

**REPORT ON THE
SITUATION OF
WOMEN IN
ZIMBABWE**



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ZIMBABWE

Compiled by the Ministry of Community
Development and Women's Affairs.
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DEDICATION

The Women's Needs Assessment Survey was the work of a large team of committed women and some few men at all levels of Zimbabwean Society. This report is dedicated to:

All those women and men
committed to improving the
quality of life of all people
of Zimbabwe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people and agencies made the survey and this report possible. We are indebted to the following:

- The Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs, for the immense help given to the project team by the Minister, Cde. Teurai Ropa Nhongo, her Deputy, Cde. Nromi Nhiwatiwa; officials at national, provincial and grassroot levels for their tireless efforts to make the survey possible.
- UNICEF for the grant that made this study possible.
- Officials of other Ministries at all levels for their assistance.
- All those interviewed and consulted for their time and willingness to share with different members of the research team.

PRESENTATION

Part I, Section 1 gives the background to the survey, while the major findings are presented in Section 2. In Part II, women's participation in the economy through agricultural production, employment in the formal sector and women's informal involvement is discussed. Women's social needs are presented in Part III under health, education, legal status and family needs. Part IV covers women's participation in public affairs. Part V gives the summary and recommendations.

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PREFACE

Terms of Reference

The Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs in co-operation with UNICEF commissioned a nation-wide survey to assess the needs of women in Zimbabwe. The purpose of the survey was to provide baseline data, especially on rural women, from which the Ministry could find some basis for policy formulation, project proposals and planning programmes to meet these needs. It was suggested that the whole exercise take the shortest possible time—about four months.

Objectives of the Survey

Given the terms of reference above, (the general aim of the survey was to determine and describe the position and needs of women as perceived by women themselves and those people and agencies whose work relates to women.) In addition, women's participation in traditional and modern sectors of development were examined to identify factors that hinder or enhance such participation. The various socio-economic sectors (and/or institutions) including agriculture, health, education, employment, family, legal position and participation in public affairs provided the framework for assessing women's needs. A preliminary review of available literature had shown these areas as useful parameters for the survey. More specifically the objectives of the survey were:

1. To determine the demographic characteristics of rural and urban women in Zimbabwe.
2. To determine women's economic participation through an examination of their agricultural, informal and formal sector activities.

3. To examine factors that hinder or enhance the full participation of women in the above activities.
4. To determine women's aspirations in these areas of their lives.
5. To determine women's participation in family and community decision making processes as they relate to each of the above activities.
6. To determine how women related programmes as organised and offered by women's groups and other development agencies relate to felt and unmet needs.
7. To determine the attitude of men towards the position of women in various sectors.

In line with the Government's priority on improving the lot of the rural poor, the survey investigation concentrated on rural areas, mostly the peasant communal lands. A sample of 19 rural districts was randomly selected from the country's five provinces. In addition, four urban districts were chosen to represent the large and small urban areas. Three other residential areas in Salisbury were included for the views of non-black women (see map of districts visited at the end of the report, and Appendix 1 for the distribution of fieldworkers).

Twenty-three workers, mostly married women from the University of Zimbabwe, the School of Social Work and women's groups, given a three-day training and orientation to the survey and a pretesting exercise before being attached to a district to gather the necessary information.

Various methods were used to collect the data. Individual

interviews were conducted using a detailed structured questionnaire. A loosely structured questionnaire was used for group interviews. In addition, questionnaires were either mailed or administered to all of the 55 rural District Councils, some Ministries, Women's Organisations, some Development Agencies, Women Members of Parliament, extension and other Government workers in the sample districts. A total of 5 208 people were consulted in the process of gathering information.

The information presented in most of the tables in each section was based on a sample of 1 678 women interviewed individually. The majority of women would have preferred individual interviews in addition to the group interviews. However, time constraints did not allow for this. What is important to note is that the information gathered by either method has been subsumed in the analysis. In addition, existing studies on women in Zimbabwe and other third world countries were consulted.

Time Constraints

In view of the very limited time for such an enormous task, it was not possible to deal with all the issues raised exhaustively. However, this report of the situation of women in Zimbabwe based on first hand information and available literature, provides a comprehensive overview which we believe is adequate for selecting issues for policy formulation, project proposals, and programme planning. We have also identified some areas requiring further indepth study.

PART I

BACKGROUND TO WOMEN'S NEEDS

SECTION IBACKGROUND TO WOMEN'S NEEDS

Women are an integral part of any given society. They cannot therefore be treated as if they existed in a vacuum. However, it is necessary to isolate them for analytical purposes.

Black women in Zimbabwe constituted one of the numerous socio-economic groups of the colonial era. The combination of their traditional subordinate status and the racially segregated colonial system made them one of the most exploited groups of the time. It is therefore necessary to isolate and analyse women as an exploited group in order to effectively redress the imbalances created by tradition and colonial history. It is also opportune to compare the provision of the Lancaster House Constitution for rapid African advancement for an initial period of time with the need for some special measures to correct the imbalances between women and men. We would like to believe that the creation of the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs is in line with these special measures.

This survey of women's needs in Zimbabwe has to be looked at in the light of socio-economic and historical developments of the country. Briefly, the traditional economic system of the Shona and Ndebele societies was based on the family or household unit. The division of labour between women and men in these traditional societies has been adequately described elsewhere.¹ Women were chiefly responsible for the day to day activities of food production, processing and preparation. Men's agricultural activities seemed to have been limited to the sporadic tree felling, preparation of new fields and the provision of meat through hunting and/or raiding. Although women were valued for their labour, men controlled the means and instruments of production in addition to being managers, supervisors of women's and children's agricultural activities.

Women started off their married life in a weak socio-economic position, because they were primarily valued for producing children.² A newly married woman had little or no social status. However, her standing within the family and community increased with the size of her family. Infertility was and still is regarded in customary circles as legitimate grounds for divorce, or a good enough reason for a man to marry a second wife. It was not enough just to produce children. They had to be fed and maintained. A woman whose children died in childbirth or early childhood was often accused of witchcraft. Thus, a woman worked hard in her food producing role to feed and bring up her family. A lazy woman would be sent back to her people to be "taught" hard work. Laziness within the traditional society, particularly on the part of women, brought disrepute to the family. On the other hand, a hard working woman and mother of many children gradually strengthened her socio-economic position within the family and society. This is illustrated by the strong influence wielded by older women in family and village matters, an influence that her subordinate position would otherwise have not accorded.

There are two important and relevant things to the understanding of women's present position deriving from the traditional past. Firstly, the division of labour between women and men provided the basis of class division in the pre-colonial setting with men controlling the means as well as the end result of the production process.⁴ Secondly, societal values are not static but change to the general process of social change and in particular as traditional oriented societies come into contact with other cultures. The family as a basic institution in society is greatly affected by any changes such as those introduced by the colonial system.

What impact did the colonial era have on traditional Shona and Ndebele societies in general and on women's position in particular?

In Zimbabwe, the colonial period gave rise to a dual economy with a modern industrial and commercial agricultural sector on the one hand, and a largely poor and neglected peasant on the other. The modern sector depended on the supply of cheap labour from the traditional communal lands. Initially men from these areas were forced to provide labour through various ways (chibaro) and their migration was seasonal.⁵ However, the migratory labour system has become very much part of a way of life for many Zimbabweans. At the time of independence, for example, out of approximately 780 000 farming families in the peasant sector, about 235 000 families operated a split family survival strategy.⁶ This means that the husband migrated to an urban area, mine or commercial farm for wage employment, usually an unskilled or semi-skilled worker. The wife and children supplement his meagre wages through subsistence production. The wife as de facto head of household, family farm manager and labourer subsidises the modern sector by providing unemployment benefits and social security on retirement of the husband. According to the Zimcord Conference document,

"Production in the rural areas is, to a great extent left in the hands of women, children and the elderly while a large number of young men are employed in the modern sector and return to the rural areas occasionally or for retirement. This has had some significant effect in reducing the productivity of the rural sector."

How did the labour migration system affect the traditional division of labour, the roles and status of women and men? Firstly, women whose husbands were working elsewhere had their workload increased by doing those tasks formerly done by men. These tasks include the family farm, ploughing, cattle herding and assuming de facto head of household responsibilities except for the occasional visit of the man. However, because of their structurally subordinate position within the family, and men's control of the means and instruments of production, they still, to a large extent, are controlled and supervised by the men. Secondly, due to poor land

and climatic conditions of most communal lands, lack of technological inputs and labour constraints, women's food production efforts resulted in gradually decreasing yields especially in the latter part of the colonial era. This made women and children increasingly dependant on the wages of the men for food and other basics. This dependency together with the prestigious earning capacity of the man has had a negative effect on women's position and self-image. The association of women with subsistence production as an uneconomic activity has eroded the influence women had within the traditional society.

Within those peasant family units where the men were not migrants, the introduction of cash crops significantly affected the socio-economic position of women and men.^e Cash crop production was directed to men by a male dominated and oriented extension service system. The production of these crops (maize, cotton, tobacco, etc.) and their related technologies was largely in the hands of relatively better-off peasant farmers who could afford the initial capital as there were no credit facilities for the peasant sector. The modern agricultural methods required for these crops were imparted by male extension workers through the master farmer approach. For cultural and economic reasons women found it difficult, at least initially, to be part of the peasant sector cash crop production.

Women were however affected in various ways by the introduction of cash crops. The technological requirements of these crops sometimes increased the workload of women. Because certain tasks such as weeding, were traditionally women's tasks, women had to do a lot more weeding than was required in the traditional mode of production.

Secondly, it was traditional that a certain piece of land within the family field was designated as the wife's. This piece was variously known as zunde, tsu, isivanda and was used by women

for crops such as beans, groundnuts, sweet potatoes, yams, etc. These crops were used to supplement the staple food, sadza, from maize, rapoko, millets or sorghum and for barter purposes. Women had absolute control over the harvest from their pieces of land, and sometimes the harvest was substantial.⁹ The introduction of cash crops and general land shortage in the peasant sector contributed to the disappearance in many areas and reductions in a few others of the women designated pieces of land and their crops. One result has been an unbalanced diet, lacking essential nutrient requirements such as is provided by beans and groundnuts. Another result was that women have lost completely their right to tseu/zunde/isivande.

Women's food producing role appears then to have been very much weakened by male migration, introduction of cash crops and neglect by extension services. [The weakening of this role was accompanied by an increasing dependence on men's wages or money from cash crops, and a concomitant self-depreciation on the part of women.]

The position of the rural woman was somewhat better than the unemployed urban housewife in town who was entirely dependent on the husband. The overwhelming majority of black women in town belonged and still do, to this category. Black women constituted only 6,2% of the entire working population in the non-agricultural sector in 1979.¹⁰ Job discrimination during the colonial era was based on race and sex. This put the black woman on the bottom of the racial ladder after the white, coloured, Asian men and women, and black men. The net result for the woman in town was a lowering of status from her lack of an economic role such as she had through the traditional division of labour. Could it be possible that the supposed high birth rate of Zimbabwe was partly due to women wanting to enhance their status through the only way they perceived possible given the economic constraints of the time?

The legal position of women during the colonial era does not seem to have improved either. Traditionally a woman was a ward all her life, under the guardianship of her father or male relative before marriage, and under husband or his relative after her marriage.¹¹ Women did have limited property rights within the traditional society, mawoko/ezandla property for instance. This meant that whatever a woman received for her professional services such as midwife, *nganga* (doctor), pot etc., was hers to keep or dispose of as she wished. However, under laws formulated by colonial administrators based on an obvious misunderstanding or misinformation, if an African woman goes to work with the prior consent of her husband, she is not to have no right to her own salary and such accrues to her husband.¹² In practice this does not happen often. However, where it does happen, the husband is justified by law to have and to control the wife's salary. Inheritance laws of the colonial era, based on some traditional practices also discriminate and still do, against women.

The picture which emerges from this brief description of the colonial impact on women's lives is one of social subordination and economic dependence in varying degrees, depending on rural or urban orientation and position in society.

The Government has stipulated growth with equity as its overall policy objective.¹³ To achieve growth and equity within the various sectors and between the racial and social groups of Zimbabwean society, will mean tackling the imbalances cited above. These imbalances are a result of traditional and historical processes.¹⁴

Integrated rural development is one of the strategies to be used in achieving growth with equity within the national development framework. Women constitute at least 50% of the rural population in some areas, the largest group in the peasant

✓ sector. It is also pertinent here to point out that rural women bore the brunt of the war of liberation. Because they were involved at personal and community levels, over a long period of time in various capacities, they have emerged as probably the most politicised group of people compared to the urban women and men population.

Given these experiences from the struggle, how do women perceive their position in rural and national development terms? Drawing on their experiences during the struggle what values they have acquired, how do they perceive the social system with its divisions based on tradition and colonial history? How do women interpret their need given the framework of a socialist egalitarian oriented Government on the one hand, and a traditional and colonial past characterised by women's subordination and oppression on the other? How is the question of equity, in terms of fairness and justice for women, to be approached given this history?

These and other questions provided the framework of the study. The examination of women's needs has been approached from an equity point of view, i.e., equitable distribution of resources between various sectors and groups of society to achieve growth (personal growth included) within the family and community at local and national levels. In other words women's needs have to be seen within the linkages, totality and complexity of the socio-economic and political situation of Zimbabwe.

In the subsequent sections women's needs, in various aspects of their lives, are presented. It is important to indicate that one group of women, the female ex-combatants, were not included in the study as an assessment of their needs has been dealt with, recently, by the Demobilisation Directorate.

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SECTION 2

DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURESIntroduction

Age and sex were the main determinants of one's socio-economic position in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. Traditionally, the Shona and Ndebele societies were divided into the young and the old, men and women for social and economic activities. Thus men, women, boys and girls ate in separate groups, while the division of labour by sex ensured that certain tasks were for men (e.g. raising huts), women (weeding) boys (herding cattle), girls (drawing water). With the advent of colonialism, race and education, among other factors, became additional demographic factors in determining one's socio-economic situation. For the purposes of this report the main demographic factors that have provided the framework for assessing women's needs are age, marital and household status, education and participation in the labour force. Those aspects of age, marital and household status that are important to the understanding of women's needs are presented and discussed, while education and the rate of women's participation in the labour force are discussed in subsequent sections.

Age Structure

According to the population estimates based on the 1969 census Zimbabwe had a total population of 7 130 000 as of June 1979, and an estimated growth rate of 3,6 percent as of June 1980. Approximately 4 396 000 (61%) of the total population were under 20 years of age.

Table 1* shows that there are more women per 1 000 males between the ages of 20 and 64. Women thus constitute about 51% of the total population of Zimbabwe. Since most of the population statistics available are estimates based on the 1969 census, they may not be accurate to the last degree. It is hoped that the 1982 national census will provide the true population picture. *Tables cited within a given sector are listed at the end of the sector.

of Zimbabwe. In the meantime the figures available do provide some working figures.

Several points need to be noted about the population figures presented above. Firstly, the proportion of young people under the age of 20 creates a high rate of dependancy on the adult population. We presume that the majority of persons in this age group are either in early childhood, in school or unemployed. The constraints imposed on women by this dependancy ratio, especially by the under 4 age group, are discussed in relation to family needs, and their participation in the labour force and public life in the sections that follow.

Secondly, women in the most reproductive age cohort of 18 to 35 constitute the largest group of our sample, about 56 percent (Table 2). Given an estimated growth rate of 3,6 percent and more women than men per thousand within this age range, we have a situation with great potential for a rapid increase of dependent persons.¹⁵ According to our sample, about 66% of the women between the ages of 18 to 35 have, on average, three children (Table 3).

Thirdly, the proportion of women to men above 20 years of age in the total population is not reflected in the modern employment sector or in decision making bodies. For instance, black women constituted only 6,8% of the total working population of Zimbabwe in 1979. Perhaps the most glaring illustration of this disproportionate representation exists within decision making bodies as elaborated in Section 10 below. The major reason for women's absence in these spheres is lack of education, but also of equal importance are societal attitudes and family demands.

Marriage

Marital status is another important demographic factor determining one's social position in traditional oriented societies.

This is the reason why it is discussed under this section, rather than the section on legal status. Marriage, in African society, is a process usually involving a number of stages over a period of time.¹⁶ However, according to the present laws, inherited from the colonial period, marriage is not valid until it is registered or solemnised. There are roughly three broad categories of marriage: the customary unregistered, the customary registered and civil marriages. More detailed discussion of each of these types can be found in the sources indicated in the reference section. What is sufficient to note is that each has either a significant disadvantage or advantage to the man or woman, but for women, there are more disadvantages than advantages. Customary unregistered marriages occur, where part or all of the lobola has been paid, but the marriage is not legally binding. The husband is entitled to marry a second or more wives. Our sample shows that more than one-third of the married women (41%) are in this category (Table 4). The most frequently mentioned reason for unregistered marriages was that lobola had not yet been completed (see Table 5). The second most frequently mentioned reason was a polygamous family situation. Others responded that they had not given the matter much thought. However, the majority of respondents (59.2%) in this category did not give any reason.

It is not at all surprising that the most frequently mentioned reason for unregistered marriages was lobola if the type of marriage is correlated by age. It is usually women in the younger age group, 30 and below, who are found in this situation. The reasons for incomplete lobola payments include high lobola charges not commensurate with the salaries of the men. Although African marriages are still very much a family affair, in actual practice young men shoulder most, if not all, of their lobola, with

little or no help from relatives. Secondly, some men will deliberately not complete the lobola to avoid being forced into a civil marriage which does not have the provision of marrying subsequently. In addition, some women do not know that they can register under customary marriage, even if they are in a polygamous situation. Others simply do not think it is necessary at all. And yet, in town it is easier to get a house in the low-income residential areas (former townships) if one possesses a marriage certificate. In addition, the latter can be used as a status symbol, to show that one has been properly married. Some women's clubs and church organisations insist on marriage certificates for full membership. Divorce and inheritance rights in customary unregistered (unsolemnised) marriages operate according to customary practices (see section on legal status of women).

Customary registered marriages are legally valid because they have been solemnised. The marriage is potentially polygamous and the ground of divorce would be customary but a warranted village or former tribal court or former District Commissioner's court would preside instead of a family council as in the customary unregistered marriage. In this and the above types of marriages, adultery on the part of the husband, unlike the wife, is not a ground for divorce.

Civil marriage is contracted under the Marriage Act (chap. 37) applicable to all whites and blacks who choose to marry in terms of the Act. This marriage may follow from a customary registered marriage, provided there are no impediments. Causes for divorce are governed by the Matrimonial Causes Act (Chap. 39). Property rights, however, remain governed by customary law. Divorce cannot be granted by a tribal court. Adultery on the part of the man becomes grounds for divorce as this is a monogamous situation. This type of marriage affords considerable legal protection to women.

It was stated earlier that marital status is an important

demographic factor in the consideration of the situation of women in society. Thus a young, newly married woman, for whom labels are not yet completed, will be anxious to raise a family and work in the field to secure her position and enhance her status within her husband's family. It is noteworthy that there are more customary registered and civil marriages in the older age groups (35 and above) than in the younger age groups. The concept of unmarried women is still frowned upon to a very large extent.

It is essential to keep these factors in mind when planning development projects to assess how they may affect women's position within the family and the community.

Women Heads of Household

Women heads of household constituted \pm 9% of the sample and a surprising proportion of these were below the 35 age group. (Table 6).

This group was comprised of the widowed, divorced/deserted/separated. They are grouped together as de facto heads of household in economic terms. Whatever is the cause of their status they are economically responsible for themselves and their children. The relatively high ratio of women heads of household in the younger age group of our sample could be an indication of widowhood (as a result of the war), and marriage instability. It is most probably the latter reason. Although we were unable to obtain records of divorce rates among the black population, it was frequently mentioned during the survey that due to male urban migration and families living apart, drinking problems and poverty, there is an increase in marriage instability. Official records are not likely to show this as Shona and Ndebele societies highly frown upon divorce. Rather than go through the divorce process and risk stigmatization, many people will choose to live in separation.

One economic implication of this is that de facto women heads

Marriage Certification

Since this society appears to value marriage and family institution so much, certain policy measures are needed in the process of marriage and the family institution in legal terms to all concerned parties. The present system where registration of marriage largely depends on the guardian completion of lobolo, gives rise to social, and legal insecurity to many women. Perhaps a legislative measure could make marriage registration compulsory. If this would have to be linked to some measure on the (see section on Legal Status).

Economic Provision for Women Heads of Household

Judging by the proportion of women heads of household in the sample, there is an urgent need for an in-depth study of the situation of women heads of household in urban and rural areas. This study would provide much needed information on the causes and consequences of their status for social security purposes, among other uses that the data could be used for.

Table 1: Estimated Age Distribution of Population
at 30th June 1979

Age	Males	Total	Females	Females per 1000 males
0-4	765000		738000	965
5-9	593000		576000	971
10-14	474000		469000	990
15-19	379000		362000	955
20-24	304000		313000	1030
25-29	239000		257000	1075
30-34	189000		207000	1100
35-39	150000		166000	1110
40-44	117000		132000	1130
45-49	93000		105000	1130
50-54	72000		83000	1153
55-59	56000		64000	1143
60-64	38000		47000	1237
65 plus	51000		71000	780
Total	3520000		3610000	13765

Source: CSO - February, 1981

Table 2: Age Range of Respondents

Age	No of respondents	%
18-23	473	25.8
24-29	219	16.6
30-35	249	14.7
36-41	169	10.1
42-47	175	8.0
48-53	71	4.4
54-59	28	1.7
Over 60	11	0.7
Don't know	232	13.8
No response	80	4.1

*N = 1 678

Note: In most tables 'N' refers to the number of respondents to a given question and not to the total sample of 1 678.

Table 3: Age by Number of Children

Age	% of Women with 1 - 3 Children	% of Women with 4 - 5 Children	% of Women with 6 - 9 Children	% of Women with over 10 Children
18-23	56.8	8.9	2.1	0.7
24-29	57.0	14.0	2.5	1.2
30-35	51.9	26.1	9.9	6.3
36-41	55.7	17.5	10.0	17.5
42-47	56.0	15.4	10.8	1.5
48-53	41.7	17.0	20.7	-
54-59	42.9	12.0	-	14.3
Don't know	58.9	15.1	7.5	3.0

*N = 1 678

Table 4: Marital Status by Type of Marriage

Marital Status	Not Applicable	Customary Registered	Polycamv/ Customary Unregistered	Civil
Single	13.9	-	-	-
Married	1.9	15.1	51.1	32.1
Divorced	20.1	15.0	58.0	5.5
Deserted	-	-	-	-
Widowed	25.0	23.0	21.1	31.1
Other	36.3	5.0	51.0	6.0

*N = 1 678

Table 5: Reasons for Unregistered Marriages

Reason	N ^a	%
Labels not completed	450	28.2
Polycamous situation	122	7.2
Not thought about it	110	6.5
Not applicable	994	59.2

*N = 1 618

Table 6: Household Status

	N ^a	%
Not applicable	69	4.1
Wife	1084	67.4
Head of household	1173	73.5
Daughter	172	10.5
Wife of Son	125	7.6
Relative	72	4.5
Lodger	18	1.1
Other	9	0.5

*N = 1 618