Current trends on women’s participation in aquaculture / fish farming and future prospects; the Zimbabwean perspective: a case of Siabuwa Community in Binga District; Matabeleland North Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study to explore challenges impeding women’s participation in fish farming/aquaculture in Zimbabwe’s marginalized communities was carried out in Siabuwa area of Binga District; Matabeleland North Province. The treatise’s main thrust was to establish the current status of women’s involvement in projects earmarked for community development as elsewhere, particularly Africa’s fast developing economies women have been central in advancing rural livelihoods. The study endeavored to streamline women’s contributions in different sectors of the economy, barriers encountered and the possible benefits that can accrue from the aggregation of women into community based income generating projects. A qualitative approach augmented with descriptive design in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of livelihood issues from participants was employed. Experts from the government of Zimbabwe’s Livestock Development Unit (LPD) and other stakeholders partnering the government in the district provided secondary data in the form of archival material and records and which were so essential in the compilation of the required relevant facts. Questionnaires and interview guides were the main instruments used to collect primary data from a sample of 50 subjects, who were purposively selected from a population of 400 inhabitants of Siabuwa community. The data collected were analyzed through descriptive statistics where tables, frequency counts and percentages were finally used for purposes of presenting the findings. The findings revealed that though women are segregated from active participation in community projects they have the potential to make immense contribution in areas of management, production and marketing which are crucial facets for sustainable community development. It is therefore opined that the inclusion of women in fish farming would usher a new dimension which would go a long way in an endeavor to address gender inequality in Zimbabwe’s rural communities.

Key words; Women’s participation in aquaculture, fish farming and future prospects, community development, Zimbabwe’s marginalized communities

I. Background of Study

Women’s participation and influence in the aquaculture, the farming of aquatic organisms, is marginally formally recognized in most African nations as it has always been marred by culture, religion and political factors which are a major stumbling block in addressing gender inequality issues. Aquaculture is the farming of diverse kinds of aquatic plants and animals of different species in water (FAO, 2014). FAO, (2016), opines that aqua farming has the capacity to create physical and social economic sustenance of rural communities, where fishing activities are seriously undertaken. According to Edwards, (2015) aquaculture originated from Asia and has become a global center of industrial aquaculture development. In Africa, Zimbabwe has comparatively advanced aquaculture and is among the best fish farming countries in Sub-
Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, the growth in the aquaculture industry has been largely attributed to the critical contribution of women (Olufayo, 2012). Medard, et al. (2017), assert that in Tanzania’s Lake Victoria, men control the production sector while women dominate the fish marketing system and only 2.1% of women have been appointed to senior managerial positions. It has been noted that women’s reluctance to be actively involved in aqua-farming has had negative implications on the fishery sector’s ability to sustain people’s livelihoods and national economy. It is therefore premised that, women’s involvement in managerial positions in aqua-farming is fundamental to advance socio-economic aspects and community development for the disadvantaged societies.

Failure to consider females in higher positions in community projects is not a result of lack of expertise but assumed to be due to obstacles related to the historical African perspective which regards women as always second to their male counterparts. Besides a study by Maposa and Mugabe, (2013), has shown the significance of the social responsibilities of women as they had great obligation in the past hence their performances could inspire other women of today. In Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, women have managed to occupy and do a sterling job in the field of politics, public offices as well as schools management where excellent results have been displayed. Owing to economic hardships faced by women in marginalized rural communities, fishing in available water bodies has become the only viable option for sustainable livelihood opportunities. Women in aquaculture have now turned out to be preferred points of contact for public authorities in respect of social issues and safety at seashores as cited by (Frangoudes, 2013). It has become a general phenomenon that whenever men migrate to urban areas for better fortunes or are committed elsewhere, women always assume their responsibilities. The involvement of women in fish farming and other farming activities to boost productivity, arguments well in defining the critical role played by women in advancing community development in Zimbabwe. It is therefore imperative that non-involvement of women in decision making positions in rural agriculture encourages gender disparity and breeds social and economic injustices in communities.

Siabuwa community enjoys relative fishing activities from the Zambezi River and other small inland dams found within Binga district. The community is located a mere hundred kilometers from Binga District centre where packaging of dried fish and wholesale marketing is done. The proximity of the area to the district’s largest fishing camp, Mujele along the Zambezi River keeps the supply of fish to the market constant. Complementing the supply from the natural water bodies are, three fish ponds and a night storage dam which were constructed by Basilwizi Trust, a non-governmental organization (NGO) popular in the area. FAO, (2010) asserts that aquaculture production using the pond system may be a reliable source of obtaining improved fish species that can enhance productivity to meet the ever escalating demand from the growing populations in developing nations. It has been noted that fish farming has managed to advance the livelihood of participating farmers by refining their nutrition and boosting income generation through fish sales. As most fishery projects are managed by men it is perceived that aggregating women as active participants would bring a paradigm shift which would transform the artisanal fish farming into a lucrative business. Thus, women are therefore expected not to shun themselves but to be actively involved in decision making roles so as to break gender barriers which are a possible cause for disparity.

The cultural dilemma has been cited as the root cause of discriminatory tendencies which impacted negatively on women’s participation in a diverse of projects in Zimbabwe. For years this has resulted in the exclusion of women from activities earmarked for community development. The drafting of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of (2009) ushered in a new dimension as its Goal number three had thrust on the need to promote gender equality through women and the girl child participation in community projects as a way of women empowerment. In an effort to adopt and implement MDG number three Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Gender and Community Development was mandated to address imbalances in gender equality to promote women’s empowerment through active involvement in community projects. In addition, the adoption of gender policies provided a platform where women would compete equally for managerial posts with their male counterparts. As this is not the case in most Zimbabwe’s rural communities a study to establish current trends on women’s participation in fish farming and prospects which can result from such an incorporation of women in to community development projects was carried
out. Thus the study was premised on rectifying the effects of women’s exclusion and marginalization from viable projects and the mainstream economy.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Lack of women’s participation in fish farming/ aquaculture and other sectors of production has been a common practice in Zimbabwe’s marginalized communities where culture dictates what roles women have to play in society. Agitating the situation was the launch of the fast track land reform program which brought in a new dispensation in the country’s land tenure systems where major resources inclusive of land were allocated to men, who eventually became the major beneficiaries of such schemes. The widening gap of women’s involvement in community projects impacted negatively on the sustainability of management practices and the viability of a wide range of projects in most communities as men would at any given time migrate to urban centers to seek for better options on income generating. It is therefore against this backdrop that a study aimed at establishing the impediments which detour women from active participation in community projects; with particular reference to women’s involvement in fish farming in Zimbabwe’s Binga district of Matabeleland North Province was carried out.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of the study was to explore current trends on women’s participation in fish farming and identify the future prospects of the business expansion through women’s involvement. Central to the treatise however were the following specific objectives;

- To explore and establish the current status of women’s participation in fish farming/aquaculture in Zimbabwe’s marginalized communities
- To examine the challenges impeding women’s participation and prospects of advancing rural livelihoods through women’s involvement in community projects.

II. Research Methodology

The study employed the qualitative approach with descriptive design in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of challenges hindering women from active participation in community projects, and generating what they perceived to be the benefit of their involvement in such ventures. Experts from the government of Zimbabwe’s Livestock Development Unit (LPD) and other stakeholders partnering the government in the district provided secondary data in the form of archival material and records and which were so essential in the compilation of the required relevant facts. Questionnaires and interview guides were the main instruments used to collect primary data from a sample of 50 subjects, who were purposively selected from a population of 400 inhabitants of Siabuwa community. The data collected were analyzed through descriptive statistics where tables, frequency counts and percentages were finally used for purposes of presenting the findings.

III. Results and Discussion

4.1 Current women’s contribution in aquaculture in the study area

The respondents were asked about women’s contribution in fish farming and how they perceived the significance of such contribution in community projects.

Table 4.1: Current women’s contributions in the study area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women contributions</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results indicated that women have the capacity to contribute significantly to fish farming industry in Zimbabwe’s rural communities. The respondents showed that women contributed significantly in areas such of; management 20%, production 25%, marketing 32% and security 20%. Participants believed that though stigmatized, women had the potential to contribute immeasurably in management, production, and marketing sectors of community projects. This concurs well with Olufayo (2012), who asserts that women can be a pillar in the extensive growth of fishery industry in developing economies. It was established that sustainability in community projects would only be achieved through incorporation of women and according them equal opportunities in such projects. Although, women are segregated in many activities it was also noted that youths who constitute a special segment of human resources in rural communities were not fully utilized as they were found to be engaged mostly in off-farm activities. Elsewhere it has been noted that youths may provide the essential workforce if rendered the opportunity to participate in projects earmarked for community development. Instead, some men during the field visit retorted that women had to spend much of their time guarding homesteads with their families as the area is heavily infested with wildlife. From the observation it can be deduced that when presented with equal opportunities women can perform better or out compete their male counterparts.

4.2 leadership qualities portrayed by women in the study area

![Figure 4.1: Women leadership abilities](image)

The findings indicated that women had capabilities in motivation 14%, Delegating 10%, trustworthiness 16%, creativity 18% and taking responsibilities 16% among other attributes. The majority of participants pointed out that that women exhibited good leadership skills and when presented with equal opportunities would perform better than their male counterparts. Though women had other social commitments, it was noted that they also budgeted time efficiently to give practical attention to their responsibilities in community development projects. The failure by communities to recognize women’s good leadership attributes has impeded progress and development of projects in most rural communities. As such the segregation has become the main source of gender disparity and has fueled social and economic injustices.
4.3 Challenges encountered by women in fish farming

The findings from the respondents showed that women lag behind as they always lack access to information and continuous training. The traditional roles prescribed for women as well as fisheries policies and Council levies have been cited to be other major obstacles. Zimbabwe’s National Water Authority ZINWA and Environmental Management Authority EMA, while collecting levies from participating farmers were cited as not doing enough in providing technical expertise in advanced technologies on fish farming and identifying viable markets for the industry. Farmers perceived that training on fish farming practices, production; marketing and post-harvest management lacked the technological aspect of the digitalized agriculture and the importance of using modern Information Communication Technologies ICTs in fish farming and agriculture as a whole. As alluded to by Chisango, (2017) it is imperative that new farming systems need to incorporate new communication technologies to enhance efficiency and performance so as to boost productivity.

4.4 Prospects of improved livelihood and community development

“One participant on responding to why being actively involved in fish farming recounts”,

(So that I and my family can develop together with the community)

The fish farming projects enhances the opportunities for employment for the community based population. There are great opportunities for opening up space for vast employment opportunities for both youth and women as the projects develops. It was established that participation in the fisheries industries revived the agrarians to fend for their families and nourish their diet. The fisheries gave an opportunity for income generation. In addition, farmers used this opportunity to raise some remuneration to pay tuition fees for their children and for other purposes. Also, the farmers indicated that the farm provided practical self-development techniques on fish farming methods. Some agriculturists preserved their partaking as an opportunity to acquire knowledge bases in order to impart knowledge on other members of the community. Others majored that they desired to practically develop self and the community through the project availability. The non-involvement and participation of women can have a tremendous negative impact both on means of support and community development. Therefore, it is ascertained that women needs to be involvement in the community development projects in order to advance rural livelihoods and reduce gender inequalities.
IV. Recommendations

- It was established that sustainability in community projects would only be achieved through incorporation of women and according them equal opportunities in such projects. It is therefore paramount that women need to be regarded as a vital segment of human resources in rural communities who when fully utilized greater achievement can be scored.
- Though women have other social responsibilities and commitments as prescribed by gender and societal norms, it was noted that they are very efficient in terms of time budgeting as they devote the greatest part of their time to projects and activities meant for community development. It is therefore imperative that the inclusion of women fuels success of most projects in rural communities.
- Stakeholders such as Zimbabwe National Water Authority ZINWA and Environmental Management Authority EMA, apart from collecting levies from participating farmers must be seen to be actively involved in providing technical expertise in advanced technologies on fish farming and assist in identifying viable markets for the farmers.
- Communities need to have a paradigm shift and start to view fish farming as a viable opportunity for income generation to sustain the livelihood of rural communities. It is paramount that women’s participation and involvement must be emphasized so that they play a pivotal role in boosting productivity to curb the donor dependency syndrome which is so prevalent in the study area and Binga district as a whole.

Reference(s)