

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN REDUCING ABSOLUTE POVERTY IN RURAL ZIMBABWE:

A Case Study of Bindura District (2008 to 2011)

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### ABSTRACT

*The study sought to assess the role of women in reducing absolute poverty in rural Zimbabwe. Specific objectives were to analyze the nature and characteristics of men and women participating in rural development, to compare production levels under male and female headed households as well as to analyze the role of women in decision making. The Descriptive survey method was used on a population of 300 smallholder households. A sample of 52 households was randomly selected. The data collection instrument was a Formal Household Questionnaire Survey administered through personal interviews. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS). The research found that most of the women were illiterate, their households were large and some were elderly people and their major source of income comes from agricultural activities and informal sector activities and from casual labour.*

*Some of the women got training on crop production from AREX, and training on entrepreneurship through NGOs that were implementing developmental projects in the area. The production levels by the women were low in terms of yield per hectare and area planted. Major products were maize, groundnuts, vegetables, sweet potatoes and tomatoes. Very few women are into agro-processing, major processing was on drying vegetables, sweet potatoes and peanut butter making and most of the processing machines were old. Major challenges for the women include large family size due to the effect of HIV/AIDS, high dependency load, lack of innovative, lack of appropriate training,, financial support, land ownership, low produce and climatic change. The research recommended strong capacity building on the women to instill a commercial orientation that is motivational to move them from a subsistence mentality to a commercial focus through increased production, and for further assistance from both government, NGOs and private sectors, to ensure sustainable development.*

Keywords: Women, Absolute Poverty, Rural, Zimbabwe

### INTRODUCTION

The study of the role of women on poverty reduction has been an area of intense, interest over the years in developing countries worldwide especially in Zimbabwe. Poverty have a

direct impact on the social and economic welfare of many especially the poverty stricken rural people of Zimbabwe.

The research is to focus on the role of women in reducing absolute poverty in rural Zimbabwe for the period 2008 to 2011.

From the year 2001 to around 2008 Bindura district like any other district in Zimbabwe, suffered from setback of the hostile economic environment that prevailed in the country. During this period the country experienced social, economic and political problems, the unemployment rate was as high as 85 percent and hyperinflation reached it is highest at above 300 million and growth rate was a negative of 13% in 2008. This development negatively affected Zimbabweans particularly women on their ability to provide for their families. They also suffer from shortage of food, raw material and machinery and shortage of foreign currency. This made it difficult for women to get inputs such as seeds, fertilizer and chemicals with all these problems women still fight on while the male counterpart disappeared to the neighbouring countries or to the urban areas in Zimbabwe. In the light of the relative economic stability brought about by the introduction of the multi currency system in 2009 the expectations were that the standard of living will greatly improve, but this was not the case in most rural area in Zimbabwe. It was against this background that this research sought to assess the role of women in reducing absolute poverty in rural Zimbabwe using Bindura district as a case study.

The people living in poverty constitute the largest proportion of the world population, about 75 to 80 percent of all targeted poverty and inequality groups are located in rural areas of Africa and Asia about 70 percent in Latin America

Absolute poverty can be defined as the number of people living below a specified minimum level of income i.e. in terms of income levels that are insufficient to provide adequate nutrition – an international poverty line i.e. anyone living on less than a dollar a day. Poverty and inequality may be caused by natural abilities such as strength, Intelligence, skill, education and ignorance.

The rate of poverty and inequality is very high in developing countries like Zimbabwe because of low levels of productivity, high rates of population growth and dependency burdens, high and rising levels of unemployment, underemployment and disguised unemployment, low per capital real income and unequal distribution of income and wealth.

Poverty represents more than economics and the quantitative measurement of income and employment, it is a real fact of life for many people of the world, a state of mind as much as a state of nation.(Todaro,2003)

Poverty is both a physical reality and a state of mind in which society has, through some combination of social, economic and political and society failed to secure the means for obtaining a better life, and also the forces of ignorance and human misery (Todaro,2003) Every nation should put policies to eradicate absolute poverty and reduce inequality.

Women are actively involved in farming activities and they are the major contributors in agricultural development (Hanayani,2005). At least 70 percent of food staple production in Africa is generated by women (Havazvidi,1994). Most people depend on agriculture especially in Sub-Saharan Africa; people largely depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and for exports. (Mlambo,2004), echoed the same sentiments when he said, agriculture is the leading economic sector in Zimbabwe, which has proved to be an engine for economic growth. The sector contributes between 15-20% of the gross domestic product (G.D.P), 40-45% of the total exports and about 60% of the value of raw materials to the manufacturing sector. He added that agricultural sector also supports the livelihoods of about 70% of the economically active population engaged in agricultural production. A greater percentage of the sector's total output being generated by women, it therefore means that women contribute much towards people's survival, economic growth and development.

Historically, women were involved in cash cropping and food processing and among the major crops grown which included tobacco, wheat, cotton, Soya beans and paprika, Maize remains a major crop in terms of planted hectares. Maize is still being grown in areas where rains are poor and erratic such as in Matabeleland South and Masvingo provinces. Zimbabwe

considers food security essential and relies on the production of maize first (because it is a staple food) before considering other drought resistant crops like sorghum and millet.

One of the focal provinces for agricultural productivity is Mashonaland Central Province which plays a pivotal role in maize production. This is mainly facilitated by women. A well-known district in maize production in Mashonaland Central Province is Bindura District. In Bindura district, women play a vital role as agricultural producers and as agents of food and nutritional security. They have got a large proportion in smallholder agricultural production and post harvest activities. Their involvement in smallholder agricultural production is increasing in many areas in Mashonaland central particularly with the development of export-oriented irrigated farming, which is associated with a growing demand for female labour, including migrant workers.

Women's involvement is significant not only in terms of their labour input, but also in terms of their decision-making authority. In fact, as more men migrate to cities and other countries for work, increasing numbers of women are becoming heads of households, managing farms on a day-to-day basis. To support their extensive and multifaceted roles in smallholder agriculture and to enable them to respond to market incentives more efficiently, women need effective agricultural support and services. However, this has not been the case. Cultural and religious factors place them far below men even when most of the women are the breadwinners in their families such that agricultural support and services are generally geared towards male households. As a result women are complaining that they are being marginalized and are frequently underestimated and overlooked in development strategies. They even complain that their contribution to agriculture in particular is poorly understood and their role has not yet been recognized. It was against this background that this research sought to assess the role of women in reducing absolute poverty in rural Zimbabwe using Bindura district as a case study with a view to provide possible policy recommendations to enhance the role of women in development and in reducing absolute poverty.

Women also face the problem of climatic change, the rainfall pattern have change, soil composition also change, traditionally the rain starts in October when women start to plant their crops but now the rains start around December or January, also the soil composition has

changed causing the output of maize to decrease as the woman don't have the money or the knowledge to improve their methods of production

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite the fact that most women are intensively involved in rural development and they are the major contributors in agriculture and increase the gross domestic product (G.D,P) their role has not been recognized. As a result, women are complaining that they are being marginalized in the society. An understanding of the role of women in rural development and in reducing absolute poverty and the challenges they face, helps to understand their position in the society. It is therefore necessary to assess the role of women in national development and reducing absolute poverty so as to verify their current position in the society. This helps to facilitate women development through facilitation and support on the role of women.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main purpose of this study was to assess the role of women in reducing absolute poverty in rural Zimbabwe

- i. To determine the nature and characteristics of women participation in rural development.
- ii. To compare the production levels between male and female headed households.
- iii. To analyze the role of women in decision making in rural areas.
- iv. To make appropriate recommendations for improving women's contribution in development.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Women are actively involved in farming activities including food processing and marketing, cash cropping and animal husbandry (Kwesu,2003). They are the major contributors in agricultural development (Rukuni,2001). Their work ranges from crop production to harvesting operations. They grow grains, cotton, fruit and vegetables. The crop farmer plants,

tills, fertilize, sprays, harvest, packs and stores the product (Malik,2006). Their daily tasks includes keeping and caring for the livestock at farms. The livestock farmer feeds and cares for animals, while the horticulture farmers produce ornamental plants and nursery products (Mazuru,2005). Women are also heavily involved in all aspects of the country's agricultural sector and they are expected to regularly engage both domestic and commercial aspects of society (Rukuni,2001). Women also play a vital role in meeting the food requirements of the country and are increasingly contributing foreign exchange earnings. However women's participation in agro-forestry is also limited in Zimbabwe. They are only involved in some production and transplanting of seedlings (URDC,2004).

### **Importance of agriculture in rural development**

Agriculture plays an important role in rural development, is the progressive improvement in rural levels of living achieved primarily through increases in small-farm incomes, output and productivity (Todaro, 2003). The principal sources of agricultural progress and the basic conditions essential to its achievement are divided into the sources of smallholder agricultural progress and the conditions for general rural advancement (Havazvidi et al, 1994). Sources of smallholder or small scale agricultural progress includes; technological changes and innovation, appropriate government policies and supportive social institutions (Brown J et al, 1992). Conditions for general rural advancement includes modernizing farm structures to meet raising food demands, creating effective support system and changing the rural environment to improve levels of living (Kwesu, 2003). This means an agricultural development strategy requires at minimum, three basic elements; (1) accelerated output growth through technological, institutional and price incentives changes designed to raise the productivity of small farmers; (2) raising domestic demand for agricultural output derived from an employment-oriented urban development strategy and (3) diversified, non agricultural, labour-intensive rural development activities that directly and indirectly support and are supported by the farming community. The crucial role played by women in agricultural production aims to achieve these sources and conditions necessary for rural and agricultural development (Malik, 2006).

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL HOUSEHOLD FARMERS**

According to The New Farmer (No 1, 2003) smallholder farmers were created to decongest the communal areas and were semi-subsistence. Although women pressure groups wanted their own `quota (CIMMITY, 2003) resettlement was for families represented by a household head rather than individuals (Utete, 2003). Smallholder farmers had no set criteria as to who deserved to have the land. They were resettled adjacent to communal areas by using farms that were adjacent to communal areas (URDC, 2004). Smallholder farmers had each a land holding of six hectares arable land, and all buildings at farms such as A1 were state property. The buildings are used as satellite schools, houses for civil servants, or occupied by farmers on a caretaker base (The New Farmer, No 3, 2005). It is from these attributes of new farmers that the main characteristic of smallholder farmers can be described as people of varied educational levels, having more male headed households as compared to female headed households, clustered on a demarcated farm, and with six hectares each. The research wanted to verify these characteristic and to add more features as well as to verify if smallholder farmers bear the characteristic of Zimbabweans in general, in terms of education, household heads and agricultural training. .

## **PRODUCTION LEVELS BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE SMALL HOUSEHOLD FARMERS**

Women are actively involved in agricultural practices but the degree of involvement of men and women vary according to different activities. Male headed households are more productive compared to female headed households (Brown et al, 1992). Women have little access to the benefits of research and innovation resulting in low productivity level (Koe et al, 1999). Their roles and needs are often ignored when devising technology even when technology is appropriate for their use. Lack of financial resources hinders the purchase and use of such technology by women. This has a great impact in their productivity (Jiggins, 2006). There are many cultural, social and physical obstacles for low participation and productivity of female in agriculture such as extension services (Mougeot, 1999). Moreover, the male dominating society is also the hindrance to female participation and productivity (Koe et al, 1999). Women's access to improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides is limited. Women farmers are frequently not reached by extension services and are rarely members of cooperatives which distribute government subsidized inputs to small farmers. Extension

services are usually directed towards male such that their productivity is higher compared to female (Rabinowicz, 2002).

Contrary to this view,( Frankenberger, 1992), argued that women are intensively involved in agriculture and they play a major role such that their productivity is higher than that of male households. Women contribute more towards the national output and a greater percentage of food supply is ensured by female households (Rukuni, 2001). Women are responsible for at least 70% of the food staple in Africa and they are the major suppliers of agricultural labour (Bolding, 2003). This research therefore, seeks to reveal the current major contributor to the total output as well as the reasons justifying that higher output. Also the research is using maize (since it is the main staple crop) to compare the production levels such that the view that women are responsible for a greater percentage of food supply is verified. It will go further and reveal the means that could be employed to increase the yields for women smallholder farmers to ensure food security, growth and development.

### **WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL DECISION MAKING**

Rural women are heavily involved in almost all aspects of agricultural production but their share in decision-making is not commensurate with the amount and type of agricultural work they shoulder (Jiggins, 2006). While women are heavily involved in livestock production, with the exception of herding and marketing, decisions related to when to buy or sell, when to vaccinate, feed or water, lie most often with the male members of the household (Brown et al, 1992). Furthermore, men have complete control in financial matters such as in credit and loans, marketing and allocation of subsequent generated income, land selling and land rental transactions (Malik, 2006). Decision making at household level continues to be male dominated in all economics activities even those in which women contribute most of the labour (Ukete, 2001).

According to AREX (2004), in male headed households, men dominate decision making. In female headed households (60% of households in the communal areas), women are responsible for farm management decisions. In households where the husband is absent, men still make a large proportion of the decision regarding sale of crops and use of money (Kerlinger,1998) However the majority of women make decisions on how to spend the income generated from their own activities such as market gardening (Hanyani, 2005). Men most often decide alone on the priorities for the family and participate predominantly in



community meetings at which major decisions regarding smallholder agricultural development are made (URDC, 2004)

In regards to tenancy, landless women do not make significant participation in farm management decision making. Landless women undertook farming on leased land and could not as such take a major decision that has to do with the land without the owner's consent (Utete, 2001). Female households also have less ownership of assets compared to male households (Malik, 2006). Their level of participation in farm management decision making is quite low. .

### **Factors affecting women decision making**

Hanyani (2005) further indicated the factors affecting the role of women in decision making such as age, level of education, wealthy status and size of land holding. He argued that decision making is affected by age such that older women participate more in decision making and high level of knowledge and experience helps women to influence major decisions in farm management. <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/> Wealthy status being a major determinant of the role of women in farm management decision making, the more financially strong women are, the more their involvement in decision making process (Sikandar, 2005). It is from these attribute of ( Jiggins, 2006) that the main factors affecting decision making can be described as education levels, age, wealthy status and land ownership.

### **Research methodology**

The descriptive survey method was used on a population of 300 smallholder households. A sample of 52 households was randomly selected. The data collection was through a formal household questionnaire, personal interviews. Data was analyzed using the statistical package for social scientist (SPSS).

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

**Table 1: Characteristics of small householder farmers**

Characteristic	Details	Male % N=42	Female % N=10	Total %
Marital Status	Single	1.9	0	1.9
	Married	44.2	9.6	53.8
	Widower	5.8	0	5.8
	Widowed	0	21.2	21.2
	Divorced	0	7.7	7.7
Families with extension training		86.76	19.24	93.2
• Main Occupation	Farming	36.5	9.6	46.1
	Casual Jobs	21.2	5.8	27.0
	Formal Jobs	11.5	3.8	15.3
	Owns a Business	11.5	0	11.5

Source: Primary data (2011)

As shown in the table 1 above, 53.8% of the total sample of smallholder farmers, were married, 44.2% being married male households and 9.6% being female households. 44.2% of the married male households imply that there are 44.2% female households married to these male household such that if we include total percentages of female households who are divorced and 21.2% widowed, we get the total number of female household who are actively involved in smallholder agricultural activities. Therefore a total of 82.7% female households in smallholder farming entail almost a 100% of active participation by women in smallholder agriculture. Usually women participate more in extension trainings held in rural areas compared to male households who are always off farm . this is shown by 93.2% of families who receive extension trainings. This indicates that more women receive agricultural trainings compared to male households and they participate fully in those trainings. In terms of occupation, a total of 44.2% of the male households do not take farming as their main occupation. Most of them have casual and formal jobs as well as their own jobs such that they are always off the farms, many male farmers do not take farming as their main occupation. Only a greater percentage of female households rely on farming and they are always on farm. This is indicated by 73.1% of the total female households who are highly participating in smallholder farming and they take farming as their main occupation and reduce the shortage of food in the rural area.

The table above had shown characteristics that women participate more in smallholder agriculture than male households and most women highly attends and receive extension trainings. A greater percentage of male households stay off farms and they do not take farming as their main occupation. This is supported by the view that women participation in smallholder agriculture is very high Their role can be determined by their level of participation.

**Table 2: Sizes and Age Of Small Household Farmers**

<b>Characteristic features</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Male N=42</b>	<b>Female N=10</b>	<b>Total N=52</b>
Household size	Mean	3.02	2.0	2.8
	Std Dev	2.53	1.56	2.4
	Sum	127	20	147
Household size Males	Mean	1.9	0.4	1.62
	Std Dev	1.43	0.7	1.44
	Sum	80	4	84
Household size Females	Mean	1.12	1.6	1.21
	Std Dev	1.47	0.97	1.39
	Sum	47	16	63
Age of plot owner	Mean	43.94	53.0	45.75
	Std Dev	12.80	10.55	12.80

Source: Mudavanhu et al (2011)

Male households age range from 31.-56. While female households range from 42.-63. this means female households have a longer life span compared to male households and they are more mature than men. This is shown by a smaller standard deviation for female households of 10.55. Due to a longer life span, most of the female households becomes widows with very large numbers of girl children. This relates to (jiggins, 2006) findings that most female households with farms are old and a number of them are widows due to a shorter life span of male households. (Chimedza, 2000) added that old and experienced female households are

involved in decisions making even though they consult their male children. Most of the female household heads are widows (Murombedzi C.J. et al, 2000).

The main characteristics of smallholder households were that women participate more in agricultural and rural development than male households and most women highly attends and receive extension trainings. A greater percentage of male households stay off farms and they do not take farming as their main occupation. In terms of age, male households range from 31.-56. while female households range from 42.-63.

### **PRODUCTION LEVELS BETWEEN MALE AND FEMAL SMALL HOUSEHOLD FARMERS**

**Table 3: Comparing Means and Average Maize Hectares of Small household Farmers**

<b>Sex</b>		<b>Maize hectares grown in 08</b>	<b>Maize hectares grown in 07</b>	<b>Maize hectares grown in 06</b>	<b>Maize hectares grown in 05</b>
<b>Male</b>	Mean	3.1220	3.5122	3.2692	3.5645
	Std. Deviation	1.6874	1.4339	2.3335	2.8099
<b>Female</b>	Mean	3.5000	3.5560	3.8750	3.7500
	Std. Deviation	1.5000	1.0138	2.6424	3.4538
<b>Total</b>	Mean	3.1900	3.5200	3.3723	3.6026
	Std. Deviation	1.6472	1.3589	2.3693	2.9046

Source: Interview data (2011)

From the Table 2, there was a general decline in allocating land for maize production. It was however noticeable that from the hectares each household own, at least half of the land was set for maize production. Although what was of great importance to this research was the yield per hectare for the households, the number of hectares allocated for maize production

could also enhance food security. Inadequate allocation of land for maize production could be compensated by an increase in maize productivity per hectare to ensure that there would be food security. Table 3 was used to compare productivity levels between male and female households.

**Table 4: Comparing Means; Average Maize Yields households from 2005 to 2008**

<b>Household</b>		<b>Maize yield in 2008</b>	<b>Maize yield in 2007</b>	<b>Maize yield in 2006</b>	<b>Maize yield in 2005</b>
<b>Male</b>	Mean	9.6122	10.3073	11.4333	12.9367
	Std. Deviation	9.9610	7.5499	13.0369	14.7830
<b>Female</b>	Mean	10.6667	10.1333	13.6125	14.4500
	Std. Deviation	7.9418	6.8233	15.1586	18.6437
<b>Total</b>	Mean	9.8020	10.4400	11.8043	13.2553
	Std. Deviation	9.5636	7.3570	13.2686	15.4090

Source: Primary data (2011)

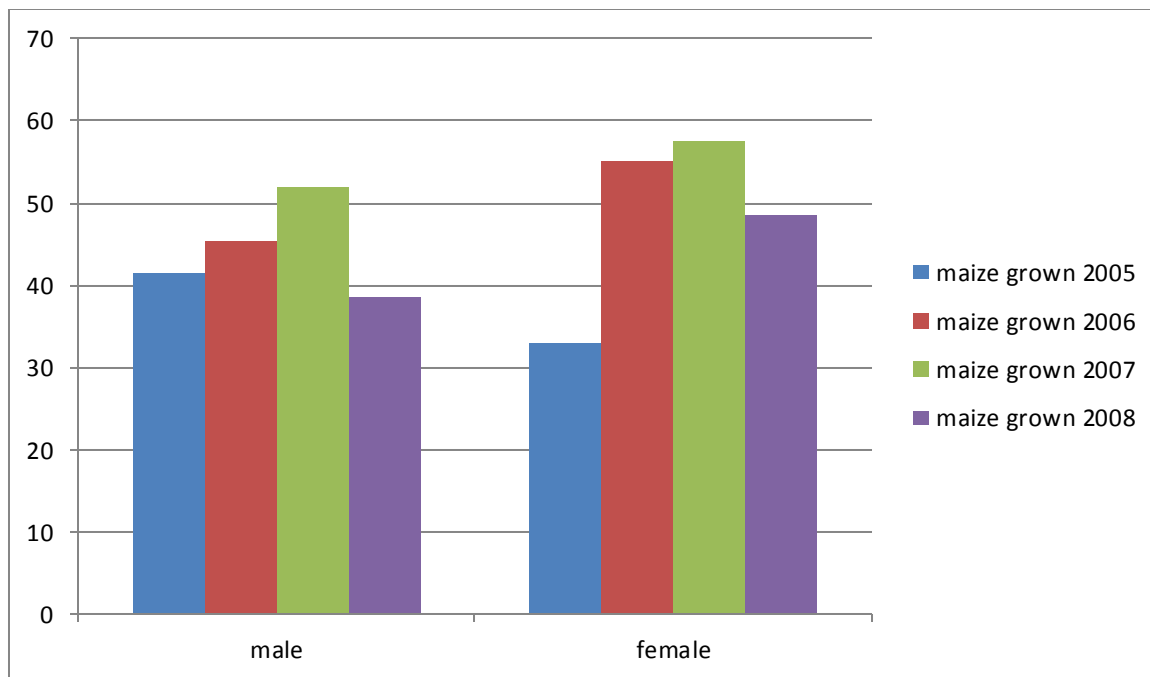
For Male households, the average yields were falling from 12.9367 tones per farmer in 2005 to about 9.6122 tones per farmer in 2008. When comparing these figures together with Table.2 on Maize Hectares Grown, there was a decline in both the average yield per farmer and the maize hectares allocated for maize. Added to this is the high standard deviation of greater than the mean in 2005, 2006 and 2008, and standard deviation level of 7.5499 against a mean of 10.3073 in 2007. This makes it not safe to rely on the mean because it means the absolute yields for the farmers are widely spaced and they were falling.

In Female households, although average yield per farmer was generally falling from 14.4500 in 2005 to 10.6667 in 2008, there is no relationship with the number of hectares allocated for maize production. Of concern is the high standard deviation, especially being above the mean in the first two years. Female households had the largest average land allocated to maize production, highest average maize yield per farmer, and a more stable and low standard deviation.

For all the households under study, hectares allocated for maize production fell gradually from an average of 3.6 ha per household in 2005 to 3.3723 ha in 2006 then rise again to 3.52 ha resting at a low average of 3.19 ha per household in 2008. However, average yields per household were falling from 13.255 in 2005 to 9.80 in 2008. Thus in Table 4.5 below, the absolute totals for maize hectares grown and the total yields for the hectare are presented. It appears that Female households still had an upper hand in terms of total hectares put under maize and in terms of the absolute maize production.

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**Figure 1: Gross Hectares cultivated and gross maize yields in metric tones**



Source: Primary data (2011)

Even though it has been revealed from the nature and characteristic analysis that most households are male headed with a percentage of 80.8% relative to 19.2% of female household and also that female households receive little agricultural training compared to male households, greater portion of women's land was allocated to maize production and higher yields were produced by female households. This result confirms (Frankenberger, 1992)'s view that women are intensively involved in agriculture and rural development, they play a major role such that their productivity is higher than that of male households. Also a high contribution between the periods by women confirms that women contribute more towards the national output and a greater percentage of food supply is ensured by female households (Brown et al, 1992). We can conclude with the World Bank (1998) statement that women are responsible for at least 70% of the food staple in Africa and they ensure food security within the economy.

## **ROLE OF WOMEN IN RURAL DECISION MAKING**

### **Major Decisions made by Small Household Farmers**

Major decisions made by smallholder farmers includes; Manpower planning, major crops to be grown, loan application, marketing and distribution, income use and major decision made during farming (in-household decisions) such as when to sow, fertilize or irrigate. Proportions of these major decisions made by female household compared to male are given in the table below;

**Table4: Major Decisions made by Smallholder Households**

<b>Major Decisions by Households</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Manpower planning	75.2	24.8	100
Major crops to be grown	54.3	45.7	100
Loan Application	75.2	24.8	100
Marketing and Distribution	80.5	19.5	100
Income Use	84.8	15.2	100
Major decisions during farming	30.1	69.9	100

Source : Interview data (2011)

As shown in the table, major decisions on farm management are made by male households relative to female households. This is shown by greater percentages of male households in all decisions. Of the total manpower planning decisions made, male households take 75.2% while women cover only 24.8%. On marketing and distribution, male covers 80.5% while 19.5 is left for female households. Financial decisions concerning the use of income as well as decisions on loan application rest in the hands of male households. This is inline with the idea that men have complete control in financial matters such as in credit and loans (Bolding, 2003).

From the previous results on household characteristics, male households had a greater percentage of Agricultural training received and a number of them were educated better than female households. Most of them did not take farming as their main occupation; as a result

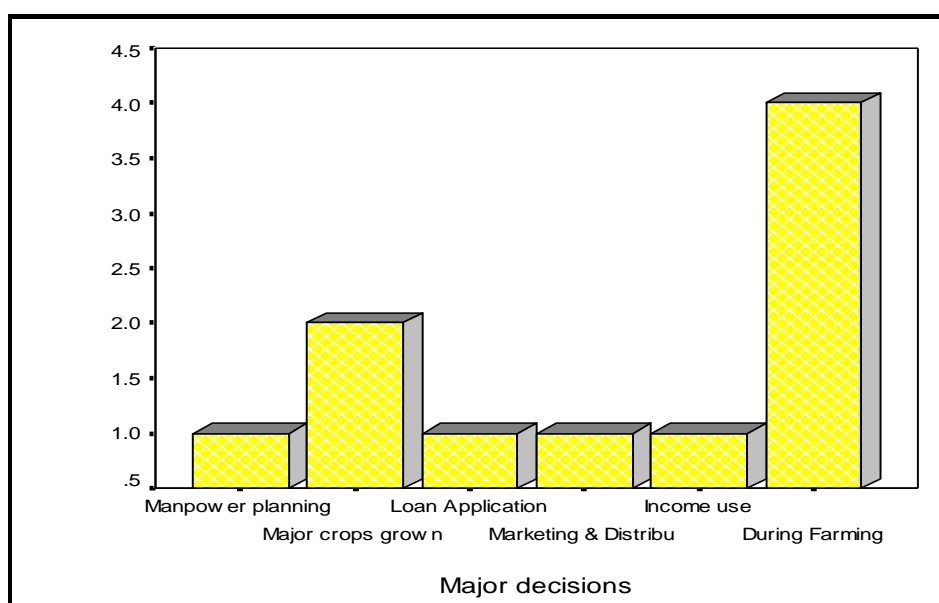


they stay off farms. While they are off farm, major decisions during farming (in-household decisions) are made by female households who stay on farm. This justifies a greater percentage of 69.9% of the decision made by women during farming as compared to 30.1% of male households.

The research reviewed that decisions concerning the need to apply for a loan as well as those decisions concerning the use of income after produce are made by male even though a greater percentage of them stay off farm. This means the role of women in decision making is mainly centred on farm and during farming. They make decision directed to farming activities such as when to plough, cultivate and when to sow as well as the seed types; decision regarding field crops. It's also a women's role to decide on the type of labour to be used as well as monitoring them although greater part of manpower planning is done by male. This support Rukuni (2001) findings that rural women's major work ranges from crop production up to harvesting operations and major decision they make are directed to on-farm activities. This is shown on the figure below which shows only Female household decisions. A greater percentage of their decisions are made during farming which is 30.1% compared to 69.9% for male.

### Major decisions by women.

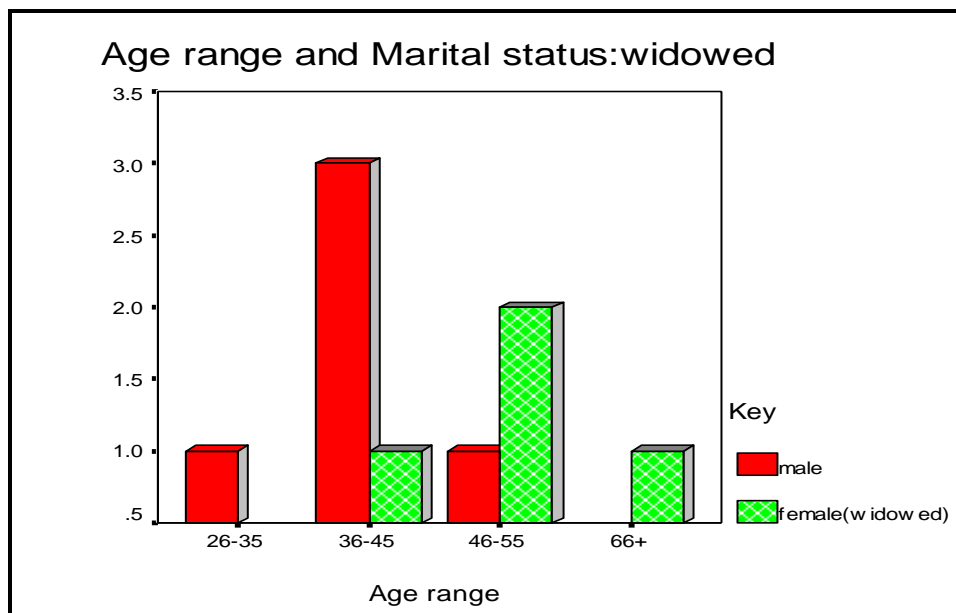
**Figure 2: Major decisions by female households**



Source: Mudavanhu et al (2011)

The study also revealed that decision making is affected by age and that older women participate more in decision making than young age groups. They are between the age ranges of 36-45, 46-55 and 66+. Most of the female households who make decisions are widowed compared to married and divorced. This is shown in fig.2 below.

**Figure 3: Age range and status**



Source : Primary data (2011)

### Property Ownership

To determine property ownership between female and male households, table 5 was used. Household property has been classified in three major categories that are Household assets, Productive assets and Livestock. Household assets included wheel barrows and solar panels while Productive assets are those assets directly linked to production for example animal drawn plough, cultivators and planters. Ownership proportions were given as follows;

**Table 5: Property Ownership**

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Household Assets	11.5	9.6	21.2
Livestock	40.4	3.8	44.2
Productive Assets	28.8	5.8	34.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>80.8</b>	<b>19.2</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Mudavanhu et al (2011)

As shown on the table, 11.5% of the total household assets are owned by male household while 9.6% is owned by female households. On livestock and Productive assets, male households own 40.4% and 28.8% while female household own 3.8% and 5.8% respectively. It has been revealed that 80.8% of all the farm assets are owned by male households while

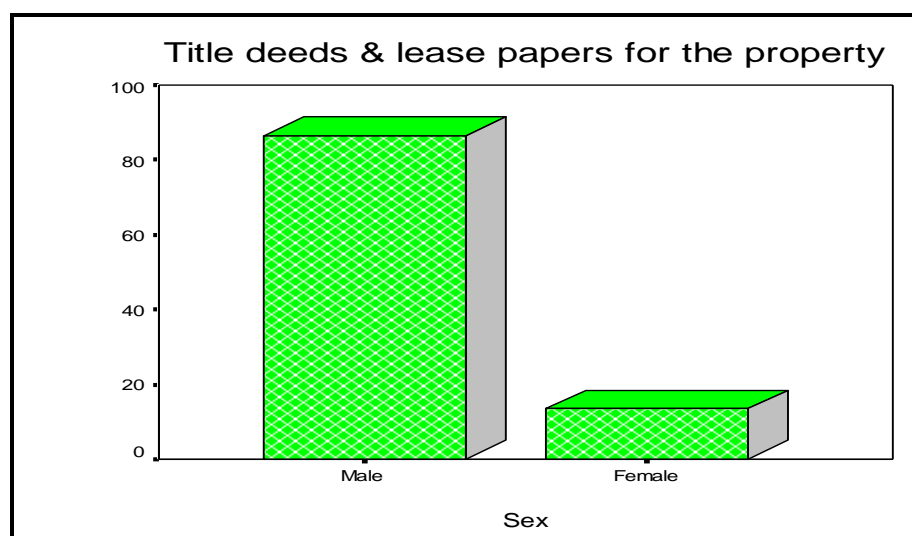
19.2% is owned by female household. The greatest percentage of female ownership was on household assets which they use on daily basis and are owned by very few female who are household heads, the rest were owned by male. This justifies women's low participation in decision making since they can not make decision on asset which they do not own.

These findings supports the idea that decision making at household level is male dominated in all economic activities even those in which women contribute most of the labour (Ukeje, 2001). Women are underrepresented in the decision making process and their role in decision making tends to be marginalized. Assets like livestock and productive assets, men make the decision alone. Very few female households are consulted as shown by 80.8% relative to 19.2% of female therefore women participation in decision making is very low.

### **Title deeds and land ownership**

Very few female household heads had title deeds for their land. Those few female households who had title deeds for their land had lease agreement papers. This mean they had the right to lease their land and to make major decisions over their property. These female households' heads constituted only 13.5% while 86.5% were male headed. Thus a greater portion of land belongs to male household and major decisions were made by male in the district. This is shown on the figure below;

Figure 4 : Title deeds and lease paper



Source : Primary data (2011)

As shown on the diagram, 86.5% of male headed households who own property title deeds and lease papers imply that major decisions concerning land are made by male household. Very few represent women in decision making. Landless women undertook farming on leased land and can not take a major decision that has to do with land without the owner's consent. This is in line with ( Rukuni ,2001) view that women are underrepresented and men have complete control in financial matters, land selling and land rental transactions (Jiggins, 2006).

The greater percentage of farm property is owned by men and most of the households are male headed resulting also in a greater percentage of male households having title deeds and lease papers compared to female household. Major decisions are also made by men therefore; we can conclude that women are marginalized in terms of decision making. The study also revealed that decision making is affected by age, Level of education and wealthy status. Older women participate more in decision making than young counterparts. Also high level of knowledge and experience helps women to influence major decisions in farm management. Wealthy status being a major determinant of the role of women in farm management decision making, the more financially strong women are, the more their involvement in decision making process ( Malik, 2006). (Hanyani, 2005) idea has been proved to be correct that; factors such as age, wealthy and level of education lead to lower participation of women in decision making.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study found out that women play an important role in reducing absolute poverty in the rural Zimbabwe. Women participate more in agricultural and rural development and provide food security. A greater percentage of, males stay off farms and do not take farming as their main occupation. Women contributed more to the national output and ensured food security and development in rural Zimbabwe, but women have less ownership of land, livestock, and productive assets, therefore they cannot make decisions over things they do not own. Women are marginalized in terms of property ownership, decision making and policy formulation, even though they play important roles in reducing absolute poverty and rural development in Zimbabwe.

The important role played by women in the agricultural and rural development cannot be overlooked, through this, the battle for absolute poverty will be won.

The study recommends that women should be empowered through training and the provision of appropriate technologies that are gender sensitive, land ownership, financial support, involve women in decision making and policy formation. Government should initiate women social and economic welfare projects to facilitate their vital role in agricultural and rural development for the benefits of the nation as a whole.

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