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Being a Wife of a Climatic Migrant: The Expanding Effects of Climate Change on Rural Women Left Behind

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Abstract:

The research explored the impact of environmental migration towards women left behind by their husband in Chivi Rural Community. Environmental migration is basically conceptualised as the movement of people from one society to the other because the society of origin do not have weather conditions to support one's livelihoods. The unsustainability nature of the rural community livelihoods has significantly forced majority of men to migrate to other countries to support their families left behind. The women are being left behind in the Chivirural community as members of the family and the greater community. This would mean greater responsibilities for women in taking care of the remained family members through various forms, whilst men are responsible for supporting their families as well with various forms of remittances. Considering that women are left within the context of community, and women demeaning patriarchal fibres of the extended family, it was of great interest to explore the economic, social and psychological challenges women in rural communities are facing due to their men's migration. In exploring this social phenomenon, a qualitative methodology was chosen as the most appropriate methodological approach, with in-depth and Key Informant interviews adopted as data collection material from 25 participants, mainly women who have their husbands in diaspora. The data elicited have reflected that women in rural areas who have their husband in diaspora are facing enormous, social economic and psychological challenges, despite receiving remittance from their husbands. This is due to pressure posed by the extended family culture, struggling enterprising projects, lack of human rights specifically women's rights, and deterioration of all forms of agricultural projects in the Chivi Community. On the other hand, the remittances of the diaspora husbands have proven to be useful for educated women who know their rights, who can manage small businesses professionally, who control amount of respect in the community and take their children towards the proper route of education. In short, migration has successfully changed the lives of people in many societies, but for Chivi rural community migration has proved to be a fiasco in improving community quality of life. This is attributed to lack of skills amongst those migrants, and also failing adaptive capacities for wives and families left behind. This background therefore calls upon various local and international stakeholders to work in collaboration to come up with a comprehensive strategy that ensure the sustainability of the community livelihoods.

Keywords: Climate Migration, Migrations, Quality of Life, Women Challenges, sustainability, Rural Livelihoods

1. Background

The recent reports on climate change have confirmed that climate change is the driving factor behind the sudden changes in the modern day's biophysical environment which is affecting water resources, human settlements, and the service of the ecosystem (IPCC, 2014). Climate change is an environmental problem that has the potential to adversely affect the human security, human rights and the economic security of the rural communities (Misselhorn, 2005). The changing climate is regarded as perhaps the most environmental threat to fight poverty, malnutrition, diseases and hunger in Africa, mainly due to the devastating impact of this phenomenon towards agricultural economies which the continent sole depend upon. It is a phenomenon that has the potential for undermining the public enjoyment of human rights, specifically people on the frontline of the devastating effects of climate change, because such individuals have generally contributed least to the occurring climatic phenomenon (Low, 2005). The rural community population are some of the vulnerable individuals whose right to livelihoods security has been violated. In statistical terms, it is estimated that more than three billion of world population do live in the rural communities of the developing countries, and most of them are depended on agriculture for the livelihoods, however most of them are living on less than 2\$ a day (Bulkeley, 2003). The most pressing factor for these communities is that, the developing countries are critically lacking resources for fighting the effects of climate change (Adger, 2003). The security of humanity is directly linked environmental security, energy security, food security and security from violence, and the vulnerability of rural communities to all these forms of insecurities and anxieties due to climate change is the main reason behind the unsustainability of rural community life (Agoumi, 2003). The speed and the general intensity of the changing environment are very dramatic and it is outpacing the very speed of autonomous community adaptations and thereby

threatening the rural ability to cope with this challenging phenomenon (Martin, 2010). The Farmers in Africa are facing the probability of cumulative crop failures and this would mean subsistence farmers will not be able to cope with climate change due to under capacity, and this will increase malnutrition, diseases, and hunger in the general community. The United Nations Conventions on Climate Change have projected that a significant amount of over \$80 billion may be required by 2010 in order protect the rural livelihoods of the developing countries (IPCC,2007).

Zimbabwe is one of the members of the developing countries that belong to the semi-arid region that have precipitation and temperature patterns that do pose danger to the agricultural production of the country (Phiri, 2014). The government of Zimbabwe have also considered that climate change is a national threat that has the potential to undermine the country's desire to meet the millennium development goals (Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate, 2012). The impacts of this scaring phenomenon are reflected in increasing droughts, heat waves and other weather patterns variability. The government have even considered that climate change is one of the economic, social and political challenges of the modern Zimbabwe, as the phenomenon is identified as the main factor that is stalling the developmental progress of the country. The most vulnerable group are the rural communities whose livelihoods rely only on Agriculture (Cooper, 2008). Zimbabwean community farmers are the most affected groups as their livelihoods are being put at stake. The rural community life has been made worse by the fact that, the country is facing serious economic crisis, of which governmental attention is being directed towards climatic symptoms like fighting diseases, unemployment and not necessarily coming up with comprehensive strategy to deal with root cause which is climate change. The climate variability in the country has been pointed as posing serious geographical, social, economic and political challenges on the struggling rural communities in the country. In response, the struggling people who desire to feed their families may end up resorting to desperate risk solutions like migrating as climatic migrants (Drabo&Mbaye, 2011).

The patriarchal system in the Zimbabwean community is an important factor which is posing pressure for rural communities' men to find proactive solutions in times of family difficulties. As a result, majority of man are increasingly migrating from Zimbabwe to the neighbouring countries as an adaptation method to climate change, as they seek other avenues of survival. The risk involved in migration is the main reason why gender is increasingly the main determinant of the migration demographic group, especially for illegal migrants. The environmental migrants do not have legal protection in the hosting countries as they are not defined in the traditional definition of a refugee, and this makes the process so dangerous and man are expected to accept that challenge as a result of societal gender stereotyping (Bhasin, 2006). Migration as a growing phenomenon seem to have profound effects on the migrants themselves, but families left behind are also left to endure substantive responsibilities especially for women who have to take roles which were traditionally done by their male counterparts. Climate migration is one of the rising topical issues of the 21st Century; however, research is still required on the effects of migration towards various demographic groups, especially the most vulnerable members of the community like women and children. Researches regarding women and climate change have focused mainly on how women have played important roles in mitigating climate change, and how they have been affected by climate change at rural community level (Phiri et al, 2014, Cannon, 2002). However, there is need for an exploration of the relationship between climate changes, migration and its effects on women, an area that is very infant if not ignored in the modern literature. Chivi North is a part of the main Chivi district which is known as ward four in Masvingo Province, as semi-arid areas that falls in the poor climatic national regions of four and five. To improve the livelihoods of the community men, have no options except to migrate to the neighbouring countries yet, the information about the experiences of the women left behind in patriarchal familial set up remained scanty

1.1. Research Objectives

- To examine women's social, economic and psychological challenges of the rural communities left behind by migrants
- To explore some identifiable positive relationship between migration and quality of life for women left behind by migrants' husbands.
- To suggest recommended solutions that can improve the wellbeing of the women in rural communities

2. Methodology

The qualitative research approach was chosen as the most appropriate methodological approach for exploring the topic of this nature, mainly because it allows participants to provide the inside geo-cultural contextual rich information vital for this research. The data was collected using in-depth interviews, and Key-informant's interviews from 25 members of the Chivi North community who took part in this research. The sampling method for this research was based on snowballing and purposive sampling. Leveraging on community knowledge, the researchers were able to access many participants through many referrals. The data collection was made easier through the researcher's community research assistant, who was very vital for creation of rapport between the researcher and the participant. The research participants were mainly dominated by women of the migrant community, while other important community stakeholders like education officials, local police members, and community heads did take part in the research as Key Informants participants. The welfare of the women participants was guaranteed by the researcher's observation of privacy, and anonymity in the research, whilst informed consent was also important for harnessing commitment of all participants' stakeholders in the research.

3. Data Presentation and Analysis

3.1. Challenges of Women left behind by Environmental Migrants

3.1.1. Remittances and Extended Family Values

Remittances are continuously becoming source of livelihoods for climate prone communities and for people in Chivi rural communities it is the main source of livelihoods due to the crumbling of agriculture, and ill-timing of rainfall and the general vulnerability of the community to danger of famine. The extended family values of the Shona tradition are still binding in the Chivi rural community and they seem to pose a social and psychological hurdle for women left behind by their husbands in diaspora. In case of migration the whole family have a responsibility of pooling resources for a man who engaging in the risk journey of working in diaspora. It is such a move that create an obligation and a psychological contract for the men to support the whole family rather than one's distinct family. As result, the husband might choose to send remittance through members of his family which could be parents and other relative, usually a male. In seniority terms, the mother in law and the father in law are regarded with unquestionable respect in the Shona tradition by their daughters in law. As a result, women would rely on the generosity of their in-laws' in case of the husband could have send remittances back home. Financial freedom for women is highly curbed by the extended family culture of the community, and this expose the children of the migrant father, whose children are compromised on various child basic needs like health, education, nutritious food and other financial requirements that might arise (Giannelli& Lucia, 2010).

- “My husband has been sending money to his family on several occasions, but sometimes my in-laws' do not even tell me. Regardless, of modern forms of communication, my husband prefers to talk to his relatives and not to me his wife, and now my children are going hungry”

This can only demonstrate the level of deprivation that women are forced to endure, and also the vulnerability of their children. The livelihoods security which their husbands are fighting to bring back is being put under threat by the social economic context of the community. This means women cannot come up with some climatic mitigation programs or projects of livelihoods diversification because of the cultural system that requires challenge from policy makers and other interested stakeholders, especially women defenders.

Regardless of the above, there are moments and times when husbands would send remittances direct to their wives. This is ideal for a modern family set up; however, the women in Chivi North have reported some heart-breaking narrations regarding such an arrangement. The cultural tradition does pose some expectations towards the daughter in-law, where she has unwritten obligation to share with members of her in-laws'. However, due to the fact that, the family might not have the actual quantification of the valuable received, the daughter in law is always found in trouble for being self-centered, stingy and not respecting the size and dignity of the family.

- “Regardless of the fact that, I always try to share with my in-laws' all the staff I receive from husband, I am always perceived as an enemy of the family who squander the resources meant for the bigger family”

The women are always on the losing end, whenever fight escalate between daughter in laws and her husband's relatives. Cases of malicious framing of lies that is meant to damage the image of the daughters' in-law are very common, to an extent where family members would prefer to destroy the marriage of such women in their own family. It is this unstated pressure that women endure in the rural communities that always force them to declare everything they receive from their husbands to their in-laws', and share equivalently. Considering the fact that women in this scenario tend to have small families; in terms of sharing they tend to receive a smaller portion of the shared valuables. The pain of one's right can only be understood at individual point, such that some have chosen to quit marriage institution and work for themselves in other livelihoods avenues, mainly as cross border traders.

- “I could not bear it anymore, and I chose to leave that family and start my small cross border business....”

Therefore, in as much as migration is meant to improve the quality of life for families, it is of paramount importance to consider the traumatic experiences of the wives of the migrants, which they undeservedly suffer due to the detrimental driving factors of migration and climate change. These challenges have the potential to render children and wife more vulnerable to abuse and to poverty from the community and family (Piper 2005). In short, the desperation in the community is the main cause of community conflict as sources of livelihoods have been narrowed by the effects of climate change. Therefore, there is need for improvement in community agricultural techniques inspired by experts, natural resources management should be in line with local knowledge and there is need for coping strategies in case of disaster (Gandure, 2005). Such an approach requires the lobbying of ministry of women Affairs, together with various rural life defenders. The private, non-governmental organisation and other arms of government need to work in collaboration to come up with a comprehensive climate mitigation strategy as migration have proven to be a less sustainable adaptation method for the rural communities.

3.1.2. Struggling Scale of Community Gardening and Women

Migration is not a new phenomenon for rural communities, however the degree and the frequency of migration has increased remarkably due to the changing weather patterns as result of climate change. In case of absence of the father in a family, traditionally women would rely on small community garden projects, where they would grow a number of small scale cash crops that would in return improve their livelihoods through those income-generating projects. However, the research has found interesting information about the vulnerability of women who traditionally depend on such projects. The extreme weather patterns are increasingly supporting the breeding of various pests and agricultural diseases that destroys gardening projects. The cost of chemicals is so unbearable for a community that has lower levels of income. The baboons are also increasingly becoming messengers of climate change. Due to the environmental degradation, the vegetation that traditionally supported the survival of the monkeys and baboons in the forest have all been destroyed, and as result community gardens are the target of the wild animals of this nature.

- “Baboons and Pests are some of challenges we are having in the community gardening projects, and I have decided not to grow anything this year for that reason”

Basing on this mentioned idea, women challenges can only be attributed to the detrimental effects of climate change. In other words, climate change has made community life very unsustainable due to its damaging effects on the agricultural based sources of livelihoods. Women become the major victims because it is an economic area which they traditionally dominate, but it is now withered off by the damaging effects of climate change (Tichagwa, 1994). The community as a whole can have some collective efforts, where community energy could be directed towards rural afforestation in a bid to mitigate the effects of climate change (Martin, 2013). This can be supported through the Reward for Environmental Services Plan, where community can be compensated for various environmental friendly efforts (Piper, 2005). Therefore, environmental challenges cannot be addressed by a single agent or single stakeholder, as it requires a coordinated effort of local stakeholders together with international community. The regional, local, and international planning levels are needed to address the danger posed by climate change in order to fast track broad range of responses.

Migrants do not have a legal right to work in hosting countries, but on the other hand families could only rely on received remittances (Buch & Kuckulenz, 2002). This demonstrate the vulnerability of rural communities specifically women, who desperately require external support from various social stockholder who can play pivotal role in changing the precarious situation these women are finding themselves living. The vulnerability of women to climate related problems is posing a great call for women to participate in high profile negotiations on climate change, to make sure that their interests are catered for in all climate change related decisions and policies to be implemented (UNDP, 2009). The investment in variety of crops especially drought resistance crops could be a practical solution for vulnerable communities as Chivi rural area, a strategy that have been tried in other parts of western Africa and Asia (Nicholls, 2004)

3.1.3. Lack of Education and Entrepreneurial Projects Running

Women who are receiving remittances from their husbands are increasingly investing in small business endeavours with the aim of having some profit margins returns. The businesses vary from individual to individuals. Majority are investing in second hand clothes trading business which is popularly known as Mabhero. These are second hand clothes that women do buy for resale from places as far as Mozambique. However, due to lack of hard cash and electronic money in rural communities, running businesses continue to be a risk endeavour due to credit system. Besides, majority of women do not have the business acumen that is required in such an unpredictable business environment. One educationist in the community have mentioned that, *“community training is required if women are to run their businesses in a professional manner.”*

As they registered a number of losses, some have chosen to quit those enterprising projects. However, some have quitted the business as a result of social labels and community discouragements.

- “Many people have been laughing at me since I started my business, and they were questioning my ability to run business”

The Women’s self-efficacy have been destroyed by the community stereotyping and self-fulfilling prophetic behavioural approach. This was mainly due to the fact that most of these women do not have prior education background known by the community. Therefore, community programs that creates a culture of social and business entrepreneurship is very important if community livelihoods are to be diversified from agricultural based to other avenues. In short, the communities are killing the potential of women to open up other avenues of livelihoods, leaving them to rely on remittances` which are less sustainable. Furthermore, property investment is an area that women are struggling to engage in, mainly because in the community, buying a land by a woman is regarded as a sinister agenda of the woman to run away from the matrimonial house. As a result, women are found to be victims of consumerisms, where the money remitted becomes victim of conspicuous consumption. The can only give emphasis to the importance of girl child education if sustainable future is to be achieved (Goldstone, 2002). Basing on this point under discussion, the uneducated women of the society seem to be on the losing side of the times as migration is posing significant responsibility for women in the absent of their husbands.

3.1.4. Negotiation of Conjugal Rights upon Return and Anxieties

The rights of women in the rural communities are frustrated and are exposing women to serious psychological anxieties. Majority of them have reported the enduring fear of their husbands failing to secure stable jobs, however, HIV and Aids has been reported as the main cause of fear in their families. The Zimbabwe`s neighbouring countries have a significant record of HIV and AIDS victims. As a result, women do have the fear of virus being transmitted to them by their husbands (UNAIDS. (2013). However, due to bride price an exchange price paid between families; where the husbands literally buy a woman as own personal property. As a result, women, do not have the power to negotiate the rights and health safety with their husbands (UNAIDS. 2013).

- “I could not ask for protected sex or even to ask for test before engage in sex as it is hard for a woman”

This exposes women to HIV and Aids transmission, but on the other hand it makes them live a life full of uncertainties. The uncertainties come from the fact that, it has hard for a rural community to go and seek medical test for HIV and AIDS because such women may be accused of some promiscuity behaviours. On the same note, patriarchal dominations are also another factor stops women from suggesting medical test in a marriage relationship

3.2. The Opportunities in Migration

In circumstances were women are educated, successful utilisation of money in areas of small scale business have been reported. Besides, personal development and children`s education is the main priority for the educated rural population of women. Besides, the educated group seems to command a significant amount of respect amongst their family members and the community in general and they seem to entertain some freedom in running their business. Furthermore, the educated community women are also equipped with

information about their own rights and they tend to be abused less by their in-laws. As a result, the migration of their husbands is not gloomy and doom as it tends to open new avenues for their wives and families left behind (Maphosa, 2004). It is women of this nature that requires external financial support even in terms of low-interest grants and loans that would support educated and successful women of the community projects. The government should also take a proactive role towards women education, as education seems to provide the community with necessary community solutions that helps communities to come up with a comprehensive strategy to mitigate the effects of climate change.

4. Conclusion

The changing climate has seriously devastated the community livelihoods of the rural communities in Zimbabwe. Chivi rural community is one of the community areas that has fallen victim to the detrimental effects of climate Change. The deterioration of various forms of livelihoods mainly agriculture, has forced the man in the community to migrate to other countries as an adaptation strategy. This arrangement has left women assigned to a number of responsibilities within the family, especially with the allocation and use of family remittances. Due to the traditional patriarchal extended values of the community, remittances have increasingly become sources of conflict for rural women with their in laws, and this posed psychological tension in the lives of women in the Chivi community. Besides, women also continued to suffer from the struggling small scale agricultural projects that is also being victimised by the effects of the changing climate. The remittances that are being sent by their migrants' husbands are struggling to change the quality of life for women, due to lack of education, societal huddles, and lack of external support. Women are also vulnerable to HIV and AIDS diseases mainly due to the fact that rural women are still frustrated by the patriarchal system and the 'bride price custom' which rips off women's house in a marriage institution. Migration has helped to improve lives of many people in the world; however, it seems it works better for high skilled migrants. Besides, lack of education for women, lack of knowledge about rights and other cultural glass ceilings posed on them are some of the inhibiting factors for women's social mobility. The rural communities are evidently suffering to the negative sides of migrations as quality of life for families and women is seemingly deteriorating due to the social arrangement that is very unsustainable for village life. It is from such a background that there is need for local and international cooperation to make rural life more sustainable by bringing better technology for climate adaptation, helping in forest management, diversification of livelihoods, and also diversification of crops by introducing drought resistant crops in the community. This will be very vital in making life more sustainable for rural communities and at the same time protecting the vulnerable members of the community who are women and Children.

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