

## The Role of Community Development Organisations in Promoting Women Empowerment in Wadzanai Community Development Trust of Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** This exploratory sequential mixed methods design investigated the role of Community-based Organisations in empowering women in Wadzanai Community Development Trust (WCDT) of Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe. Thirty female participants were first randomly selected and then selected by snowballing. In-depth face-to-face interviews and structured questionnaires were used to generate and gather data. The study's first finding was that as a result of CBO, women's rights as part of the global human rights were now observed in WCDT. Another finding from the study was that CBOs empowered women in WCDT with skills to start and manage their businesses. The other finding was that CBOs protected women against abuse. The fourth finding was that CBOs helped women with knowledge to start income generation activities. In view of the foregoing findings, five conclusions are made. First, CBOs promote observation of human rights, with women's rights in particular in search of empowerment of women in all spheres of life. Second, CBOs capacitate women with skills to start and manage their own income generating projects and businesses. These income generating activities culminate in the establishment of sustainable livelihoods in Wadzanai Community Development Trust. Third, it can be deduced that as a result of exposing women to CBOs, women who are free from abuse are quick to empower and influence development activities and processes in their locality. Fourth, CBOs therefore provide the means and space for those affected by a particular phenomenon to be part of the solution to their problem, to co-operate and implement the solution with those willing to help them. Fifth, it has been established that soft loans are not a conducive way of empowering women. From the preceding conclusions, three recommendations emerge. First, the researchers recommend the need for CBOs to cast their net wide so that they can empower as many women as possible not only in Mashonaland Central, but in Zimbabwe as a whole. Second, CBOs need to work with schools and other public gatherings so that they could spread the message of not abusing women and violating their rights as well with the intent to empower women. Future research could focus on the efficacy of CBOs in promoting empowerment of societies rather than confining their efforts to women alone.

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, Community Development Organisation, role, Wadzanai Community Development Trust.

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of community based organisations (CBOs) has gained some ground in development circles in Zimbabwe. In the last ten years partly due to the socio – economic challenges and increasing donor fatigue, some donor organisations began experimenting working with CBOs. This was due to the perception that they provide a more direct route to their target beneficiaries. These developments seemed to indicate an enhanced place for CBOs in development [1]. CBOs provide a space for those people directly affected by a particular issue to express

themselves and contribute to the solution. Instead of people complaining about a particular problem expecting someone to come from nowhere to rectify the situation, the members take it upon themselves to initiate the process and where possible actually solve the problem. Writing about communal farmers in Kenya on this subject, Mathie [2] said that their involvement in a local farmers' association effected a shift from passive farmers complaining about the failure of government marketing systems to active manager farmers confident of their own power to secure resources for which they are eligible and entitled' CBOs therefore provide the

means and space for those affected by a particular phenomenon to be part of the solution to their problem, to co-operate and implement the solution with those willing to help them. Development organisations are continuously translating issues of women empowerment into their practices seeking for more efficient strategies to achieve women empowerment. Community based organisations have presented a complex situation with numerous chances in fulfilling this task of empowering women. According to ILC [3], Community based organisations promote women empowerment through activities that provide women access to information, community trainings and income generating activities. These developments seemed to indicate an enhanced place for CBOs in women empowerment. This raised issue of the role and situation of CBOs in promoting women empowerment in Zimbabwe, which prompted the researcher to carry out a research on the role of community based organisations in promoting women empowerment.

According to Hoogvelt [4] probably the most challenging of emerging directions in development theory was the opening up of feminist scholarship, especially after its forward leap from women's studies to gender studies. It was not till about the 1970s that women figured seriously in mainstream development literature. This was a consequence of the fact that it was assumed that, women had not really benefited from the development process, they had therefore been excluded from it and now needed to be brought in. The result was that the United Nations (UN) launched its Decade for Women held in Mexico.

The history of the modern western feminist movements is divided into three waves. Each wave dealt with different aspects of the same feminist issue. The first wave comprised women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, promoting women's right to vote. The second wave was associated with the ideas and the actions of women's movement beginning in the 1960s. The second wave campaigned for legal and social equality for women. The third wave is a continuation of and a reaction to the perceived failures of the second wave feminism beginning in the 1960 [5, 6].

There has been growing interest in the development of "Community Based Organisations" (CBOs). Many agencies have sought to provide grants to enable these organisations to grow and become effective in the delivery of service to their constituencies [6]. CBOs work in a variety of different fields, such as education, health, rights of the disabled and gender issues. The major characteristics of a CBO are; they are non-profit, rely on voluntary contributions and act at local level. Literature reveals the use of CBOs in promoting women empowerment, Malenja a CBO in Zambia supported by SOS Children's Villages in Zambia organized and participated in their first village

public march to raise awareness about domestic violence during the International 16 days of activism to end violence against women campaign [7].

In Zimbabwe there are various CBOs that seek to promote women empowerment, for example in Gweru there is GWAPA (Gweru Women Aids Prevention Association) the organisation prevents HIV and AIDS by economically and socially empowering women through the organisation's interventions that includes peer educating. In Mashonaland central only SOS Children's Villages FSP works in conjunction with two CBOs two in rural and one in urban in empowering women through assisting them income generating activities like poultry and sewing. This has economically empowered them since they are able to send their children to school and put food on the table.

Zimbabwe has managed to cover some ground in terms of women empowerment for instance, the nation recorded an improvement in universal primary education, and there are females in the judiciary sector, mining and also a female who is currently a vice president. However, poverty statistics reveals that 75.4% people are poor in Mashonaland central alone of which statistics states that in Zimbabwe there are more females than males. Women participation in political decisions as equal partners with men has not been achieved. Although women make up about half of the electorate and have attained the right to vote they continue to be underrepresented in parliament, their number in parliament is 19% far below the African Union and SADC target of 50% [8].

Wadzanai works towards raising the women's socio-economic status through an active leading role in their personal development. Wadzanai Community Development Trust believes that, equipped with the relevant education, knowledge, skills and support, any woman is able to actively and effectively participate in the overall development of her family and community as well as the country at large. The CBO mobilises funds and resources that are used for income generating projects for its members, their projects are piggery, pottery, poultry, gardening and tie and dye. They also empower women through skills training workshops and awareness campaigns in gender based violence.

It is against this background that this research focuses on investigating the role of WCDT in promoting women empowerment in Mashonaland central province. The research investigated the role played by the organisation's interventions to women empowerment. The study therefore sought answers to the question: How do CBOs in WCDT of Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe promote women empowerment?

## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

An exploratory sequential mixed methods design was applied to carry out this study to investigate

the role of CBOs in promoting women empowerment in WCDTs. The sequential mixed methods design provided a balanced interpretation of the results [9], regarding the role of CBOs in promoting women empowerment in WCDTs. The use of an exploratory sequential mixed methods design enabled the researcher study in depth the extent to which women in WCDTs were empowered by CBOs in Mashonaland Central of Zimbabwe [10]. The researcher was able to obtain lived experiences of women who were in dire need of empowerment [11]. The study was carried out between 01 September 2017 and 30 November 2017. Thirty female participants were selected using snowball sampling technique and simple random sampling to cater for both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the study. These sampling techniques enabled the researchers to access women who were empowered by CBOs in WCDTs as result of referrals made by other participants and giving every participant an equal chance of getting selected for participation in the study [12].

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time from the same participants so that comprehensive findings on the role of CBOs in promoting women empowerment in WCDTs could be reached. Structured questionnaires and in-depth face-to-face personal interviews were applied to generate data regarding the role of CBOs in promoting women empowerment in WCDTs. The questionnaire and the interview guide had two sections for demographic data of the participants and actual research data. The first section covered issues of sex, age, marital status and empowerment status. The second section covered a broad question on the role of CBOs in promoting women empowerment in WCDTs. In-depth interviews

facilitated data generation through the use of participants’ free narrative and descriptive responses [10, 13]. Questionnaires gathered structured data that complemented qualitative data [14] with respect to the role of CBOs in promoting women empowerment in WCDTs. Through the use of interviews, participants were able to open up as much as they could to demonstrate the degree to which appreciated the role of CBOs in promoting women empowerment in WCDTs. Questionnaires enabled participants to show predetermined responses.

Tables and figures were used to present and analyse quantitative data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative research findings. As a result of the use of thematic analysis, themes that focused on the role of CBOs in promoting women empowerment in WCDTs emerged from the findings. These themes arose as a result of open coding. The themes paved way to presentation and interpretation of findings. The findings were presented narratively using quotes which were then turned into excerpts that aided interpretation of findings [15].

**Presentation and Interpretation of Findings**

The presentation of findings precedes interpretation of findings. Demographic data of the participants are going to be presented first using tables and figures. The presentation of the actual findings shall be combined with the interpretation of the findings.

**Response rate of subjects**

Table 1 below shows the response rate of the subjects to the questionnaires and the interview. There was a 100% response rate of the participants.

**Table-1: Response rate of subjects (N=20)**

Tool	Sample size	Answered	Percentage
Interview guide	20	20	100%

**Demographic data**

The participants were twenty women who are members of the Wadzanai Community Development Trust who responded to the interviews.

**Distribution of respondents by age**

The participants were requested to state their age ranges and as shown by Table 2 below.

**Table -2: Distribution of respondents by age (N=20)**

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
15 – 20	0	0%
21 – 30	3	15%
31 – 40	10	50%
41+	7	35%
Total	20	100%

Results in Table 2 show that 15% of the participants were under the 21-30 age range, whilst 50 % fell under the 31-40 age range. Thirty five percent (35%) of the participants were found on the 41+ age range and there were no participants who were under

the 15-20 age range. The information revealed that more women are under the 31-40 which had the highest percentage. The women were gradually moving towards the middle age group.

**Distribution of participants by marital status**

Table 3 below shows the distribution of participants by marital status.

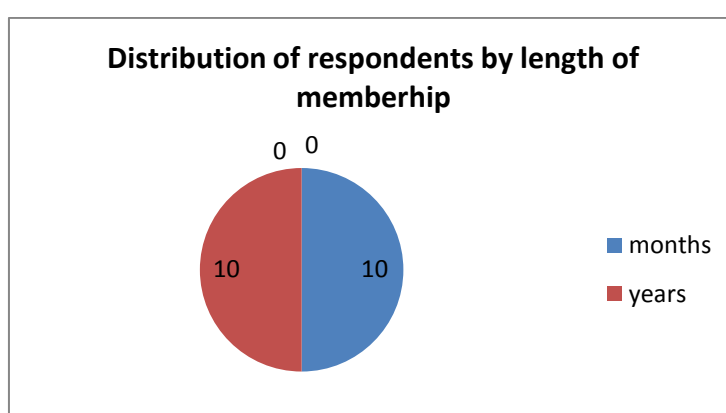
From the study 75% of the participants in Table 3 were married women. Twenty percent (20%) of them were widows and 5% of the participants which was one woman who was single. In this regard, it can be deduced that widows needed some form empowerment.

**Table-3: Distribution of respondents by marital status (N=20)**

Marital status	Number of women	Percentage
Married	15	75%
Widowed	4	20%
Single	1	5%
Total	20	100%

**Distribution of participants by length of membership**

Distribution of participants by length of membership in WDCTs is shown by Figure 1 below.



**Fig-1: Frequency distribution of participants by length of membership(N=20)**

The participants as illustrated in Figure 1 were requested to state the period of their membership and the ranges were in months and years. The study revealed that 50% of the participants had been members for over a year and another 50% of them had been members for less than a year only.

**Distribution of respondents by educational levels**

Table 3 is a presentation of the distribution of participants by educational levels.

The highest level of education attained by participants as indicated in Table 3 was envisaged in the interview guide. The majority of the women attended secondary education (65%) and primary education (35%). Demographic data also revealed that all the participants were informally employed.

**Table-3: Distribution of respondents by educational levels (N=20)**

Level of education	Number of women	Percentage
Primary level	7	35%
Secondary level	13	65%
Tertiary	0	0%
Total	20	100%

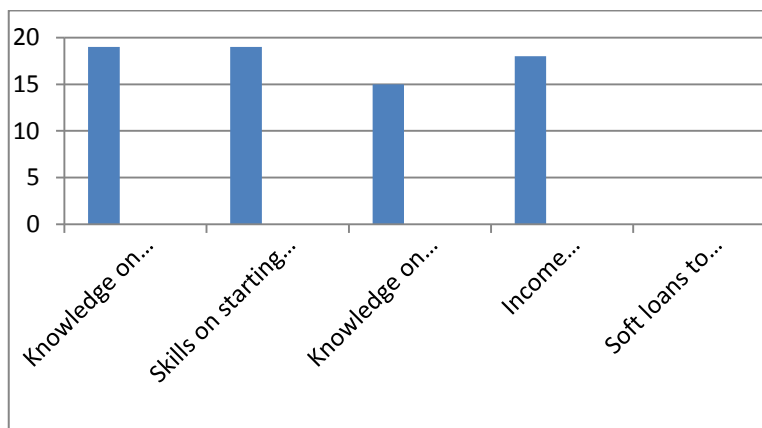
**FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION**

**Role played by CBO in promoting women empowerment**

**Response on benefits being obtained from the CBO**

In a bid to illustrate the role of CBOs in empowering women, participants were requested to

respond to an unstructured interview guide and questionnaire to indicate some of the benefits they were getting from Wadzanai Community Development Trust. The questionnaire responses are illustrated in Figure 2 below.



**Fig-2: Responses on benefits offered to members by WCDT (N=20)**

Majority of the participants which was 95% (19 out of 20 participants) in Figure 2 responded to the questionnaire data acknowledging receiving both knowledge on women/human rights business from the CBO. These results were complemented with free responses from interview data under the subsequent specific sub-headings.

**Women and human rights**

The participants' free responses are as shown by the following excerpts.

- *I am now conscious of my rights as a woman, let alone as a human being. I am now able to stand up and fight for my rights without fear (P1).*
- *People no longer have the privilege to oppress me. I take them by surprise when they know that I am now aware of my rights (P12).*
- *It is now pleasurable that women and human rights can no longer be violated any more because women now know their rights and how to observe them (P13).*

The results are not consistent with early research findings by UN (2013) noting that although women make up about half of the electorate and have attained the right to vote they continue to be underrepresented in parliament, their number in parliament is 19% far below the African Union and SADC target of 50%. It can be concluded that the continued underrepresentation of women in various for a might perpetuate violation of women's rights if CBOs do not actively undertake their duties.

**Skills on starting and managing small businesses**

Another majority of the participants which was 95% (19 out of 20 participants) in Figure 2 responded to

the questionnaire data acknowledging receiving both knowledge on skills on starting and managing small business from the CBO. In response to interview questions on the same observation, selected participants had this to say:

- *CBOs empowered me very much. I am now a proud self-reliant woman who is capable fending one's self and family (P3).*
- *CBOs are a welcome development. They have done away with the practice of dependency syndrome among women in Wadzanai Community Development Trust. They are now able to look after themselves and dependents (P2).*
- *As a result of CBOs, I am now a proud bread winner in spite of the fact that I am a widow who is looking after five children of school going age (P7).*
- *I am now an entrepreneur in my own right because I am now running an attractive fowl rearing enterprise (P11).*
- *I am managing my small business of earthenware vases. These vases are now a source of sustaibale livelihoods for my family and relatives (P9).*

The results are consistent with early research findings by ILC (2010) who discovered that community based organisations promote women empowerment through activities that provide women access to information, community trainings and income generating activities. In practice, these developments seemed to indicate an enhanced place for CBOs in women empowerment in Wadzanai Community Development Trust. The findings indicate that CBOs empowered the participants both socially and economically.

### Protection against abuse

From the results most (75%) participants acknowledged receiving benefits of knowledge on laws protecting women and girls against abuse. From a qualitative research perspective, participants indicated the following:

- *I benefitted a great deal from CBOs. I am now conversant with how females in society get abused. I have been exposed to means of overcoming such abuses (P10).*
- *Women and girls get abused is they are not properly empowered. Empowerment means doing away with female abuse in society (P17).*
- *CBOs educated women on laws that protect women against sexual abuse and statutory rape (P18).*
- *CBOs are a blessing in the sense that they make women aware of their abuses and how they should overcome them (P11).*
- *All because of CBO, I am now enjoying the rights to be heard, recreation and choice on top of education (P4).*
- *I also have the right to be protected against abuse and neglect by spouses and relatives in case of widows (P5).*

The findings are compatible with previous research findings by Hoogvelt [4] who observed that probably the most challenging of emerging directions in development theory was the opening up of feminist scholarship, especially after its forward leap from women's studies to gender studies. In addition to the above, literature reveals the use of CBOs in promoting women empowerment, Malenja a CBO in Zambia supported by SOS Children's Villages in Zambia organised and participated in their first village public march to raise awareness about domestic violence during the International 16 days of activism to end violence against women campaign [7]. It can be deduced that women who are free from abuse are quick to empower and influence development activities and processes in their locality.

### Income generating activities

Lastly, questionnaire data in Figure 2 shows that 90% of the participants acknowledged that they received income generating activities from the CBO. In responding to open-ended questions, the participants revealed the following sentiments:

- *Consequent upon my becoming a CBO member, I was exposed to some income generating activities such as chicken rearing and mushroom farming (P13).*
- *As a result of my association with CBO in Wadzanai District, I was able to start my fish farming business well, although the production suffers during winter months (P9).*
- *Because of engagement with CBO in Mashonaland Central, I am now an economically empowered woman (P6).*

- *CBOs socially empowered me to the extent that I am now a somebody who can be counted in society (P11).*

The results are resonating well with early research findings by Mathie [2] who on writing about communal farmers in Kenya on this subject, said that their involvement in a local farmers' association effected a shift from passive farmers complaining about the failure of government marketing systems to active manager farmers confident of their own power to secure resources for which they are eligible and entitled. In that regard, CBOs therefore provide the means and space for those affected by a particular phenomenon to be part of the solution to their problem, to co-operate and implement the solution with those willing to help them.

### Provision of soft loans to start businesses

None of the participants indicated that CBOs empowered them by providing them with soft loans to embark on small-scale business ventures. As researchers, we are content with the fact that CBOs did not want to cultivate a spirit of dependency syndrome among the participants. We also feel that CBOs could have perceived that participants had no capacity to pay back loans given that running businesses in the country could a risky venture given the economic downturn obtaining in the country now.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing findings, five conclusions are made. First, CBOs promote observation of human rights, with women's rights in particular in search of empowerment of women in all spheres of life. Second, CBOs capacitate women with skills to start and manage their own income generating projects and businesses. These income generating activities culminate in the establishment of sustainable livelihoods in Wadzanai Community Development Trust. Third, it can be deduced that as a result of exposing women to CBOs, women who are free from abuse are quick to empower and influence development activities and processes in their locality. Fourth, CBOs therefore provide the means and space for those affected by a particular phenomenon to be part of the solution to their problem, to co-operate and implement the solution with those willing to help them. Fifth, it has been established that soft loans are not a conducive way of empowering women.

From the preceding conclusions, three recommendations emerge. First, the researchers recommend the need for CBOs to cast their net wide so that they can empower as many women as possible not only in Mashonaland Central, but in Zimbabwe as a whole. Second, CBOs need to work with schools and other public gatherings so that they could spread the message of not abusing women and violating their rights as well with the intent to empower women.

Future research could focus on the efficacy of CBOs in promoting empowerment of societies rather than confining their efforts to women alone.

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