaries, participatory GIS mapping, and policy-dialogue simulations. All instruments were translated, pilot-tested, and administered by female researchers trained in feminist interviewing. Quantitative analysis used SPSS 28 for descriptive statistics and logistic regression, while qualitative data were coded in NVivo 14 using both policy-driven and emergent themes. Rigor was ensured through peer debriefing, member checking, and triangulation. Ethical approval was obtained from the Midlands State University Research Ethics Committee, with strict attention to informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity throughout data collection.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents data that highlights the significant disparities in climate-smart agriculture adoption patterns between male-headed and female-headed households across Chivi District. Tables, figures, and thematic analyses are used to illustrate key findings, underpinning the intersection of gender, tenure security, and climate resilience.

Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of 420 surveyed households in Chivi District.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Surveyed Households by Gender and Tenure Status (N=420)

Characteristic	Female-Headed Households (FHHs) (n=198, 47%)	Male-Headed Households (MHHs) (n=222, 53%)	Total Sample
Land Tenure Status			
Formal land title holders (%)	28%	89%	60%
Communal land users (%)	72%	11%	40%
Mean Household Size	5.2 (±1.8)	6.1 (±2.1)	5.7 (±2.0)
Primary Livelihood			
Crop farming (%)	82%	78%	80%
Livestock rearing (%)	15%	19%	17%
Off-farm income (%)	3%	3%	3%
Education Level (Household Head)			
No formal schooling (%)	22%	14%	18%
Primary education (%)	63%	58%	60%
Secondary education or above (%)	15%	28%	22%
Access to Extension Services			
Received CSA training (%)	31%	49%	41%
Contact with Agritex officer (%)	42%	67%	55%

Female-headed households (FHHs) made up 47% of the sample but only 28% held formal land titles, compared to 89% of male-headed households (MHHs). This tenure insecurity limits women's access to crucial agricultural technologies (Figure 2).

CSA Technology Adoption Rates by Household Type

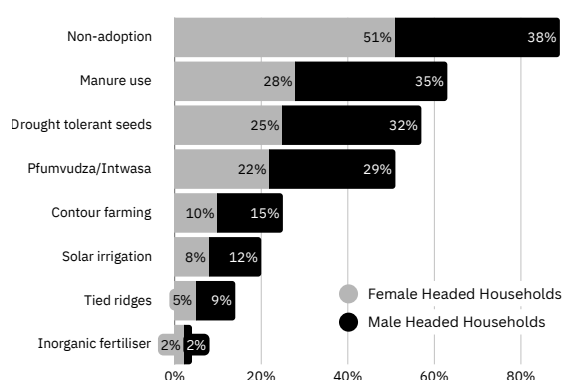|	Female Headed Households	Male Headed Households
Non-adoption	51%	38%
Manure use	28%	35%
Drought tolerant seeds	25%	32%
Pfumvudza/Intwasa	22%	29%
Contour farming	10%	15%
Solar irrigation	8%	12%
Tied ridges	5%	9%
Inorganic fertiliser	2%	2%

Figure 2: CSA Technology Adoption Rates by Household Type (Source: Primary Data 2024)

Figure 2 illustrates significant disparities in CSA adoption by household type. FHHs without secure tenure adopt substantially fewer climate-resilient practices, with 35% less use of drought-resistant seeds and 42% less use of conservation agriculture techniques than MHHs. These gaps reflect intersecting barriers: tenure insecurity restricts credit and extension service access (World Bank, 2023), while women's time poverty, averaging 20 hours of daily labour (Table 4), limits their ability to engage in labour-intensive techniques like contour farming. Patriarchal land systems, where only 28% of Masvingo women hold land titles, exacerbate vulnerabilities and constrain women's agency to invest in sustainable soil and water conservation (Nyathi et al., 2024). These structural barriers align with findings that 61% of women are excluded from local adaptation committees, reinforcing gendered resource inequities (Table 5).

Table 2: Predictors of CSA Adoption: Odds Ratios and Significance Levels

Predictor	Adjusted Odds Ratio (AOR)	95% CI	p-value
Female-headed household	0.43	[0.30, 0.62]	<0.001
Tenure insecurity	0.27	[0.15, 0.48]	0.002
Education (per additional year)	1.12	[1.02, 1.23]	0.018
Farm size (per hectare)	1.08	[1.01, 1.16]	0.031
Access to credit (yes vs. no)	2.95	[1.88, 4.62]	<0.001

Table 2 shows key predictors of CSA adoption in Chivi District. FHHs have 57% lower odds of adopting CSA than MHHs (Adjusted Odds Ratio [AOR] = 0.43, p < 0.001), indicating persistent institutional gender bias beyond differences in education and farm size. Tenure insecurity is the strongest barrier, reducing adoption odds by 73% (AOR = 0.27, p = 0.002), consistent with critiques of patriarchal land control (Gundu-Jakarasi & Nhidza, 2021). Education and farm size have smaller positive effects (AOR = 1.12 per additional year of education, p = 0.018; AOR = 1.08 per hectare, p = 0.031). Access to credit increases adoption odds nearly threefold (AOR = 2.95, p < 0.001), though qualitative data expose women's exclusion from formal credit systems, illustrating Agarwal's (2018) "proxy access" paradox, wherein nominal inclusion does not confer real control.

The model explains 42% of the variation in adoption (Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.42, a statistical measure of model fit) but excludes sociocultural factors like decision-making norms. These findings challenge narrow technocratic CSA models, approaches that focus mainly on technical solutions without addressing social inequalities, and support Anderson and Sriram's (2019) argument that "gender-blind" interventions (which ignore power relations) reinforce patriarchal control over technology access.

Interactions between tenure, credit, and education underscore the need for intersectional policies that tackle overlapping barriers. Tenure reforms alone are unlikely to succeed without parallel financial inclusion. While cross-sectional data limit inference of causality, these results position CSA adoption as a political process needing structural transformation rather than merely technical fixes.
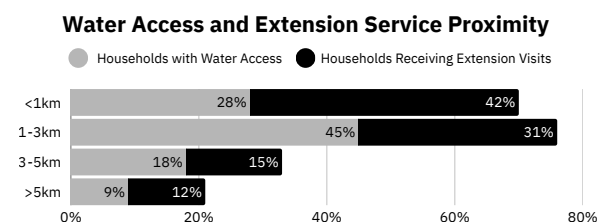

Water Access and Extension Service Proximity

Figure 3: *Distance-Based Disparities in Water Access and Extension Services (Source: Primary Data 2024)*

Figure 3 shows stark disparities in water access and extension services by distance from water sources. Households within 1 km of water are three times more likely to receive agricultural extension services (42%) than those 3 to 5 km away (15%). As distance increases, water access declines sharply, from 28% at less than 1 km to 9% beyond 5 km, while extension services marginally improve at remote locations, 12% beyond 5 km, likely due to mobile units. However, 73% of households beyond 1 km face limited water and technical support, heightening climate vulnerability.

As one 54-year-old farmer remarked during focus group discussions (Participant 7, female, Chivi District):

The Agritex officer comes quarterly to demonstrate drip irrigation, but always when we're fetching water from Nyuni dam.

This spatial mismatch is further explored in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis of Women's Climate Adaptation Strategies in Chivi District (N=24 FGD Participants)

Strategy Type	Specific Practices	Frequency (%)	Key Constraints	Gender-Specific Implications	Policy Entry Points	Age Cohort Variation
Labour-Intensive Alternatives (68%)	• Dry-season gardening in wetlands • Hand-watering using buckets • Composting household waste	68%	• High time burden (4-6 extra hours/day) • Limited to small plots (0.1-0.3ha)	• Reinforces time poverty (Table 4) • Children often pulled from school to assist	• Labour-saving tech subsidies • Childcare-supported training	Youth (18-35): 41% use Elderly (55+): 89% use
Social Resilience (22%)	• Informal seed swaps • Rotational labour groups • Kinship-based food sharing	22%	• Dependent on social capital • Collapses during extreme droughts	• Widows face exclusion (43%) • Young women contribute more labour	• Formalise women's collectives • Climate-resilient seed banks	Middle-aged (36-55): 67% use
Market-Based (7%)	• Selling handmade crafts • Seasonal migration • Small livestock trading	7%	• Requires start-up capital • Market access barriers	• Men control 89% of income (Table 1) • GBV risks during travel	• Women's mobile markets • Travel-safe transport grants	Youth-dominated (91%)
CSA Technology Use (3%)	• Drought-tolerant seeds (when available) • Shared irrigation pumps	3%	• Male-dominated allocation • Maintenance costs prohibitive	• 91% reported male control of assets	• Gender quotas for tech distribution • Women's repair cooperatives	Minimal age variation

Table 3 presents a thematic analysis of women's climate adaptation strategies in Chivi District based on 24 focus group participants. Labour-intensive strategies dominate (68%), including dry-season gardening in wetlands, hand-watering, and composting, consistent with Saran et al.'s (2024) findings on women's agricultural labour burden. These practices demand significant time, often on small plots, with children frequently involved. Social resilience strategies such as seed swaps and rotational labour groups account for 22%, relying on social capital but vulnerable to breakdowns during drought, as noted by Managa et al. (2023). Market-based approaches and climate-smart technologies are less common (7% and 3%), constrained by financial exclusion and male control over assets, reflecting analyses by Atta-Aidoo and Antwi-

Agyei (2025) and Erel et al. (2017). Age cohort differences show that elderly women engage more in labour-intensive methods while youth participate more in market-based activities (Sato & Alarcon, 2019).

Table 4 quantifies a substantial gendered time gap in Chivi District from 420 time-use diaries (2023–24). Women average 20 hours of productive labour daily across seasons, nearly double men's 10.2 hours in the dry season, with a significant 9.8-hour disparity. Women spend markedly more time on water collection (+3.4 hrs), fuelwood gathering (+2.2 hrs), and childcare (+3.4 hrs) (all $p < 0.001$), representing 63% of their daily work. Men's workloads decrease in the dry season, while women's remain constant, illustrating the "ratchet effect" whereby women absorb climate shocks through increased labour rather than

technology (Anitha, 2019; Sato & Alarcon, 2019). This time poverty partly explains the low CSA technology adoption by women (3%, Table 3). Widows face additional burdens, spending 23% more time collecting water and being 91% excluded from climate planning (Table 5). These findings support Sundberg's (2016) concept of "social reproduction squeeze," showing how ecological stress translates into gendered exclusion.

Table 4: Daily Time Allocation by Gender and Agricultural Season (Hours per Day)

Activity	Women		Men		Gender Gap (Dry Season)
	Rainy Season	Dry Season	Rainy Season	Dry Season	
Crop Cultivation	5.2 (±1.1)	3.8 (±0.9)	6.4 (±1.3)	4.1 (±1.0)	-0.3 (NS)
Livestock Care	2.1 (±0.7)	1.9 (±0.6)	3.0 (±0.8)	2.7 (±0.7)	-0.8**
Water Collection	3.7 (±0.5)	4.9 (±0.6)	1.2 (±0.3)	1.5 (±0.4)	+3.4***
Fuelwood Gathering	2.5 (±0.4)	2.8 (±0.5)	0.5 (±0.2)	0.6 (±0.2)	+2.2***
Food Processing	2.3 (±0.6)	2.1 (±0.5)	0.3 (±0.1)	0.2 (±0.1)	+1.9***
Child/Elder Care	4.2 (±0.8)	4.5 (±0.9)	1.0 (±0.3)	1.1 (±0.3)	+3.4***
Total Productive Labour	20.0 (±2.1)	20.0 (±2.3)	12.4 (±1.8)	10.2 (±1.6)	+9.8*
R-squared	0.618463	Mean dependent var	1.68918		
Adjusted R-Squared	0.51672	S.D dependent var	0.15309		
S.E of regression	0.106426	Sum squared resid	0.169897		
Long run variance	0.004586				

*Key: *** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; NS=Not Significant. Standard deviations in parentheses. Data from 420 time-use diaries (2023-24).*

Figure 4 demonstrates how intersecting identities of age and marital status shape climate knowledge acquisition, with widowed women over 50 exhibiting constrained access to modern information channels—relying predominantly on radio (82%) and peer networks (67%) due to limited digital literacy and mobility constraints, while younger married women leveraged more diversified sources like WhatsApp groups (43%) and extension visits (38%), reflecting their greater social capital and technology adoption. This 44-percentage-point gap in digital channel usage underscores how patriarchal norms and lifecycle stages compound information marginalisation for older, unmarried women, potentially excluding them from time-sensitive climate advisories disseminated through mobile platforms.
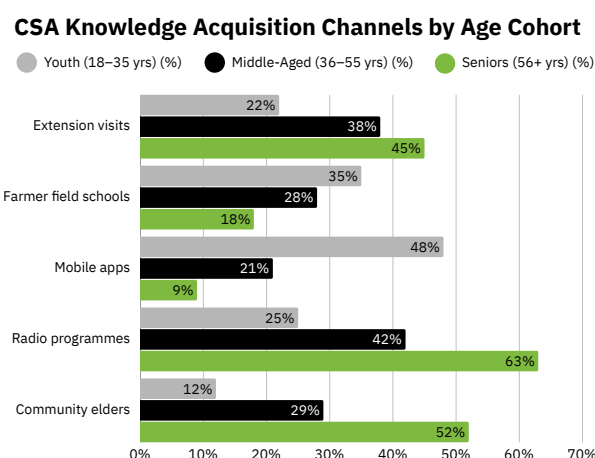
CSA Knowledge Acquisition Channels by Age Cohort

Figure 4: Dominant CSA Knowledge Channels by Farmer Age Group

Table 5: Barriers to Women's Participation in Climate Planning (N=24 FGD Participants)

Barrier Category	Specific Challenges	Frequency (%)	Quoted Justifications	Institutional Source	Policy Implications
Structural Exclusion	Denied committee membership	61%	"Women belong in homes, not meetings"	Customary leaders (89% of cases)	Need legal quotas with enforcement
	No childcare at meetings	73%	"Bringing children looks unprofessional"	District council bylaws	Mandate on-site childcare facilities
Procedural Obstacles	Meetings during water-fetching hours	82%	"8am sessions conflict with chores"	Agritex scheduling norms	Participant-designed timetables
	Complex bureaucratic language	58%	"They read policies we can't understand"	Ministry templates	Community translation protocols
Cultural Sanctions	Retaliation for speaking	47%	"My husband beat me after I testified"	Patriarchal norms	Anonymous feedback systems
	Widow-specific exclusion	91%	"No husband means no household voice"	Village court rulings	Alternative representation channels
Resource Barriers	No transport stipends	67%	"Walked 12km to attend, then was ignored"	Climate fund guidelines	Gender-responsive budgeting
	Male monopoly of information	78%	"Extension officers only visit male farms"	District agricultural office	Mandatory female outreach quotas

Data Source: Coded transcripts from 3 FGDs with verification via 9 key informant interviews (κ=0.79).

Table 5 identifies barriers to women's participation in climate planning from 24 focus group discussions. Only 12% of women registered in climate-smart initiatives participate in decision-making, despite 58% household registration. Structural exclusion is widespread: 61% of women are denied committee membership, mostly enforced by customary leaders (89%), with widows facing the highest exclusion at 91% due to village court rulings. Procedural barriers include meeting times that clash with water-fetching hours (82%) and lack of childcare (73%). Nearly half (47%) reported retaliation, including domestic violence, for speaking out, illustrating a risky environment for women's engagement (Erel et al., 2017). Resource constraints persist, with 67% lacking transport stipends and 78% reporting male monopoly over agricultural information. As one village head admitted (Participant 5, key informant):

The council asks for two women representatives, but we choose widows who won't challenge men's decisions.

These findings reveal entrenched institutional and procedural barriers to women's climate leadership (Brisebois et al., 2022; Anderson & Sriram, 2019).

Table 6 exposes a persistent disconnect between CSA programme rhetoric and lived realities in Chivi District, with implementation lagging behind policy claims by 12–66 percentage points across all attributes. This gap is most acute in gender mainstreaming and time-appropriate training, where institutional indifference renders women's inclusion largely symbolic. The near absence of childcare, female extension agents, and local language materials reveals that "gender-sensitive" programming often amounts to performative compliance rather than substantive change; what Brisebois

et al. (2022) term "convenient synergies." Women's narratives highlight how these failures perpetuate exclusion and force reliance on labour-intensive coping (see Table 3), while benefit-sharing remains largely a "paper reality" controlled by male elites. These contradictions reinforce the cycle of exclusion and time poverty quantified in Tables 4 and 5, demonstrating that technical fixes without structural accountability are insufficient. The findings call for rigorous, participatory monitoring of CSA initiatives, with metrics set and verified by women themselves, to close the credibility gap and drive genuine empowerment.

Table 6: Contradictions Between CSA Programme Designs and Local Realities in Chivi District

Programme Attribute	Policy Claim (%)	Actual Implementation (%)	Discrepancy Gap	Participant Experiences (Verbatim Examples)
Gender Mainstreaming	89	23	66	"They call it 'gender-sensitive' but we sit at the back while men answer"
Childcare Provision	14	2	12	"I missed the compost training because goats ate my baby's nap mat"
Female Extension Agents	45	11	34	"In 3 years, only male officers visit our fields"
Local Language Materials	72	29	43	"English PowerPoints with tiny text - like testing our eyesight!"
Time-Appropriate Sessions	68	9	59	"9am meetings when we're knee-deep in river sand fetching water"
Benefit-Sharing Monitoring	55	6	49	"The register shows I received drought seeds… [laughs bitterly]"
R-squared	0.618463	**Mean dependent var**		1.68918
Adjusted R-Squared	0.51672	**S.D dependent var**		0.15309
S.E of regression	0.106426	**Sum squared resid**		0.169897
Long run variance	0.004586			

Data Sources:
  i.   *Policy claims: 9 CSA programme documents (2022-24)*
  ii.   *Implementation: 420 household surveys + 24 FGDs*
  iii. *Discrepancy formula: (Claim % – Implementation %)*

Figure 5 shows a 23–42% seasonal decline in women's CSA technology use in Chivi District, revealing how "gender-neutral" interventions (those designed without considering different impacts or barriers faced by women and men) mask persistent exclusion. The steepest drops occur during school holidays, when women's unpaid care work increases by 6.3 hours/day, and 81% of CSA trainings take place in the lean season, times least accessible to women. Only 12% of senior women use digital advisories, while 62% of female-headed households travel over 5 km for water, highlighting intersecting burdens of care, digital illiteracy, and infrastructure gaps. One participant noted (Participant 12, female, Chivi District):

> *The bank requires my husband's signature for the climate loan, but he buys fertiliser for his maize plot while my groundnuts get no inputs.*

Seasonal Gaps in Women's CSA Technology Use

Legend: ● Peak Season (Apr–Sep) ● Lean Season (Oct–Mar) ● % Drop

Moisture Retention Basins: 68%, 26%, 42%
Drought-Tolerant Seeds: 55%, 32%, 23%
Conservation Agriculture: 48%, 35%, 13%
Agroforestry: 30%, 18%, 12%
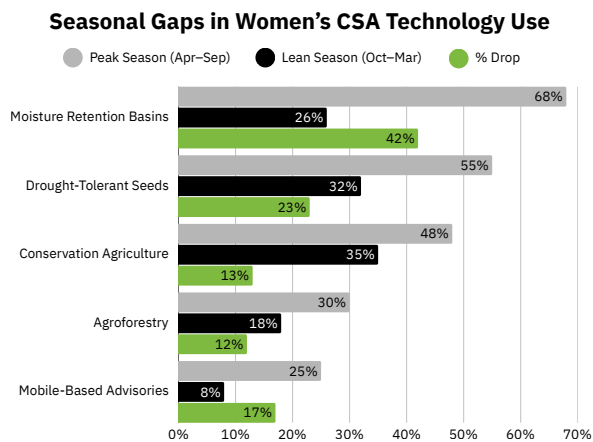Mobile-Based Advisories: 25%, 8%, 17%

Figure 5: Seasonal Gaps in Women's CSA Technology Use in Chivi District (2024)

These patterns align with Khoza et al. (2021), who found that women switch to drought-resistant crops when labour-intensive CSA is unsustainable. The data connect Table 2's finding of limited credit access (OR=4.2, p<0.001) with reports of male appropriation of loans, showing that technocentric approaches conflate presence with empowerment. Figure 4 highlights the urgent need to reschedule training to women's availability and support village savings groups, as reflected by 73% of women (Table 5). It underscores how scaling CSA without structural reform perpetuates "empty inclusion" and gendered vulnerabilities.

SYNTHESIS
Gendered Barriers, Structural Roots, and Policy Pathways for CSA Transformation

This study shows that gender disparities in CSA adoption in Chivi District stem more from entrenched patriarchal systems shaping land rights, labour, and decision-making than resource deficits. Female-headed, tenure-insecure households are 35% less likely to adopt CSA, reflecting global trends (Erel et al., 2017; Mishra et al., 2019). Feminist political ecology and rights-based frameworks (Brisebois et al., 2022) highlight how women's reproductive labour, such as six daily hours spent on water collection, remains invisible in CSA metrics, reinforcing exclusion. Intersectional barriers including age and marital status further marginalise widows and older women, while male-dominated credit systems and poorly timed extension services perpetuate what Elias et al. (2021) describe as "feminist governance failures." Though digital tools like WhatsApp help younger women, structural constraints and "gender-neutral" technologies often overlook women's time poverty and care burdens, especially during school holidays.

Evidence points to "empty inclusion" in CSA programmes (Anderson & Sriram, 2019), where nominal participation masks structural barriers. Market-driven and technocentric approaches ignore women's temporal and social realities, as indicated by seasonal drops in technology use and reliance on labour-intensive coping strategies. Rights-based analysis, grounded in ICESCR Article 11, warns that without attention to land rights, income control, and agency, CSA will reinforce gendered vulnerability (Sato & Alarcon, 2019). Empowerment, defined by Kabeer (1999) as access to technology, leadership, and income, emerges as key for transformation. Incorporating empowerment indicators into CSA monitoring can enhance assessment and barrier dismantling.

Policy framing must treat gender-responsive CSA as a human rights imperative rather than a technical fix. Legal quotas for women's governance roles, subsidies for labour-saving technologies, gender-responsive budgeting, and enforcement of Zimbabwe's National Climate and Gender Policies are vital. Accountability mechanisms should embed gender equity in practice, not rhetoric. Achieving transformative CSA requires alignment with feminist climate justice principles, which include recognition, redistribution, representation, and reparation, as well as with international frameworks such as CEDAW and the SDGs. Structural reforms to land tenure, credit, and extension services, combined with inclusive leadership and multi-stakeholder collaboration, are essential for scaling effective gender-responsive CSA models across sub-Saharan Africa.

LIMITATIONS

While this study provides critical insights into gender disparities in CSA adoption, several limitations must be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design captures only a snapshot of complex, evolving dynamics between gender relations and climate adaptation, potentially missing longitudinal shifts in power structures or seasonal variations in labour allocation. To address this, we integrated retrospective questions about historical farming practices and triangulated responses with observational data from different agricultural cycles. Another limitation stems from potential response bias, particularly sensitive topics like intra-household decision-making or land disputes, where participants might underreport inequalities due to fear of social repercussions. This was mitigated through same-gender

interviewers, anonymous survey components, and prolonged community engagement to build trust before broaching contentious subjects. Finally, while the sampling strategy ensured representation across Chivi's wards, the findings may not fully translate to other agroecological zones with different tenure systems or gender norms. We explicitly contextualise our conclusions within semi-arid smallholder farming systems and recommend further studies in contrasting environments to test the framework's broader applicability. These methodological choices strengthened the study's validity while transparently acknowledging the boundaries of its generalisability.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that GR-CSA in Chivi District, Zimbabwe, holds transformative potential only if it addresses deeply entrenched structural barriers that limit women's participation, resource access, and leadership in agriculture. It highlights how these gender disparities are rooted in patriarchal systems affecting land rights, labour distribution, and decision-making power. The research, combining quantitative data on adoption barriers with qualitative insights from participatory mapping and policy reviews, reveals persistent challenges, including women's time poverty, insecure land tenure, and exclusion from extension services. Although technical solutions are important, without addressing these fundamental social and institutional constraints, CSA adoption remains limited and inequitable. The findings underscore that empowering women in CSA requires confronting systemic inequalities

rather than merely optimizing their productive labour. While focused on Chivi, the results echo similar gendered constraints found across sub-Saharan Africa, suggesting that successfully addressing these requires a rights-based, feminist-informed approach to climate adaptation that centers women as agents of change, strengthens community resilience, and supports sustainable development in vulnerable rural environments.

Recommendations for Government

- Revise CSA Programme Designs to Align with Women's Time Constraints

Hold training sessions during off-peak hours and provide childcare support to prevent increased labour burdens for women.

- Strengthen Land Tenure Security for Women

Implement legal reforms and community awareness campaigns challenging customary practices that exclude female-headed households from land ownership and inheritance.

- Mandate Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Climate Adaptation

Require at least 40% of CSA funding to support women-led farming collectives with accessible credit mechanisms.

- Enforce Transparent and Inclusive Climate Governance

Institute quotas ensuring substantive representation of women, including young women and widows, in local climate committees.

Recommendations for Civil Society and Extension Services

- Integrate Indigenous and Local Knowledge

Value women's agroecological expertise in CSA extension services rather than treating women as passive beneficiaries of external technologies.

- Develop Gender-Sensitive Monitoring Frameworks

Measure not just adoption rates but also shifts in decision-making power, labour equity, and women's control over CSA benefits.

Recommendations for Policy and Advocacy Groups

- Embed International Human Rights Norms into CSA Policies

Mainstream the principles of CEDAW and Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 13, implementing mandatory gender audits and human rights impact assessments.

- Address Unpaid Care Burdens Through Dedicated Services

Allocate budgets for childcare facilities and improved water infrastructure to ease women's unpaid labour and enhance participation.

With accountability and political will, these measures can shift CSA from reinforcing inequalities to driving transformative gender justice, strengthening climate resilience in Chivi and similar contexts.

REFERENCES

Agarwal, B. (2018). The challenge of gender inequality. Economia Politica, 35, 3–12. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40888-018-0092-8

Allen, I. K. (2020). Thinking with a feminist political ecology of air-and-breathing-bodies. Body & Society, 26(2), 79-105. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X19900526

Anderson, S., & Sriram, V. (2019). Moving beyond sisyphus in agriculture R&D to be climate smart and not gender blind. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems, 3, 84. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2019.00084

Anitha, S. (2019). Understanding economic abuse through an intersectional lens: Financial abuse, control, and exploitation of women's productive and reproductive labour. Violence against women, 25(15), 1854-1877. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218824050

Atta-Aidoo, J., & Antwi-Agyei, P. (2025). Climate-smart agriculture adoption in rural Ghana: Do resource requirements matter? BMC Environmental Science, 2, 4. https://doi.org/10.1186/s44329-025-00018-6

Belle, J., Mapingure, T., & Owolabi, S. T. (2024). Factors influencing rural women's adoption of climate change adaptation strategies: Evidence from the Chivi District of Zimbabwe. Climate, 12(11), 191. https://doi.org/10.3390/cli12110191

Brisebois, A., Eriksen, S. H., & Crane, T. A. (2022). The politics of governing resilience: Gendered dimensions of climate-smart agriculture in Kenya. Frontiers in Climate, 4, 864292. https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2022.864292

Cavanagh, C. J., Chemarum, A. K., Vedeld, P. O., & Petursson, J. G. (2017). Old wine, new bottles? Investigating the differential adoption of 'climate-smart' agricultural practices in western Kenya. Journal of Rural Studies, 56, 114-123. doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.09.010

Chidakwa, P., Mabhena, C., Mucherera, B., Chikuni, J., & Mudavanhu, C. (2020). Women's vulnerability to climate change: Gender-skewed implications on agro-based livelihoods in rural Zvishavane, Zimbabwe. Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 27(2), 259-281. https://doi.org/10.1177/0971521520910969

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, art. 14, Dec. 18, 1979, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women

Doukas, H., Nikas, A., Stamtsis, G., & Tsipouridis, I. (2020). The green versus green trap and a way forward. Energies, 13(20), 5473. https://doi.org/10.3390/en13205473

Elias, M., Joshi, D., & Meinzen-Dick, R. (2021). Restoration for whom, by whom? A feminist political ecology of restoration. Ecological Restoration, 39(1-2), 3-15. DOI: 10.3368/er.39.1-2.3

Erel, U., Reynolds, T., & Kaptani, E. (2017). Participatory theatre for transformative social research. Qualitative Research, 17(3), 302-312. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794117696029

Farmonaut. (2024). Revolutionising agriculture: How Farmonaut's satellite imagery analytics boost crop monitoring and sustainable farming. Farmonaut Technologies. farmonaut.com/remote-sensing/revolutionizing-agriculture-how-farmonauts-satellite-imagery-analytics-boost-crop

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. (2024). The status of women in agrifood systems 2024. FAO. www.fao.org/gender/the-status-of-women-in-agrifood-systems

Frediani, A. A. (2010). Sen's capability approach as a framework to the practice of development. Development in Practice, 20(2), 173-187. https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520903564181

Government of Zimbabwe. (2013). The national gender policy (2013-2017). Ministry of Youth Development, Gender, and Employment Creation. https://www.undp.org/zimbabwe/publications/national-gender-policy

Government of Zimbabwe. (2023). Zimbabwe national strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence (2023-2030). https://zimbabwe.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/zimbabwe_national_gbv_strategy_2023_to_2030.pdf

Government of Zimbabwe. (2020). National climate policy. Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry (MECTHI). www.forestry.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Zimbabwes-Climate-Change-National-Adaptation-Plan.pdf

Gundu-Jakarasi, V.N., & Nhidza, J. (2021). Climate change in Zimbabwe's vulnerable communities: A case study of Supporting Enhanced Climate Action Project (SECA Project) in Bulilima District. In: G. Nhamo, D. Chikodzi & K. Dube (eds), Sustainable Development Goals for Society (Vol. 2, pp. 211-223). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70952-5_14

Huyer, S., Loboguerrero, A. M., Chanana, N., & Spellman, O. (2024). From gender gaps to gender transformative climate smart agriculture. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 67, 101415. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2024.101415

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 11, Dec. 16, 1966, 993 U.N.T.S. 3, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights

Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. Development and Change, 30(3), 435-464. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125

Khoza, S., de Beer, L. T., van Niekerk, D., & Nemakonde, L. (2021). A gender-differentiated analysis of climate-smart agriculture adoption by smallholder farmers: Application of the extended technology acceptance model. Gender, Technology and Development, 25(1), 1-21. doi.org/10.1080/09718524.2020.1830338

Managa, L. R., Zaca, F. N., Uchele, O., & Nemathithi, A. (2023). A review of technological barriers to climate-smart agriculture implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for smallholder farmers. Africa Insight, 53(2), 18-33. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-afrins_v53_n2_a2

Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development. (2025). National gender policy. openparly.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/National-Gender-Policy-2025.pdf

Mishra, A., Appadurai, A. N., Choudhury, D., Regmi, B. R., Kelkar, U., Alam, M., ... & Sharma, U. (2019). Adaptation to climate change in the Hindu Kush Himalaya: Stronger action urgently needed. In: P. Wester, A. Mishra, A. Mukherji & A. Shrestha (eds), The Hindu Kush Himalaya assessment (pp. 457-490). Cham, Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92288-1_13

Mugandani, R., Muziri, T., Murewi, C. T. F., Mugadza, A., Chitata, T., Sungirai, M., ... & Mafongoya, P. (2022). Mapping and managing livelihoods vulnerability to drought: A case study of Chivi District in Zimbabwe. Climate, 10(12), 189. https://doi.org/10.3390/cli10120189

Nyahunda, L., & Tirivangasi, H.M. (2021). Barriers to effective climate change management in Zimbabwe's rural communities. In: N. Oguge, D. Ayal, L. Adeleke & I. da Silva (eds). African Handbook of Climate Change Adaptation (pp. 2405-2431). Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45106-6_251

Nyathi, D., Ndlovu, J., Mare, A., Dzvimbo, M. A., & Ndlovu, M. (2024). Women's vulnerability and adaptive capacity to climate change in Agrarian settings of Zimbabwe. In Climate Crisis, Social Responses and Sustainability: Socio-Ecological Study on Global Perspectives (pp. 541-559). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58261-5_23

Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, art. 7, Dec. 12, 2015, T.I.A.S. No. 16-1104, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

Rao, N., Sathe, R., & Grist, N. (2025). Gender, intersectionality and climate smart agriculture in South Asia: A review. PLOS Climate, 4(2). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000482

Saran, A., Singh, S., Gupta, N., Walke, S. C., Rao, R., Simiyu, C., ... & Waddington, H. S. (2024). Interventions promoting resilience through climate smart agricultural practices for women farmers: A systematic review. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 20(3), e1426. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1426

Sato, C., & Alarcon, J. M. S. (2019). Toward a postcapitalist feminist political ecology approach to the commons and commoning. International Journal of the Commons, 13(1), 36-61. https://doi.org/10.18352/ijc.933

Sundberg, J. (2016). Feminist political ecology. International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology (pp. 1-12). John Wiley and Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg0804

Tanyanyiwa, V. I., & Mufunda, E. (2019). Gendered impacts of climate change: the Zimbabwe perspective. In W. Leal Filho, A.M Azul, L. Brandli, P. G. Özuyar & Wall, T. (eds) Climate Action: Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (pp. 543-555). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95885-9_33

United Nations Development Programme. (2022). UNDP Zimbabwe: Gender equality and empowerment. UNDP Zimbabwe. https://www.undp.org/zimbabwe/publications/zimbabwe-climate-change-gender-action-plan

World Bank. (2023). Zimbabwe gender assessment (Report No. P179911). https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099062823005513984/pdf/P179911142c466021906b1a5f4a115199d.pdf

Yamane, T. (1967). Statistics: An Introductory Analysis (2nd ed.). Harper & Row. openlibrary.org/books/OL5538588M/Statistics_an_introductory_analysis

An Analysis of the Inclusivity of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations' National Dialogue Initiatives from 2017 to 2021

Dr Tinashe Gumbo – All Africa Conference of Churches iD

ABSTRACT

Undocumented The paper contributes to the conversation on the effectiveness of inclusivity in national dialogues. It analyses the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) national dialogue initiatives from 2017 to 2021. A review of the key pastoral letters issued is done, complemented by the author's 'insider-outsider 'perspective and keyinformant interviews. A historical approach was used to glean data for this study. It is noted that the ZHOCD did not fully exhibit inclusivity as it excluded some key stakeholders in the national dialogue. It lacked systematic and deliberate frameworks for engaging political actors, including the government and military. The ZHOCD also failed to manage its relational dynamics with civil society. Drawing on a historical analysis of pastoral letters, supplemented by key informant interviews and the author's 'insider-outsider perspectives, the paper recommends for a more inclusive and systematic approach for the Church to succeed influencing national dialogue initiatives.

Key words: National dialogue, Inclusivity, Zimbabwe, Church-State Relations, Conflict Transformation

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) national dialogue initiatives from 2017 to 2021. While reference is made to initiatives before 2017, the paper focuses on the inclusivity or lack thereof in the ZHOCD initiatives surrounding national dialogue after 2017. The paper reviews selected pastoral letters issued during that period, tracing the inclusivity in the Church's communication and recommendations for national dialogue. It also examines the specific dialogue initiatives pursued in collaboration with other political and non-political actors. The paper contributes to the ongoing conversations on national dialogue in Zimbabwe. It discusses the concept of inclusivity, noting its overstated significance in national dialogue. The paper observes that while inclusivity is at the core of national dialogues, at times it leads to mistrust among stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. Thus, inclusivity can breed ineffectiveness in national dialogue. Yet, the ZHOCD is also accused of its failure to formally accommodate other key stakeholders, such as the military and non-ZHOCD faith actors, in its initiatives. The ZHOCD did not develop a formal, systematic, and predictable engagement strategy with the government. This paper, therefore, asks: To what extent did the ZHOCD's initiatives between 2017 and 2021 adhere to the principle of inclusivity, and what do its successes and failures reveal about the challenges of implementing inclusive peace in a polarised political environment?

BACKGROUND

In 2017, a new administration in Zimbabwe was ushered in with the assistance of the military. On the eve of the political transition on 15 November 2017, the ZHOCD issued a pastoral statement recommending a comprehensive and inclusive national dialogue to resolve the various challenges that led to the overthrow of President Robert Mugabe. This marked a deliberate journey of the ZHOCD to mobilise the nation towards national dialogue (ZHOCD, 2017). Subsequently, in 2019, the ZHOCD formalised the national dialogue process through a National Leaders' Prayer Breakfast Meeting. Later in 2019, the ZHOCD offered a landmark proposal, the Sabbath Call to the nation (ZHOCD, 2019). The Sabbath Call proposal culminated in the formation of the National Convergence Platform (NCP) that brought together churches and other non-state and non-political actors to facilitate national dialogue. Meanwhile, dialogues with specific stakeholders continued, including with individual political parties, the military, and other religious actors. Yet, those dialogues remained ad hoc.

The ZHOCD argued in its communications that the previous initiatives, before 2017, towards national dialogues in Zimbabwe, led by various actors, were neither comprehensive nor inclusive, hence produced unsustainable solutions. Thus, the ZHOCD pursued an idea of inclusive and comprehensive national dialogues as a way of addressing the deep-seated national challenges. The current paper, thus, assesses the inclusiveness of the ZHOCD approaches and critiques the concept of inclusivity in national dialogue. For the purpose of this paper,

inclusivity relates to deliberate and systematic actions to involve all key stakeholders in the national dialogue processes. These include political parties, non-ZHOCD faith actors, civil society, the military, academia, and other interest groups such as people with disabilities, women and youth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scanning through the literature, one notes that ZHOCD and national dialogue in Zimbabwe were covered in the media (mainly the ZHOCD Pastoral Letters and Statements, and academic work. Yet, one does not come across work that focuses on the assessment of ZHOCD's inclusivity from 2017 to 2021. Thus, the current study contributes to the conversations on the principle of inclusivity in national dialogue. It interrogates the concept of inclusivity from the perspective of ZHOCD and that of an 'insider-outsider'.

Vengesai (2021) notes that the ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe can be divided into four major categories. These are the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), and the African Independent Churches (AICs) represented by several para church organisations and networks. For this study, the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe and Africa (UDACIZA) represents the AICs in the ZHOCD. Vengesai (2021) attempts to characterise some of the AICs members as radical, internationally connected, and linked to the ruling party, the Zimbabwe National African Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Thus, the

ZHOCD (which is made up of the ZCBC, ZCC, EFZ, and UDACIZA) claims to represent the majority in Zimbabwe. In a Pastoral Statement, the ZHOCD says:

> *Together, these Christian bodies represent more than 80% of the Zimbabwean population. The ZHOCD has its origins in the Heads of Denominations (HoD), which was a loose coalition established in the early missionary periods when the various heads of denominations came together to coordinate their policy in engagement with the state and in sharing perspectives on how missionary work could be executed (ZHOCD, 2021: p1).*

The ZCBC is a Catholic institution, the ZCC is made up of Protestant Churches, the EFZ's members are the Pentecostal ones, while the UDACIZA is composed of indigenous churches.

Vengesai (2021) notes that ZHOCD's main objective is to limit the denominational boundaries among Christians in Zimbabwe and promote unity of purpose when responding to national issues. The current study extends the analysis of the objective in relation to other non-ZHOCD members, including civil society.

Gumbo and Shava (2021) note what they call the 'exclusivity' tendencies of ZHOCD national dialogue strategies; however, they do not comprehensively pursue that argument as they only make mention of it. Thus, the current study complements them through a deliberate discussion of the concept of inclusivity in national dialogue pursued by the ZHOCD through a deeper examination of their claims of the exclusivity of the Church's approaches.

Planta, Prinz and Vimalarajah (2015) comprehensively discuss the concept of inclusivity in national dialogue. They particularly focus on identifying the risk of overestimating the 'capacity of inclusion' with national dialogues. Planta et al (2015) cite examples from Yemen and South African national dialogues, among others. By analysing the role and meaning of inclusivity in the context of national dialogues, their work addresses the core dilemmas of national dialogue processes. Planta et al (2015) note the tensions related to effectiveness, representation, legitimacy, power balances, and ownership in national dialogue. They conclude by drawing a balance between the challenges and benefits of inclusivity in national dialogue.

Mandikwaza (2025) acknowledges the increasingly recognised role of national dialogues as a tool to resolve political conflicts. He offers a theoretical framework for national dialogues. He draws insights from social contract, consociationalism, and conflict transformation theories. While Mandikwaza (2025) pretested his theoretical framework using the Zimbabwean case, he deliberately ignores the role of the ZHOCD in the national dialogue process in Zimbabwe. Therefore, his analysis of the Zimbabwe case study is incomplete without the visibility of the ZHOCD.

Mujinga (2023) analyses the ZHOCD's theological justification of the Sabbath call, challenging Church leaders for muting their prophetic voices. The concept of Sabbath is rooted in the biblical creation stories when God is said to have rested on the 'Sabbath Day'. As noted later, the ZHOCD conceptualisation of the Sabbath was challenged by some actors. Mujinga (2025) further accuses the ZHOCD of its failure to raise critical issues, directed at the political leaders, to resolve challenges of the country's elections, which have been characterised by mistrust and intimidation. Thus, Mujinga fails to do a holistic analysis of the ZHOCD national dialogue approach. Mujinga (2025) opts to focus on election challenges emanating from the Sabbath call proposal. However, the current study acknowledges Mujinga's analysis but further discusses the Sabbath call within the broader ZHOCD national dialogue frame.

The Centre for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD) (2024) also discusses the significance of inclusivity and transparency in national dialogue with particular focus on Ethiopia. The CARD (2024) argues that inclusiveness in national dialogue is crucial for legitimacy, comprehensive solutions, and conflict prevention. Furthermore, inclusivity enhances the credibility of national dialogue processes, and it allows for a holistic understanding of complex issues. Inclusivity also helps mitigate tensions that arise if some sections of the population feel excluded. The ZHOCD also emphasised inclusivity for the comprehensive resolution of the deep-seated challenges the Church noted in Zimbabwe.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

National dialogues have gained currency as tools for resolving internal social, economic, and political crises (Murray & Stigant, 2021, cited in Mandikwaza, 2025). They are known as 'national' because of their national outlook, national ownership tag, legitimacy, led by national institutions and covering all provinces. Central to successful national dialogues are

their inclusivity, transparency, credibility of conveneors, public participation, adequacy of resources, availability of deadlock-breaking mechanisms, and implementation of outcomes strategies (Murray & Stigant, 2021, in Mandikwaza, 2025).

Yohannes and Dessu (2020) define national dialogues as nationally owned political processes aimed at generating consensus among a broad range of national stakeholders in times of transitioning out of deep political crises and in post-war situations. They are convened to address political, economic, and social crises, as well as improve the legitimacy of public institutions. Ideally, national dialogues should lead to political transition and stability in a country. National dialogues provide potential for meaningful conversations about the underlying drivers of conflicts. (Stigant & Murray, 2015). Planta et al (2015:4) define national dialogue(s) as an "attempt to bring together all relevant national stakeholders and actors (both state and non-state), based on a broad mandate to foster nationwide consensus concerning key conflict issues".

Yohannes and Dessu (2020:8) posit that inclusivity is "one of the most critical defining factors of national dialogues. Most of the existing literature stresses that national dialogues can only be transformative if they genuinely include different sections of society." In addition, Yohannes and Dessu (2020:8) attempt to define inclusivity as referring to "convening a broad set of stakeholders and accommodating divergent interests and needs". For them, the political elite (government and opposition actors) and occasionally, the military are critical stakeholders in national dialogues.

They also add civil society, women, youths, faith actors, business, and traditional leaders into their characterisations (s). Stigant and Murray (2015) add that to maximise the dialogue's potential to address the real drivers of conflict, all key interest groups should participate. The Yemen 2013-14 National Dialogue Conference (NDC) is noteworthy for its inclusion of a broad set of stakeholder groups (Stigant & Muray, 2015).

In its definition of national dialogues, the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (2017) also emphasises inclusivity. The initiative indicates that national dialogues provide an inclusive, broad, and participatory official negotiation format, which can resolve political crises and lead countries into political transitions. (Peace and Transition Initiative, 2017). Although arguing that the Yemen NDC was a failure, Elayah and Schulpen (2016) go against several scholars who regard it as a success story. In their diagnosis of the Yemen NDC, Elayah and Schulpen (2016), however, note the strengths of the process in its inclusivity. They note the inclusion of societal groups (women and youth) invited, who were denied a voice for a long time, as truly revolutionary.

Planta et al (2015:4), however, caution against overstating inclusivity's effectiveness as a principle. They argue:

> *There is both the risk of overestimating the National Dialogues' capacity for inclusion, as well as the transformative impact of an inclusive process design. Although we assume that the principle of inclusivity possesses intrinsic qualities… in practice, it might not necessarily be the case that more inclusivity equals better outcomes.*

Planta et al (2015) then recommend further assessment of the assumption that national dialogues are an inclusive process. Furthermore, the authors advise that any discussion on 'inclusivity' must go beyond the value "attributed to the principle itself and also critically consider the challenges and dilemmas that emerge with increased social inclusivity in negotiation and transformation processes (e.g. decreasing efficiency, inclusion of anti-democratic forces, the risk of manipulation by elites, cosmetic participation, etc)." (Planta et al, 2015: 4).

The analysis of the ZHOCD approaches is framed using insights from conflict transformation theory, particularly the emphasis on creating platforms for dialogue that include actors from all levels of society (Gumbo & Shava, 2021). The ZHOCD 'dialogue triangle' is assessed against this framework to determine its theoretical coherence and practical limitations.

ZHOCD NATIONAL DIALOGUE FRAMEWORK

Gumbo and Shava (2021) note that the ZHOCD pursued a comprehensive and inclusive national dialogue. Thus, the ZHOCD advocated for an inclusive, broad-based, comprehensive, and transformative national dialogue, a consistent language captured in its several communications between 2017 and 2021. It developed an understanding that the national dialogue process should happen at three levels: community level to restore citizen agency, organised society level to strengthen

convergence amongst non-political actors, and at policy and political actors' level to achieve policy convergence (Gumbo & Shava, 2021). Its national dialogue framework is presented pictorially through a 'dialogue triangle' (Figure 1).

The lowest level, broad in shape, represents ordinary community members who have been affected by poverty, fear, lack of knowledge, inaction, broken relations, and other social and economic challenges, as noted in all key ZHOCD statements under review in this paper. Thus, the ZHOCD hoped to mobilise the community members for coordinated approaches to local and national issues. The organised society level is represented by civil society, academia, and independent institutions. Yet, the major challenge is that these actors approach national issues in a fragmented manner without coordination (Gumbo & Shava, 2021). Thus, the ZHOCD strategy is to influence convergence, where collective reflections on the national question will lead to comprehensive solutions that address the deep-seated problems manifesting in different forms.

At the top are the policy or political actors who, however, have not agreed on the nature of the national problems and ways of addressing these. Lack of consensus remains an obstacle to progress in Zimbabwe. Thus, issues raised by organised society are being formally tabled before the political actors for dialogue by the ZHOCD, leading to common outcomes. Thus, the ZHOCD inclusivity principle must be understood within this triangle framework.

Through the 'dialogue triangle'. The ZHOCD envisioned a change driven from below through the middle level to the policy actors' stage, where implementation of dialogue outcomes is realised. With an organised, coordinated, and activated base, critical issues affecting the nation can be mobilised. These will then be analysed and sifted by the organised society, incorporating various sectoral interests represented at that level. The ZHOCD then assumed that the organised society would link up with the political actors for formal discussion of the matters. However, as noted later, this theoretical commitment by the ZHOCD was not practically fulfilled, as there was no deliberate and systematic way of engaging the political actors. The figure demonstrates the envisioned theory of change by the ZHOCD.

The lowest level is made up of communities that are immersed in poverty, fear, lack of knowledge, and other challenges. The second level is characterised by activities in civil society, researchers, and other non-state actors who are supposed to represent the interests of different groups found in the lowest stage. Yet, according to the ZHOCD, these actors are not coordinated for effective engagement of political actors at the top of the triangle. Thus, with an empowered base, coordinated middle-level actors, there will be a formal dialogue at the policy level whose outcomes are guaranteed of implementation. The envisioned theory of change fits well in Lederach's conflict transformation theory that emphasises the creation of dialogue to build platforms of dialogue to build peace in society (Gumbo & Shava, 2021).
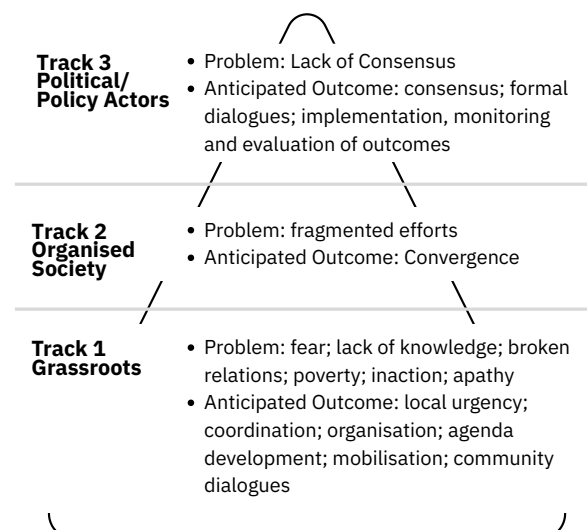

Figure 1: ZHOCD *Triangle of Engagement*
Source: Gumbo and Shava (2021:142)

METHODOLOGY

A historical approach was used to glean data for this study. The author documents a chronological narrative of the key events from 2017 to 2021. The key questions answered are: What is a national dialogue? Why is inclusivity important? How did ZHOCD ensure inclusivity in its national dialogue initiatives? Were the initiatives inclusive anyway?

A comprehensive literature review of the ZHOCD-selected pastoral letters issued between 2017 and 2021, and other strategic and programmatic materials produced, was conducted. Internet materials on national dialogues and academic work on the subject were also reviewed. Data collected through 25 key informant interviews (KIIs) for a separate project were also utilised. They were purposively selected to represent key stakeholder groups, including senior Church leaders from the ZHOCD, former members of the NCP and

representatives from the main political parties. Interviews were conducted under the principle of non-attribution to encourage candid responses. The author's roleas a former member of the ZHOCD secretariat was employed as a methodological lens of auto-ethnography, allowing for a reflexive analysis that combines experiential knowledge with critical academic distance. The unit of analysis was the ZHOCD, where its national dialogue was being analysed.

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

The ZHOCD has been engaged in nation-building processes. However, the major highlights manifested when the ZCC, EFZ, and ZCBC produced a signature document named 'Zimbabwe We Want Discussion Document' in 2006. The document comprehensively defined the national problem and the way forward. The ZHOCD (2021:3) summarises the contents of the 'Zimbabwe We Want Document' as:

> *The spirit of the "Zimbabwe We Want Document" was embodied in its values of "Spirituality and Morality, Unity in diversity, Respect for human life and dignity, democratic freedoms, respect for other Persons, Democracy and good governance, participation and subsidiarity, Sovereignty, Patriotism and Loyalty, Gender equality, Social solidarity and promotion of the family, stewardship of creation, justice and the rule of law, service and accountability, promotion of the common good, option for the impoverished and the marginaliszed, and excellence.*

The subsequent efforts by the ZHOCD were hinged on the 2006 document. When the new government of President Emerson Mnangagwa, ushered in by the military in 2017, was established, the Church took the opportunity to strengthen its nation-building role. The government characterised itself as a 'New Dispensation', and the President emphasised that the 'Voice of the people is the voice of God' (Vengesai, 2021). The leader of the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance, Nelson Chamisa, claimed that 'God is in it' in his campaign messages. Thus, the messages of the two major political parties motivated the Church to advocate for national dialogue. The Church wanted to build on the opportunity created by the public poster of the main political leaders, in which the latter presented themselves as prepared for national dialogue. However, challenges such as economic instability, political polarisation, and contested election outcomes persisted, manifesting in further social, economic, and political crises.

"Kairos" Moment: 2017 Statement

On 15 November 2017, the ZHOCD issued a statement in response to the overthrow of President Mugabe. It viewed the development as an opportunity for renewal in the nation. The statement read, "We have reached a new chapter in the history of our nation. Our God created everything out of chaos". The ZHOCD defined the key challenges as mainly consisting of a loss of trust, caused by economic and social problems, further compounded by the violations of the national constitution. In addition, the statement opined that ordinary

people's interests were being ignored by the political leadership. The statement read:

> All of us at some point failed to play our roles adequately. The Church has lost its prophetic urge, driven by personality cults and superstitious approaches to socio-economic and political challenges. Civil Society, over time, has become focused on survival and competition and lost the bigger picture of the total emancipation of the population. But the current situation is also a result of the many people in the ruling party who feel outdone, who enjoyed unbridled access to the trough of patronage. Journalists fanned the politics of hatred by giving it prime space in the name of sales and profits. All Zimbabweans must take some blame for our current situation (ZHOCD, 2017: 2).

The most important section of the statement was its call for a national dialogue, as evidenced by the excerpt below, which reads:

> Finally, we are calling the nation to a table of dialogue. The current situation gives us an opportunity to reach out to each other. There is no way we are going to go back to the political arrangements we had some days ago. We are in a situation that cannot be solved by anything other than dialogue. This dialogue cannot only happen within the ruling party. What we need is a National Envisioning Platform (NEP) that will capture the aspirations of all the sectors of society. The church, alongside other stakeholders in the private sector, academia, and other spheres, can establish a NEP as an inclusive space to enable Zimbabweans from all walks of life to

> contribute towards a democratic transition to the Zimbabwe We Want (ZHOCD, 2017: 3).

While this marked the beginning of ZHOCD's spirited call for national dialogue, the inclusivity of the envisaged process was not well articulated in the statement. The proposal for a NEP was not enough to define an inclusive process. It remained a vague statement. This probably explains why the new government ignored the Church by forming a ZANU-PF government without including other players who had helped topple President Mugabe, except the army generals who were thrust into various ministries. These include General Constantino Chiwenga (Vice President), General Sibusiso Moyo (Minister of Foreign Affairs), and Air Marshal Perrence Shiri (Minister of Lands and Agriculture).

The opposition and the civil society were not considered, thereby ignoring the ZHOCD proposal for an NEP. The ZHOCD had also called for a Transitional Government to facilitate the smooth landing of the new government, but this was not fulfilled. Thus, the country immediately went into an election mode, leading to yet another contested election result in 2018. Vengesai (2021) holds that from then onwards, ZHOCD efforts were compromised by the fact that the government characterised it as part of the regime change agenda.

National Prayer Breakfast Meeting

On 7 February 2019, the ZHOCD convened the 'National Prayer Breakfast Meeting' in Harare at the Harare International Conference Centre (HICC) to officially launch the national dialogue. This followed a series of bilateral meetings held

between the political parties and the ZHOCD. The meeting was inclusive as it targeted the ruling party and the main opposition actors, civil society, students, farmers, vendors, the security sector, academia, independent commissions, the diplomatic community, and many more.

However, on 6 February 2019, President Mnangagwa convened a meeting for political parties that participated in the 2018 elections. The MDC Alliance did not attend as it called for a 'genuine dialogue'. It was later noted that the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD) was formed from that session before it was formally constituted in May 2019. This author viewed POLAD as a direct reaction to the Church's envisioned process. Yet, the ZHOCD meeting at HICC was attended by over seven hundred people from different sectors (this author was the coordinator). President Mnangagwa apologised a few minutes before the official start of the meeting as he "had rushed to attend to the Vice President, Chiwenga, who was being taken abroad for medical treatment". Leaders from other religious groups also attended the meeting. Critically for this paper, the Head of the Zion Christian Church, Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, challenged the ZHOCD to "open up for Indigenous churches to join the platform". One could view this call as a confirmation that some key players felt that the ZHOCD was exclusive in its approaches. A few months later, the Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches (ZIICC) was formed as a para-church organisation composed of indigenous churches to engage collectively on national issues. The ZIICC demanded space in the national dialogue processes, and the

ZHOCD initiated communication of the new organisation. The inclusivity of the ZHOCD initiatives was put to the test. The ZHOCD, however, celebrated the Prayer Breakfast Meeting as the beginning of an inclusive national dialogue process in Zimbabwe. The meeting stands as a formal attempt by the ZHOCD to be inclusive, yet it was contracted by later processes under the NCP.

Sabbath Call Proposal

The ZHOCD convened an Episcopal Conference for its members, from 8 to 9 May 2019 at the Large City Hall in Bulawayo. The major outcome of the conference was the Sabbath Call Proposal, which tabled the suspension of political contestations for "seven years," during which the country would have to address all the noted challenges (ZHOCD, 2019). The Sabbath Call proposal was eventually published on 7 October 2019 at Synod House in Harare by the ZHOCD leadership. In promoting inclusivity, the ZHOCD shared the proposal with other key stakeholders, including President Emerson Mnangagwa and Nelson Chamisa, for input and/or adoption.

The key informants who participated in a separate project lamented that ZHOCD did not include civil society, academics, other faith actors, and even its lower structures when it made this critical decision. Thus, the ZHOCD was not inclusive in its initiatives. The proposal was received with mixed feelings by the public. Radical ZANU-PF activists directly attacked the ZHOCD. Yet other non-state actors gave the ZHOCD an ear and engaged with it on the proposal. On 19 October 2019, President Mnangagwa responded to the proposal through a letter in which he directly rejected the

proposal, arguing that it was meant to rescue Chamisa, whom he described in the letter as an 'ungracious loser' (Mnangagwa, 2019). President Mnangagwa challenged the ZHOCD's interpretation of the 'Seven Days Theology'. Chamisa diplomatically rejected the proposal, arguing that it was unconstitutional and was against his party's values (Chamisa, 2019). Thus, even though the ZHOCD had reached out to key stakeholders for the sake of inclusivity, its initiative was largely viewed as exclusive and unconstitutional.

Exclusivity of the National Convergence Platforms (NCPs)

Academia, civil society, and other interested individuals invited the ZHOCD for formal reflection sessions on the Sabbath Call proposal in October 2019. A series of meetings took place, resulting in the adoption of the NCP and its launch on 13 December 2019 at the ZCC premises. The launch event was attended by over a thousand delegates from across the country, representing civil society, academia, development partners, diplomats, traditional leaders, independent institutions, and other non-state and non-political actors. The ZHOCD was 'inclusive' in its invitation, yet it deliberately left out the political actors from the government and opposition parties. The rationale was to mobilise the non-political actors first for a strengthened voice when political parties were to be engaged. Political parties normally respect the numbers. The move, however, attracted fierce criticism from the political actors. The NCP was intended as a platform to host deliberations on social, economic, and political challenges (NCP, 2019). It brought together the ZHOCD, civil society

apex bodies, the Citizen Manifesto, the National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped, the National Transitional Justice Working Group, the Platform for Concerned Citizens, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, and the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, which formally endorsed the NCP. The incorporation of different sectoral groups ensured the much-needed inclusivity and representativeness of the general population. Thus, the Church assumed that the composition was strategic enough to pursue national dialogues that would attract the attention of political parties. Yet, there was no concrete structural bonding among these actors, as noted later.

The subsequent establishment of the NCP structures, including the Coordinating Secretariat, manifested the exclusivity of the ZHOCD and its collaborating partners. The ZHOCD assumed the secretariat and chair roles. Other apex bodies led technical committees to spearhead conversations on specific issues, namely, national healing, constitutionalism and elections, economy and social contract, humanitarian, and international relations. A few months after the establishment of the technical communities, tension emerged between the civil society and the Church. The Church continued with its routine issuance of pastoral letters when the need arose. Yet, immediately after the publication of one of its statements, some members of the NCP raised concern. While the ZHOCD had ensured inclusivity by collaborating with other non-state and non-political actors, the former was viewed as not pursuing collective efforts. On 3 September 2020, the NCP issued a

communication to the South African Convoy welcoming the engagement of the South African government with the Zimbabwe crisis, as well as noting the attention to Zimbabwe by the African Union. This did not save the NCP, which was now marred with irreconcilable reactions between the ZHOCD members and some members of the NCP, who accused them of being monopolistic in their approach.

Meanwhile, between July and September 2020, the ZHOCD convened bilateral and multi-party meetings advocating for national dialogue. This continued into the following year, leading to the issuance of the "National Consensus Call" (ZHOCD, 2021) calling for the nation to reflect on the national question. This development further confirmed the exclusivity of the ZHOCD since its contents could have been collectively communicated under the NCP banner. On the other hand, the ZHOCD did not engage the POLAD as a platform for national dialogue, further confirming its exclusivity and monopolistic tendencies (Gumbo & Shava, 2021). Meanwhile, ad hoc engagement of military officials, other faith actors, and the diplomatic community continued. The military, in particular, was not given the attention it deserved by the ZHOCD (Gumbo, 2023). A more systematic approach was needed to include the military in informal and formal engagement processes.

CONCLUSION

The paper has analysed the ZHOCD national dialogue initiatives from 2017 to 2021. It was noted that while the ZHOCD claimed to be pursuing an inclusive and comprehensive national dialogue, some of its approaches were generally exclusive. The study further noted that inclusivity does not always lead to effectiveness. The dynamics that manifested within the NCP confirmed that, indeed, inclusivity can also lead to ineffectiveness. The ZHOCD failed to consolidate its working relationship with some civil society actors. Moreover, it failed to mobilise the entire nation for national dialogue by being deliberately selective in its engagement processes. The engagement of the government remained unclear. This paper, therefore, recommends the ZHOCD to develop formal, systematic, and concrete engagement strategies for the government, political actors in general, and the military as key stakeholders in national dialogue. For instance, there is a need to adopt a model of core-chairing the platform where the Church and civil society second two leaders each as chairperson. This ensures shared ownership while also facilitating the building of trust among the members. To avoid overlooking some key actors, there is a need to institute a deliberate stakeholder mapping matrix at the initial stages. The paper noted that this mapping was not well done in the case of the NCP, leading to the exclusion of critical players such as the military. In future, there is also a need to establish a separate secretariat of the platform, which does not double as the secretariat for a member. This will ensure that the secretariat does all administrative and political liaison work without distraction. Lastly, there should be clear and deliberate lines of communication with political parties and the government to guarantee the implementation of agreed outcomes of dialogues.

REFERENCES

Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy. (2024). Inclusion and transparency in the Ethiopian national dialogue processes. www.cardeth.org/sites/default/files/END/Ethiopian%20National%20Dialogue%20Process-%20Activities%20Assessment%20Report%20I%20for%20Inclusion%20and%20Transparency%20%20%20(1.pdf

Chamisa, N. (2019). Call for national sabbath for trust and confidence building [Letter]. Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations. www.newsdzezimbabwe.co.uk/2019/11/chamisa-says-no-to-polls-sabbatical.html

Elayah, M., & Schulpen, L. (2016). Civil society's diagnosis of the 2013 national dialogue conference in Yemen: Why did it fail? Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research Brief. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311739881_Civil_society's_diagnosis_of_the_2013_National_Dialogue_Conference_NDC_in_Yemen_why_did_it_fail

Gumbo, T. (2023). An evaluation of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations' strategy of national dialogue to resolve Zimbabwe's political challenges from 2006 to 2022 (Unpublished master's dissertation). Africa University.

Gumbo, T., & Shava, C. K. (2021). Application of Lederach's conflict transformation theory by Zimbabwe Council of Churches in national dialogue: An insider perspective. Africa Research Bulletin, 1(2), 134–148. https://afrifuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/tinashe-gumbo-collins-kudakwashe-shava.pdf

Mandikwaza, E. (2025). A conceptual framework for national dialogues: Applied theories and concepts. African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 24(2). https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/a-conceptual-framework-for-national-dialogues-applied-theories-and-concepts/

Mnangagwa, E. D. (2019, October 19). Government response to the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations' call for national sabbath for trust and confidence building [Letter]. Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations Secretariat.

Mujinga, M. (2023). An analysis of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations' call for a sabbath on elections. Stellenbosch Theological Journal, 9(1), 1–19, https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2023.v9n1.a27

National Convergence Platform. (2019, December 13). Press statement issued at the launch. www.ncp.org.zw/press-statement

Planta, K., Prinz, V., & Vimalarajah, L. (2015). Inclusivity in national dialogues: Guaranteeing social integration or preserving old power hierarchies? Berghof Foundation. https://berghof-foundation.org/library/inclusivity-in-national-dialogues-guaranteeing-social-integration-or-preserving-old-power-hierarchies

Stigant, S., & Murray, E. (2015). National dialogues: A tool for conflict transformation? (Peace Brief No. 194). United States Institute of Peace.

Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative. (2017). What makes or breaks national dialogues (Briefing Note). Graduate Institute Geneva.

Vengesai, C. (2021). Ecumenical ingenuities as an instrumental political tool of conflict transformation in Zimbabwe's new dispensation. National Dialogue Journal, 5(1), 37–53. doi.org/10.47054/RDC212037ch

Yohannes, D., & Dessu, M. K. (2020). National dialogues in the Horn of Africa: Lessons for Ethiopia's political transition (ISS Report No. 311). Institute for Security Studies.

Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations. (2019). Sabbath call proposal. efzimbabwe.org/2019/10/document-call-for-national-sabbath/

Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations. (2021, February 21). National consensus call. www.facebook.com/ZimbabweCouncilofChurches/posts/the-zimbabwe-heads-of-christian-denominations-zhocd-national-consensus-call/1749367901904495/

Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations. (2017, November 15). Zimbabwe between a crisis and kairos (opportunity): The pastoral message of the churches on the current situation. https://familyofsites.bishopsconference.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/07/ZHOCD-statement-151117.pdf

Accepting, distancing, rationalising: strategies used by female South African academics to negotiate contrapower harassment

Chipo Munyuki – Rhodes University

Louise Vincent – Rhodes University (iD)

ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment is a pernicious problem globally. Under-researched is the phenomenon that Katherine Benson (1984) coined "contrapower" harassment. Using Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of power as being productive as a theoretical lens, this narrative study was interested in how contrapower harassment produces effects in the subjectivity of female South African academic women. Participants report effects such as hypervigilance and fear forcing them to adopt self-protective measures. However, they also narrated how these experiences generate enabling effects. Participants developed coping mechanisms such as strategic acceptance, distancing, rationalization, and 'choosing their battles' to reclaim their authority. The study demonstrates that far from being passive victims, these women actively navigate and contest power, using the knowledge produced by their harassment to develop strategies for survival and resilience in a work environment experienced at times as hostile and unsafe.

Key words: contrapower harassment; coping mechanisms; female academics; Foucault, higher education; institutional cultures; sexual harassment; power; resistance; South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment has been cited as a major problem in institutions of higher education world-wide and findings from literature indicate that women are the main victims (Wood et al, 2021). It takes various forms which exist on a continuum, ranging from the most violent acts such as rape and beating, to gestures, comments or remarks (Dalmiya, 1999, p. 47). To date, the bulk of research on sexual harassment in higher education has been conducted in universities in the global north and focuses mainly on the experiences of students (Klein & Martin, 2021). In the South African context, research on sexual harassment in educational settings has mainly focused on high schools (see Human Rights Watch, 2001; Prinsloo, 2006; Smit & Du Plessis, 2011). Research on sexual harassment in higher education contexts in South Africa has focused mainly on the sexual harassment of students by people in a position of power (Mayekiso & Bhana, 1997; Bennett, 2005; Adams et al., 2013; Quirk & Dugard, 2024).

In this paper, we tell the (reconstructed) stories of female academics' experiences of contrapower harassment. Katherine Benson uses the term "contrapower harassment" to refer to harassment which occurs when a person with less formal power harasses someone with greater formal power. In a higher education setting, for example, this would refer to individuals with formal authority such as female lecturers being sexually harassed by someone who is formally in a less powerful position such as a student. In this paper we describe the experiences of contrapower harassment that were related to us by women who are academics at South African universities.

We find that their experiences of contrapower harassment give rise to resistance which they display in various ways. Thus, the productive effects of power are never only "repressive". Power also produces enablement, forms of resistance and useful knowledge that the participants use to devise measures to minimise harm to themselves, to reconstitute their subjectivity as powerful and to find ways of being that are possible in the context of the new knowledges and truths that their experiences bring about.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

Foucault conceived power as dispersed, ubiquitous and ever-present in social relations (Foucault, 1975, 1978, 1986). What Foucault describes as "capillary power" is power that stretches into the extremities of the everyday mundane activities of life. Power produces certain kinds of subjects so that, as Heyes (2011, p. 159) argues, for Foucault, the term "the subject" is not just a synonym for "person" but denotes possibilities of being a certain kind of person. What Foucault focuses on in his work is how power subjugates and makes individuals subject to it (Foucault, 1982, p. 781).

Importantly, for Foucault though, power is never a purely repressive or subjugating force but is also productive and can yield positive effects (Foucault, 1975, p.194; 1978, p. 36).

Oppressive experiences, even at their most constraining, give rise to new forms of behaviour as opposed to simply closing down or censoring certain forms of behaviour (Mills, 2003, p. 33). For Foucault, power is not so much about limits on our liberty, as it is about making us into certain kinds of people as it trains our bodies to be preoccupied with particular kinds of surveillances causing us to think of ourselves in certain kinds of ways (May, 2011, p. 76). We are disciplined by power's subtle forms of management to self-monitor in accordance with the lessons it teaches us.

Nevertheless, we are not merely or wholly docile in our subjection to power. Foucault (1978) acknowledges that where there is power there is resistance. Resistance results in power relations being altered, weakened, reversed or reaffirmed. Thus resistance itself must be understood as an expression of power (Feder, 2011, p. 63). In this paper we are interested in how the participants challenge and contest attempts to undermine their authority. The participants emerge not as docile and passive objects of dominant discourses and techniques of power concerning the female body but as embodying and wielding the possibilities of resistance against such discourses and techniques but within the social and institutional constraints within which they operate (Oksala, 2011, p. 93).

METHODOLOGY

We conducted 13 in-depth narrative interviews with female academics working at South African higher education institutions about their experiences of contrapower harassment. Social researchers working in narrative traditions interpret stories (Riessman, 2005, p. 474). In narrative research, the unique voice of each individual is given prominence, especially voices that have not much been heard in research. Chase (2005, p. 656) notes that in narrative work, the speakers or narrators construct events through narrative rather than simply referring to events. Webster and Mertova (2007, p. 2) argue that narrative allows researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness. Stories are a window into attempts of a self to find identity in terms outside itself (Frank, 2002, p. 115). When people story their identities, they offer the researcher insight into how they perceive and experience the world, how meaning is made from experiences, and how identities are constructed in the social and cultural setting within which those experiences arise (Taylor, 2007, p. 3).

The study sample consisted of female South African academics. Women who had at any point in their teaching careers experienced contrapower harassment and were willing to share such experiences were purposefully selected for inclusion in the study. Participants were drawn from different South African universities, including both historically black and historically white universities. They worked in various disciplines including the human sciences, natural sciences, arts and commerce – in an attempt to ensure diversity in the study sample. The racial composition of the sample included nine white and four black female academics.

Informed consent to participate in the study was solicited from all the participants. Participants were guaranteed in writing the right to withdraw their consent to participate in the study at any point.

We used Braun and Clarke's method of thematic analysis (2023; see also Byrne, 2022) to analyse the narrative interview transcripts. An overall theme that emerged across the data set was the way in which experiences of harassment lead to a lasting sense of needing to be hypervigilant and on guard in order to feel protected. This is the first finding. Our interest however was in going beyond this to understand the strategies that participants were able to employ to deal with the impact that the experience had on them. To this end, we constructed three themes which capture the ways in which the participants negotiate contrapower harassment. These were accepting, distancing and rationalising and are described in greater detail below.

FINDINGS

> *I often used to work very late in the evenings in that office but …lately I'm always thinking, "I must go home now because I don't feel like it's safe [anymore]". In the evenings that I have to be there late when my students are writing a test, I go home and fetch my dog then come back to campus because truth of the matter is that it's my safety that matters. And if I pop in over the weekend I try and do the same as well. Sometimes my husband will just come with me so that I'm not there by myself (Elena).*

Elena's experience of contrapower harassment transforms her into a certain kind of (fearful, watchful) subject who develops a constant awareness of her surroundings and adopts various measures to protect herself from potential attacks. Maya similarly described being transformed into someone who is constantly concerned about and assessing her safety while at work. While her preferred mode would be to be open and welcoming, she now has the impression that her students could "really harm" her.

> *So, if I have to do some work in the evening, I won't come alone. I will try and not have my classes scheduled late because I don't want to be leaving here after dark. I have to be careful about how and when I schedule one-on-one consultations. If you are scheduling consultations with students during holiday times for example when there is no one in the building, you don't want to be alone with someone you have invited into your space. It's your job to be open and welcoming to that person but they could really harm you. You have to second guess everything about how safe you are in a space where you know ideally you should feel safe (Maya).*

Electronic media serve as a convenient platform for bullying - a phenomenon known as cyber-bullying (Blizard, 2016). While contrapower cyber-bullying may seem less threatening than being harassed in the physical presence of another person, as Aria's story makes clear, it can be just as invasive and violating as any other form of harassment.

> *The very first time I received the email from my stalker I felt very angry. I could feel my heart beating very fast because I felt that this person is invading my personal space and violating me as a person because I now have to think of myself as this sexual object and not a lecturer who is trying to do my job. I felt very violated because to me it's quite scary to think that one of my students who is sitting in my class is actually thinking about me in that way (Aria).*

As a result of these experiences, Aria adopts new ways of thinking about herself; she enters a subject position of heightened self-awareness and internalisation of how she perceives she comes across to her students. How she teaches and interacts with students in the classroom is affected as a result.

Becoming preoccupied and concerned with safety all the time is a common lasting effect of what might on the face of it seem like an isolated or singular event - what Elena called the "ripple effects" of contrapower harassment. The different measures Maya takes such as being cautious about when to schedule, and the location of, one-on-one consultations with her students reveals how she has become subjugated by her experiences of contrapower harassment so much that what could be taken for granted as straight forward consultation sessions with one's students become a very complicated and technical process riddled with a lot of planning and considerations to ensure her safety. The different measures participants describe in their stories demonstrates how their experiences transformed them into individuals who need to have their guard up at all times.

They begin to view their workplaces as suffused with the potential for danger and violation. In response, since they seem to have no sense of being able to find institutionalised support or solutions, they develop a range of personal strategies to protect themselves which we refer to here as "accepting", "distancing" and "rationalising".

Accepting

Gail spoke of coming to accept the conditions that she has to work in as a strategy for coping with circumstances which she feels are institutionally and socially condoned rather than challenged.

> *It is something you kind of get used to, because students don't see you as people … which I have just accepted. It's going to happen and that's part of the job but also, I suppose in the way in which it's not necessarily vocally dealt with. New students in the university should be taught about respecting other people and taking responsibility for their actions.... We don't really do that. Our expectations on students are very low in some ways maybe because they are customers and maybe because of the way our society views people of their age group. It's kind of quietly condoned though not being challenged (Gail).*

As Samantha pointed out, resistance comes with a price and is not always an option. This does not mean that she is passive or lacks agency but rather that she "chooses her battles" and "absorbs" as a survival strategy instead of the self-defeating and exhausting possibility of fighting every instance of micro-aggression encountered.

> In that moment, I suppose I was reacting in the same ways women who are generally placed in lower positions of authority do. In the kind of "rather than resist, absorb" way because resisting comes with a price... Well, I mean in daily life where there are these micro-aggressions that are so deeply entrenched in our everyday interactions, it's difficult to name it so instead of naming it, instead of having to do that kind of ongoing resistance which then turns you into the sort of screeching maniac you tend to choose your battles you know... you tend to absorb these things. It's almost like a survival strategy in a world that is patriarchal and sometimes it's just simpler to absorb... I think we make decisions on a daily basis as to whether we are going to confront these subtle forms of interaction that are going to position me in a particular way... You learn to live with it in a sad kind of way because calling people out is extremely difficult you know (Samantha).

Kgomotso also described the common strategy of minimising or "brushing off" the harm of being objectified or denigrated.

> My experiences have made me realise that there is still a long way to go in terms of getting men to think differently about women ... I've also realised that maybe we need to be harsher in the way that we react to these things because now that they have done it to me and all I do is brush it off and continue with class or just walk away or change my clothes, I've realised that I'm the one doing all the work to make the situation better for me but there is no responsibility on the person who is actually doing the deed. ... I'm doing the dealing with the problem but I think if we were to be harsher, they would take some responsibility. They would know, we don't say this to lecturers, we don't comment on the lecturer's body. We don't do all that. So, there would be some responsibility from them as well. So, after having experienced it I really think that whenever we are able to tackle this problem we must because I think had I reacted differently – like called out the person – or had I spoken separately with the boys and let them know the consequences, or reported them or warned them that I was going to report them and that this was not acceptable, I think it wouldn't have gone on, well not in front of me at least or directly in my face. I think it wouldn't have gone on had I reacted differently (Kgomotso).

Kgomotso's reflections point painfully to the fact that participants find themselves searching for a reason in their own behaviour for why things like this "go on" and wondering if they should have or could have handled things differently even while realising that the blame is not theirs to carry. This grappling with a sense of one's own responsibility coupled with the realisation that the problem is institutional and social rather than personal ran through the narratives regardless of the particular strategy of resistance that was chosen.

Distancing

> I've now learnt a lesson: that the closer that I get to students and the more that I open up the more I am bound to be harassed. But as I'm saying this I'm suddenly realising that I'm now putting the blame on myself and my behaviour and that I'm actually saying that it's because of me and my openness that this has happened and this is actually like an epiphany to me because it's typical of a victim to think that the fault lays with them. That it's something that you did whereas in fact it is the perpetrator who should be blamed. I'm thinking now as I am saying this to you that it's something that I'm becoming aware of now. That it's not something that I am doing wrong but that that person is doing wrong you know. It's not the way that I interact with my students that's caused this. This is something that I hadn't even thought about before and maybe it will change my behaviour in the future because I guess that I shouldn't change just because this person has violated me and that I should be true to myself (Ayanda).

The "withdrawal" from her students that Ayanda describes is a tactic she employs to attempt to minimise incidents of contrapower harassment. Aria also uses "distancing" as a strategy to cope with the harassment she experiences:

> I started to distance myself. I wasn't as friendly or as open as I used to be in the past. Especially when I spoke with male students, I thought to myself, maybe it's this guy who is doing it. So, I started to protect myself by acting in those ways. It got to the extent that I started to think of getting weapons to protect myself. I got pepper spray to take to campus with me to protect myself (Aria).

Megan similarly spoke of needing to be "firmer" and needing to delineate "boundaries":

> Maybe I need to be firmer in terms of how I set up those boundaries. Maybe I should insist on being called Ms. Wilson. I should insist that they don't knock on my door outside of my consultation hours, to command respect, but I don't think that's good for the learning environment because I do want students to be able to feel comfortable enough to ask questions ….(Megan).

For Cathy, meeting students in public or having an open-door policy can be seen as shields that help discourage harassing behaviours from students.

> I can't even get my own colleagues to leave their doors open when they meet with students or to avoid having after hours meetings alone with them. There is a lot of thinking that this doesn't actually happen but it is fairly widespread you know (Cathy).

Rationalising

Another coping strategy is rationalising experiences of contrapower harassment. Rationalising is a defence mechanism that

involves the justification of an unacceptable behaviour, thought or feeling in a logical manner which is used when trying to avoid the true reason for the action (see also Nugent, 2013). This strategy is often called "making excuses" (Pedersen, 2016).

> " *I quite easily dismiss it, but I can see that if I was a different person with different personality traits I would be hugely affected by those little things. I often wonder if it's not just a certain level of immaturity where they just think that this person is here, I'm going to make a lot of assumptions about them that can lead to treating people in a way that you aren't really thinking about how you are treating them. Because to them, it doesn't matter because we are not humans and lecturers aren't feeling beings. (Gail).*

> " *I guess I became comfortable in my own skin that I know what I'm talking about and that I'm good at what I do and it doesn't matter what a student says because people are complicated. Maybe they had a bad day or they really just don't like me personally and that impacts what they say. … Sometimes it can be annoying but I just rationalise them as teenage boys just joking around to be honest (Sarah).*

Gail rationalises her experiences of contrapower harassment as displays of immaturity, a rationalisation for the unpleasant behaviour of her students. Similarly, Sarah can be seen to be attempting to "make sense" of the reasons why some of her students display harassing behaviours towards her. Rationalising is a strategy to lighten their experiences as something that results from "immaturity" or as something that emanates from someone having a "bad day". These forms of rationalisation, remove responsibility both from the perpetrator and the institution, treating contrapower harassment as normal and expected behaviour from immature people but also operating to protect the victim who can make light of the experience.

DISCUSSION

Puwar (2004) has described how "bodies out of place" must constantly perform competence to counter the suspicion of illegitimacy. Women in academic institutions, and black women in particular, operate from a place of disadvantage where they must work harder to establish themselves as credible sources of knowledge. Alongside the general demands of academic life, there is the additional burden of contending with entrenched patriarchal cultures that continue to shape the university as a masculinised and racialised space. In the South African academy, this experience is intensified by intersecting histories of race, colonialism, and patriarchy that continue to inform institutional cultures.

South African scholars such as Amanda Gouws (2016) and Pumla Dineo Gqola (2015) have long drawn attention to how universities mirror the broader patriarchal society in which they are embedded. Gouws argues that the persistence of gender-based violence and sexual harassment in universities reveals how

institutional cultures reproduce social hierarchies rather than dismantle them. Gqola (2015), in her analysis of rape culture in South Africa, describes how silence, denial, and impunity maintain gendered domination through both spectacular and everyday forms of violence. These insights illuminate that contrapower harassment experiences are not isolated incidents but symptoms of wider institutional cultures that normalise the devaluation of women's authority.

Desiree Lewis (2001; 2017) similarly critiques how South African universities have historically privileged Eurocentric and masculinist modes of knowledge production that exclude and marginalise women's experiences. In this light, contrapower harassment can be understood as a disciplinary mechanism that polices women's intellectual and bodily presence within academic spaces. The harassment experienced by female academics is not simply personal or interpersonal; it is a reproduction of patriarchal epistemologies that render women's authority precarious. Lewis's call to centre feminist epistemologies that disrupt patriarchal power is echoed in the participants' own narrative strategies, where they produce counter-knowledges—refusing to be positioned solely as victims and instead articulating tactics of survival, boundary-setting, and resistance.

Gouws (2018) points to the ways in which neoliberal managerialism in South African universities reinforces hierarchies that disproportionately disadvantage women, particularly black women, by depoliticising gender-based violence and framing it as individual misconduct rather than systemic failure. This insight is visible in how participants

describe internalising responsibility for societal and institutional shortcomings.

Thus, contrapower harassment must be understood not merely as personal deviance but as a manifestation of institutional and epistemic power. It is a form of gendered governance that disciplines women's bodies and professional identities while simultaneously eliciting acts of subtle resistance. These resistances—expressed here as "accepting," "distancing," or "rationalising"—should not be dismissed as compliance, but read, following Lewis (2002) and Gqola (2015), as forms of situated feminist agency enacted under conditions of constraint. As Gouws (2021) argues, feminist transformation in higher education requires not only policy reform but also a dismantling of the deep cultural logics that sustain gendered power.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored how female academics in South African universities negotiate and respond to experiences of contrapower harassment. By foregrounding their narratives, it contributes to breaking the culture of silence surrounding this under-researched phenomenon, revealing how women who occupy positions of authority nonetheless find themselves vulnerable to gendered forms of subordination.

Drawing on Foucault's conceptualisation of power as both repressive and productive, the findings illustrate how contrapower harassment simultaneously disciplines and enables. Participants' strategies of accepting,

distancing, and rationalising, represent the subtle negotiations of power that allow them to maintain their professional identity and personal integrity while being aware of their own vulnerability.

Importantly, this study calls attention to the institutional and cultural conditions that make contrapower harassment possible. The persistence of gendered assumptions about authority, the privileging of the "somatic norm" (Puwar, 2004), and the customer-service logic of the neoliberal university combine to sustain environments in which female academics' credibility can be undermined. Institutional transformation requires more than policy—it requires critical engagement with these embedded hierarchies of power and the everyday practices that normalise harassment.

Universities should therefore move beyond reactive mechanisms of reporting towards cultivating cultures of accountability and solidarity. This includes redesigning student evaluation systems that facilitate harassment, creating confidential and accessible reporting pathways, and developing peer-support and mentorship structures that validate women's experiences rather than pathologise them. Recognising contrapower harassment as a form of institutionalised gender violence is a necessary step toward transforming higher education into a genuinely safe and equitable space of knowledge production.

REFERENCES

Adams, J. D., Mabusela, M. S., & Dlamini, E. T. (2013). Sexual harassment: The 'silent killer' of female students at the University of Ayoba in South Africa. South African Journal of Higher Education, 27(5), 1149–1163.

Bennett, J. (Ed.). (2005). Killing a virus with stones? Research on the implementation of policies against sexual harassment in Southern African higher education. African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town.

Benson, K. (1984). Comment on Crocker's "An analysis of university definitions of sexual harassment." Signs, 9(3), 516–519.

Blizard, L. M. (2016). Faculty members' experiences of cyberbullying by students at one Canadian university: Impact and recommendations. International Research in Higher Education, 1(1), 107–124.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. International journal of transgender health,24(1),1-6.10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597

Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. Quality & quantity, 56(3), 1391-1412. 10.1007/S11135-021-01182-Y

Chase, S.E. (2005). Narrative Inquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (Third Edition) (pp. 651-679). Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks: California.

Dalmiya, V. (1999). Why is sexual harassment wrong? Journal of Social Philosophy, 30(1), 46–64. https://doi.org/10.1111/0047-2786.T01-1-00004

Feder, E.K. (2011). Power/Knowledge. In D. Taylor (Ed.) Michel Foucault: Key Concepts, (pp. 57-68). Acumen Publishing Limited: Durham.

Finchilescu, G., & Dugard, J. (2021). Experiences of gender-based violence at a South African university: Prevalence and effect on rape myth acceptance. Journal of interpersonal violence, 36(5-6). doi.org/10.1177/0886260518769352

Foucault, M. (1975). The birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception. Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1978). The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An introduction. Penguin Books.

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. Critical Inquiry, 8(4), 777–795.

Foucault, M. (1986). Disciplinary power and subjection. In S. Lukes (Ed.), Power (pp. 229–242). New York University Press.

Frank, A.W. (2002). Why Study People's Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1(1), pp. 109-117. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690200100102

Gouws, A. (2016). Feminist institutionalism and gender equality in South Africa. Politics & Gender, 12(4), 636–642. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X16000406

Gouws, A. (2018). #EndRapeCulture campaign in South African universities: The politics of institutional change. South African Journal of Higher Education, 32(2), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.20853/32-2-2433

Gouws, A. (2021). Feminist politics and the transformation of the South African academy. Agenda, 35(4), 16–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2021.2013577

Gqola, P. D. (2015). Rape: A South African nightmare. MF Books.

Heyes, C. J. (2011). Subjectivity and power. In D. Taylor (Ed.), Michel Foucault: Key concepts (pp. 159–172). Acumen Publishing.

Human Rights Watch. (2001). Scared at school: Sexual violence against girls in South African schools. Human Rights Watch.

Klein, L. B., & Martin, S. L. (2021). Sexual harassment of college and university students: A systematic review. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 22(4), 777-792.

Lewis, D. (2001). African feminisms. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838019881731

Lewis, D. (2002). Beyond the agenda: Feminist cultural criticism in South Africa. Feminist Africa, 1(1), 11–20.

Lewis, D. (2017). Gender, knowledge and transformation in the South African academy. Agenda, 31(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2017.1338878

Lukes, S. (2005). Power: A radical view (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

May, T. (2011). A new neo-pragmatism: From James and Dewey to Foucault. Foucault Studies, (11), 54-62. 10.22439/fs.v0i11.3205

Mayekiso, T., & Bhana, K. (1997). Sexual harassment: Perceptions and experiences of students at the University of Transkei. South African Journal of Psychology, 27(4), 230–235. https://doi.org/10.1177/008124639702700405

Mills, S. (2003). Michel Foucault. Routledge.

Nugent, P.M.S. (2013.) "Rationalization". Psychology Dictionary. psychologydictionary.org/rationalization/

Oksala, J. (2011). Freedom and bodies. In D. Taylor (Ed.), Michel Foucault: Key concepts (pp. 85–97). Acumen Publishing.

Pedersen, T. (2016). Rationalization. Psych Central. Retrieved from https://psychcentral.com/encyclopedia/rationalization/

Prinsloo, S. (2006). Sexual harassment and violence in South African schools. South African Journal of Education, 26(2), 305–318.

Puwar, N. (2004). Space invaders: Race, gender and bodies out of place. Berg Publishers.

Quirk, J., & Dugard, J. (2024). Gender-based harm in higher education in South Africa: Introducing the special issue. South African Journal on Human Rights, 40(1-2), 1-9.

Riessman, C. K. (2005). Exporting ethics: A narrative about narrative research in South India. Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine, 9(4), 473–490. 10.1177/1363459305056414

Smit, D., & Du Plessis, V. (2011). Sexual harassment in the education sector. Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal, 14(6), 173–217. https://doi.org/10.4314/pelj.v14i6.7

Taylor, S. (2007). Narrative as Construction and Discursive Resource. In: M. Bamberg (Ed.) Narrative – State of the Art. Benjamins Current Topics (6), 113–122. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, Retrieved from http://oro.open.ac.uk/17254/2/2DA38EAB.pdf

Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching. Routledge.

Wood, L., Hoefer, S., Kammer-Kerwick, M., Parra-Cardona, J. R., & Busch-Armendariz, N. (2021). Sexual harassment at institutions of higher education: Prevalence, risk, and extent. Journal of interpersonal violence, 36(9-10), 4520-4544.