

Women's Empowerment Framework:
Adapted for Zimbabwe Case Study

Gender Analysis
SOWK Advanced Modules 1
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Introduction

Gender analysis is an important aspect of sustainable development practice throughout the world. Both international and local development strategies must account for the treatment of both males and females within the society as well as the social status of gender. This analysis lends itself to the issue of equality and equity, two terms too often used interchangeably in development dialogue. It is important to delineate the differences between the terms in order to better assess the appropriate framework to apply in a development context.

Equality denotes an even plane of opportunity that is gender, race, and culturally blind. It sees no difference between people and assumes that all individuals within a society must have the same chances without the hindrance of gender bias. Equity is a qualifier, demanding fairness in opportunity even if all people do not come out with the exact same portion (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983). The feminist movement has demanded equity in treatment as there is and always have been biological differences between males and females that cannot be dismissed in equality. Thus, the differences in terms lends to a clearer picture of appropriate frameworks in assessing development strategies.

The Zimbabwe Case Study relates to the gift of rabbits to local female villagers. The gift was given in response to the perceived economic need in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean economy has struggled greatly in the last decade, fluctuating with the lack of economic rights and freedoms (The Heritage Foundation, 2013). The economic failings of Zimbabwe have proven prohibitive to sustainable livelihoods for all citizens, not the least of whom are women and children.

Vulnerable populations do not necessarily suffer more greatly than other populations, but they suffer in a different context. Child-headed households are common in Zimbabwe, as are relative-led homes where the parents have died and the children are left in the care of relatives (Shoko, 2011). These homes are difficult to maintain and require sustainable work. The gift of rabbits was intended to create sustainable livelihoods for these vulnerable families.

The Women's Empowerment Framework (WEF) (Longwe, 1995) utilizes the aforementioned language in regards to empowering women within their communities to effect change for themselves and their families. The interchangeable use of equality and equity must be analyzed with a critical eye, however the framework offers an excellent micro and mezzo level of analysis. The advantage of the WEF is the use of perception of the worker, as all workers must be cognizant of the lens with which they are viewing their project. There are five levels of equality in the WEF, all of which are measured in positive, neutral, or negative impact on the target population (Longwe S. H., 2002). These levels are welfare, access, conscientisation, mobilization, and control (Longwe S. H., 2002). While Longwe is clear that these levels are not linear, this paper will address the levels as presented for clarity's sake.

The WEF has herein been used to analyze a Zimbabwean community who benefited from the gift of two rabbits. The purpose of this case analysis is to determine the success of the gifting based on the five levels of equality described in the WEF.

Welfare

The women in Zimbabwe were gifted sets of two rabbits from the Protracted Relief Programme that has aided over two million people. While the rabbits themselves were gifted, and the women are thus recipients of the gift, the positive welfare impact is sustainable (Longwe S. H., 2002). Rabbits provide a source of income and nutrition to the women and their families, and they are not dependent upon males in the community to supply them with their basic needs. The independent resource acquisition provides the women with a higher socio-economic status in their communities. As seen in the case study, both women and their families incurred food, health, and income security as a result of the gift.

Security is an invaluable gift to provide to vulnerable populations. The gift of the rabbits proved to be a sustainable form of support. Ultimately, the reproduction of the rabbits lent to sharing the wealth amongst fellow villagers, as exhibited in the case study. The case study discussed the social linking between community members who shared their resources. It is imperative to maintain cooperative relationships within communities in order to have sustainable change. Social relationships depend on the reciprocity of goods and services between individuals, thus creating bonds of trust and mutual care. Change can only happen with the support of the target population, and assisting communities in finding communal resources to weather a challenge is a key instrument in development practice.

The welfare of the recipients spread into the betterment of the community welfare. The primary sources of economic stability in Zimbabwe are not readily accessible to female citizens in outlying villages and communities (Nations Online, 2013). Women and children remain especially removed from the labor-intensive

industries such as mining and steel work (Shoko, 2011). Consequently, the gift of rabbits positively impacted the welfare of the entire communities by providing a sustainable and relatively simple form of farming production.

Access

The increased access to sustainable resources provided women with the ability to self-sufficient in their villages. However, it must be noted once again that the rabbits were not a self-conceived idea and were gifted to these families from a “higher power” (Longwe S. H., 2002). Within the framework, this is not considered empowerment as the resources were handed to the families. The case study lends itself to female empowerment due to the lack of reciprocity expected from the program that provided the resources. The rabbits were given as property to the families and are thusly creating a livelihood opportunity for women who would otherwise be dependent on others within the village. This freed women from survival mode and allowed them to focus on the sustainable livelihoods they could establish for their families.

Another aspect of access is self-awareness of the problem and the initiative to fix the problem. The gift of rabbits positively impacted the women because they now have access to a sustainable, independent livelihood, but the case study makes it unclear if this was a solicited request. The program that provided the rabbits states that they have done extensive research in the area to determine the needs and appropriate responses to the needs, but this approach takes away from the WEF. Thus, the process of conscientisation is stunted before it can take root.

Conscientisation

As discussed in the access level, conscientisation is a complicated level to assess. It is apparent in the case study that the women in the community were struggling to maintain income to provide stable housing for their families and children. Children could not attend school, food was scarce, and sustainable livelihoods were out of reach. The women were aware that there was a problem in the system and something needed to happen to improve their lot, however it is not made clear if the local women requested assistance or were handed assistance without request.

Regardless of the form of assistance, the gift of rabbits proved to be an invaluable asset to the women. While there was not an exhibited “urge to action” on the behalf of the women in the community, there was an identified aspect of need that was filled with the gift of rabbits. The gift eventually allowed women to assist other women by giving two rabbits to their neighbors, which ultimately encouraged the women to become a part of their solution. Despite the increased socio-economic status of the women, women are still subjected to unequal social status and expectations of gendered norms.

The program that provided the rabbits is not an organization aimed at eliminating inequality in communities thus cannot promote the conscientisation of the issue. The program was created to create sustainable livelihoods and promote successful rural and urban life empowerment. Thus, the conscientisation level was identified as neutral in this given case study, as we are unable to garner the appropriate information to deem the action positive or negative.

Mobilisation

As with conscientisation, mobilization is driven by female call to action. The difference herein is that the women in the village actively assisted one another when their rabbits began breeding. There was movement to create better livelihoods for each other because all women were struggling to take care of their children and grandchildren. As noted in the case study, the average lifespan for women in Zimbabwe was 40 years old, which lends to children being relegated to female relatives and increasing the burden both financially and agriculturally.

The success of the rabbits spread around the local villages and communities, ultimately creating awareness of opportunity. However, the women themselves were not necessarily the mobilizers of the program. The movement of knowledge raised awareness of the issue of conscientisation however does not eliminate discrimination and does not actively participate in emancipating women. Due to these factors, the mobilization level would necessarily be neutral.

Control

The gift of rabbits was given directly to the female head of household, which means that she is directly responsible for those resources. This gives females the control over their own livestock and economic benefits from it. The rural option of small livestock that reproduce exponentially allows the owner to become a donor, thus controlling the use of her flock. It is one thing to give a person something for themselves, it is quite another to empower them to provide assistance to others in their community. The donor mentality promotes the success of other villagers while maintaining their own level of success, thus empowering others within the community. This empowerment model will transfer positively via word of mouth

and action. Once the women were empowered to take control of their livelihoods, they were able to take back control of their lives and provide for their families.

Conclusion

Throughout the case study analysis, there is repeated mention of “family.” It is important to note that female empowerment in this case study meant the ability to care for their family without being dependent on outside male authority. The concept of caring for family is culturally relevant in Zimbabwe and must be considered in the WEF. Traditionally, raising the family has been a gendered norm that many women seek to escape from, either by having a successful career or choosing not to raise a family. It is critical to understand the culture one is working within and promote the internalized values of the women one seeks to empower.

Zimbabwean women hold these typically gendered norms as priorities in their lives. Women and children often become the primary caregivers for their families in the case of the male benefactors death. Social workers must be aware of the sensitivities surrounding these families. Zimbabwe has not created a safe government or economic structure for vulnerable populations to succeed in. Indeed, with an unemployment rate of 95%, very few citizens are experiencing economic stability (The Heritage Foundation, 2013). Development strategies have the imperative to create sustainable and accessible solutions to the widespread economic insecurity threatening the well-being of Zimbabweans.

The WEF is an excellent gender analysis to use in gaining insight into the sustainability of the gifting, however more study must be conducted in order to be

effective in positive development work. Gender is not the only concern in the Zimbabwean context, though it plays an important role in the development process. Workers must critically analyze the economic endeavors and failures of the Zimbabwean government, the underlying factors of the unemployment rates, and the health issues facing the citizens. As UNICEF Zimbabwe Country Representative Dr. Peter Salama said, “Despite our collective effort, the status of women and children of this country remains critical...we must do everything possible to improve the lives of women and children (Shoko, 2011).” Work must begin to empower vulnerable populations to effect change in their communities. The gift of rabbits proved to be an excellent form of empowering women to be successful and ultimately share their success for the betterment of their communities.

While the case study does not strictly adhere to the outlined levels in the WEF, the gift of rabbits proved to be beneficial to the community women. It is interesting to note that various livestock were provided to various communities, which could eventually lend itself to trade agreements, inter-community dealings, and increased female empowerment throughout the country. The gifting was an important initial step in providing women the ability and resources to create sustainable livelihoods. The need in Zimbabwe is great and continual efforts to improve the socio-economic and political structure are imperative to the success of Zimbabwean citizens. The WEF provides an excellent initial framework for analysis and opens the door for further research into assessment methods.

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