

Title

Circumstances devastating women's livelihood opportunities towards economic development in lithium mining communities in Goromonzi, Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe

Kelvin Takunda Gavaza, Social Worker, Manresa Campus, Women's University in Africa (WUA), Zimbabwe. Email: gavazakelvin@gmail.com

Kudzai Mwapaura, Lecturer and Fieldwork Coordinator, Manresa Campus, Women's University in Africa (WUA), Zimbabwe. Email: kudzaimwapaura@gmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6621-8158> (Corresponding author)

Floyd A. Sadomba, Lecturer, Manresa Campus, Women's University in Africa (WUA), Zimbabwe. Email: floydsadomba@gmail.com

Abstract

The study focused on the unbearable circumstances devastating women's livelihood opportunities towards economic development in lithium mining communities in Goromonzi, Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe. The study answered the central research question with literature reviews scaffolded with a funnel approach from global to contemporary praxis. Structuration theory was used to concretise the challenges facing women in lithium mining communities. Underneath a case study research design, grounded in qualitative methodology and interpretivism philosophy, the focus is on understanding the unique perspectives and experiences within a specific context, providing in-depth insights rather than broad generalisations. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews in which women were the primary participants as the experts, and a social worker and community leader who works with the women in the area. The study applied latent thematic analysis to process the unbearable circumstances that have devastated women's livelihood opportunities in lithium mining communities, unpacking the triple roles burden on women, social dislocation, economic vulnerability and sexual deprivation as central themes surfacing in the paper. Nevertheless, the study has recommended gender-responsive work redistribution, social support and community strengthening, sustainable livelihood programs and financial inclusion, legal and social protection against exploitation and addressing psycho-social and sexual well-being.

Key words

economic development, circumstances, Goromonzi, lithium mining, women's livelihood, Zimbabwe

Key dates

Submitted February 2025; Accepted May 2025

How to cite this article using ASWDNet style

Gavaza K T, Mwapaura K and Sadomba F A (2025). Circumstances devastating women's livelihood opportunities towards economic development in lithium mining communities in Goromonzi, Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe. *People centred – The Journal of Development Administration (JDA)*, 10(1), 38-48. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jda.v10i1.4>

Introduction

Women's empowerment remains a long-standing global issue, yet progress is slow, especially in lithium mining communities. Women face triple burdens: economic, social, and environmental, which hinder their livelihoods and limit growth opportunities. The lack of formal employment and social support worsens their vulnerability to poverty and gender-based violence. Environmental impacts from mining further threaten their natural resources and subsistence. Addressing these challenges is crucial to improving women's economic participation and reducing gender disparities in Goromonzi, Zimbabwe. Effective policies and community-driven initiatives are needed to empower women, improve access to resources, and promote gender equality. Only through targeted efforts can sustainable development be achieved, ensuring women share equally in the benefits of lithium mining. Henceforth, the need to address the central quest can mitigate the unbearable circumstances devastating women's livelihood opportunities towards economic development in lithium mining communities in Goromonzi, Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe.

Background

Women's economic empowerment is recognised as a vital driver of economic growth, social progress, and sustainable development, with evidence showing that empowering women in economic activities leads to higher household incomes, improved child welfare, and increased productivity (Savadye and Mwapaura, 2025; World Bank, 2021). International organisations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have prioritised gender equality and women's economic empowerment within their agendas, emphasising the importance of policies that promote financial inclusion, decent work, and gender-responsive strategies (United Nations, 2020). The UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 8 on decent work, explicitly underscore these priorities, while frameworks like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration advocate for gender-sensitive economic policies worldwide.

Access to financial services remains a cornerstone of women's economic empowerment, yet disparities persist; women are 20% less likely than men to own a bank account, with over 1.1 billion women globally remaining unbanked (World Bank, 2021). Digital financial services, including mobile banking and fintech innovations, are increasingly recognised as transformative tools in closing this gap by

providing women with easier access to capital, savings, and credit. Initiatives such as the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi), launched by the World Bank, seek to support women-led businesses through improved access to markets and financial networks. Despite these efforts, challenges such as the gender wage gap, where women earn only 77% of what men earn for similar work (ILO, 2021), persist. Occupational segregation, limited access to higher-paying sectors, and unpaid care responsibilities further exacerbate economic disparities, prompting advocacy from bodies like the ILO's Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) to promote legal reforms and corporate policies aimed at achieving pay equity.

Across Africa, regional initiatives emphasise women's participation in economic activities, with the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 promoting policies that support female entrepreneurship, land rights, and access to financial services (African Development Bank, 2021). Programs like the African Women in Business Initiative (AWIB) provide crucial financial and technical support to women entrepreneurs, while efforts to include women in extractive industries, particularly mining, are gaining momentum through organisations such as Women in Mining (WiM) Africa and policy frameworks like the African Mining Vision (AMV). Microfinance institutions like Grameen Bank and FINCA International have also played a significant role in empowering women by offering small loans to start or expand businesses, with studies demonstrating that women-led enterprises tend to invest heavily in their families and communities, fueling broader economic development (Kabeer, 2020). Nonetheless, women's participation in mining remains limited, especially in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), where sociocultural and economic barriers hinder their formal inclusion, as observed in Zimbabwe's lithium sector, highlighting the urgent need for policy reforms that formalize ASM activities and promote gender equality for sustainable development (Gavaza et al., 2025; Ncube et al., 2024; Hilson et al., 2021).

Literature review

This literature review employed a rapid review methodology (Alston, 2020), utilising academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and JSTOR to systematically map existing research on women's experiences and social impacts within mining communities. The review focused on keywords including "women's experiences," "social impacts," "mining communities," "gender inequality," "health challenges," "participation," and "discrimination" to identify relevant studies. The reviewed literature highlights the multifaceted challenges women face, rooted in their biological

roles and reinforced by societal norms, which contribute to the persistence of the triple burden of domestic, reproductive, and economic responsibilities (UN Women, 2019). In many regions, such as Northern and Southern Africa, women are underrepresented in the labour market and decision-making processes due to environmental hazards and patriarchal structures (Mensah, 2024). Similarly, in Commonwealth countries like the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, women engaged in artisanal mining encounter barriers including limited access to health facilities and educational opportunities, compounded by community rehabilitation challenges (UNDP, 2020).

In Asia and the Middle East, women's health risks are exacerbated by prolonged exposure to hazardous mining environments, with reports indicating that a significant percentage suffer from respiratory diseases such as COPD due to dust and toxic fumes (WHO, 2023). Historically, laws have restricted women's participation in underground mining, citing safety concerns and cultural taboos, particularly in countries like China, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia, leading to their marginalisation in income-generating activities and relegation to unpaid domestic roles (Oliveira et al., 2018). In West Africa, especially Ghana and Nigeria, inadequate infrastructure and social stigmas prevent women from accessing essential services and participating meaningfully in livelihoods beyond mining, which often results in persistent poverty and food insecurity (UN Women, 2019; Tshuma, 2022). In Central Africa, superstitions and beliefs about women's presence in mines further restrict their mobility and employment, deepening their social and economic marginalisation (Oliveira et al., 2018).

The southern regions, notably Zimbabwe, exemplify high levels of gender inequality, with over 68% of women in mining communities experiencing poverty, social exclusion, and health disparities (Moyo, 2018). Women face barriers in accessing reproductive health and education, with increased risks of sexual violence and gender-based violence linked to the mining culture and environment (Tshuma, 2022). Reports indicate that over half of women in these communities are vulnerable to sexual harassment and HIV/AIDS, with societal norms reinforcing stereotypes and limiting women's participation in the formal mining sector (WHO, 2023; Tamin et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, various efforts at international, regional, and national levels aim to address gender inequalities such as Zimbabwe's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), national policies like the 2017 Gender Policy, and programs by NGOs like World Vision and Welt Hunger Hilfe, which promote social cash transfers, food aid, and

microfinance initiatives to support women affected by mining (Chikoko et al., 2021; Kabonga et al., 2022).

Theoretical framework

Structuration Theory, developed by Anthony Giddens, provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex interplay between individual agency and social structures (Giddens, 1987; Giddens, 2014). In this study, the theory is employed to analyse how women's lived experiences in lithium mining communities are both shaped by and contribute to broader social, economic, and cultural systems. As a result of applying structuration, the research examines how women navigate their daily realities within existing structures such as gender roles, economic constraints, and community norms, while also recognising their capacity to influence and potentially transform these structures through their actions.

The theory's duality concept is particularly relevant in understanding the participants' behaviours and perceptions (Bhatasara, 2017). For instance, women's roles as primary caregivers and household managers are embedded within societal expectations (structures), yet their personal resilience and community involvement demonstrate agency. Their decisions to endure hardships, seek social support, or resist certain norms reflect their active engagement in shaping their social environment. Thus, their agency is not isolated but continually interacts with and is constrained by these structural elements, illustrating the ongoing recursive process that Giddens describes.

Furthermore, Structuration Theory helps explain how social change might occur within these communities (Lamsal, 2022). As women challenge traditional gender roles by participating in community discussions or seeking economic opportunities, they are both influenced by and influencing the social structures surrounding them. This dynamic creates opportunities for the gradual transformation of gender norms and community practices. Recognising this interplay emphasises that change is neither solely top-down nor purely individual but emerges from the ongoing processes of structuration, where agency and structure are mutually constitutive.

The theory also sheds light on the impact of external forces (Arthur-Holmes and Matey, 2025), such as lithium mining, on social structures. Mining activities reshape economic opportunities, social relations, and community stability, which in turn affect women's roles and statuses. Conversely, women's responses, such as forming support networks or advocating for their rights, can

influence the evolution of community norms and policies. This bidirectional influence underscores the importance of viewing social phenomena as dynamic processes rather than static conditions.

The application of Structuration Theory in this study provides a nuanced lens for understanding the complexities of women's experiences in lithium mining areas. It emphasises that while social structures impose certain constraints, individuals possess agency that can contribute to social change. Recognising this interplay offers valuable insights for designing interventions that empower women and foster sustainable community development within these socio-economic contexts. Therefore, this theory significantly guides the core foundation of the study's central aim, addressing the unbearable circumstances that devastate women's livelihood opportunities and economic development in lithium mining communities.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach within a case study design to explore the unbearable circumstances that have devastated women's livelihood opportunities in lithium mining communities in Goromonzi, Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe. The process started with defining a clear research approach based on interpretivism, which enabled a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of women affected by the social, economic, and environmental issues related to lithium mining. The research design was meticulously structured to capture the complexity of these experiences through an in-depth case study focusing on women residing in the mining communities, with the inclusion of a social worker as a key informant to provide additional professional insights and context.

Data collection was carried out using semi-structured interviews, selected for their flexibility and capacity to elicit detailed personal narratives and perceptions. Interview guides were developed based on an extensive review of existing literature and refined through pilot testing to ensure clarity and relevance, and the interviews were conducted face-to-face in settings that ensured both confidentiality and comfort, thereby enabling participants to share sensitive information freely. With the consent of the participants, each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, providing a rich dataset for analysis (Alston, 2020; Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

To analyse this data, the study employed latent thematic analysis, a method specifically chosen to unearth not only the explicit content of the narratives but also the underlying meanings, assumptions, and ideologies that shape the participants' experiences.

This approach goes beyond surface-level interpretations by systematically identifying patterns that are not immediately evident in the text, thus enabling a deeper exploration of how and why certain socio-economic adversities manifest in these communities. The coding process involved multiple rounds of reading and re-reading the transcripts, during which initial codes were generated and subsequently organised into overarching themes that captured both the explicit accounts and the latent dimensions of the participants' experiences. This method was justified by the need to understand the subtleties in the narratives that indicate deeper socio-cultural and economic dynamics at play, which might otherwise remain obscured if only a semantic analysis were applied.

Daily discussions were held among the research team to check and confirm the main ideas that were emerging, making sure the process of organising and analysing the data was accurate and thorough. Recognising the influence of researcher positionality, the researcher being a man in a predominantly female context, maintained a reflective diary throughout the study to continuously examine and mitigate potential biases that might affect interactions with the participants and the interpretation of their narratives. This reflexive practice was essential in safeguarding the integrity of the research process and ensuring that the voices of the women were authentically represented. Trustworthiness was further enhanced by employing strategies such as member checking, where preliminary findings were shared with a subset of participants to verify the accuracy of the interpretations, as well as peer debriefing sessions that provided an external audit of the research process.

Ethical considerations were central to this study, emphasising participant integrity and respect. All adult participants gave written informed consent, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, methods, and their right to withdraw at any time (Alston, 2020; Mwapaura, 2024). The researchers submitted a proposal for ethical review and approval at Women's University in Africa (WUA). In line with ethical standards and the guidelines of Creswell and Creswell (2017), the Declaration of Helsinki and local cultural norms, permission was sought and obtained from Goromonzi Rural District Council on October 4, 2024, and the Ministry of Women Affairs on October 3, 2024. Participants were fully informed about the study's aims, their voluntary participation, anonymity and their right to withdraw without any negative consequences. Strict data security measures included encrypting all recordings and transcripts, and storing data on password-protected, encrypted devices. Additionally, data were anonymised, regularly backed up securely, and transmitted only via encrypted channels to ensure

confidentiality and protection against unauthorised access

Findings

The study has returned to the core research entity central to the unbearable circumstances devastating women in lithium mining communities, to economic development. Below is a biographical profile of the participants:

Table 1: Biographical profile of the participants

Name	Age	Education	Marital Status	Class
Masivanda	31	Primary	Married	Low
Gambiza	26	Primary	Married	Middle
Mwenewazvo	42	Primary	Married	Low
Mandlovu	52	Primary	Divorced	Low
Chihera	47	Secondary	Married	Low
Manjenje	29	Primary	Married	Low
Chihoro	33	Tertiary	Married	Middle
Makore	40	Secondary	Married	Low
Mazungunye	48	Primary	Divorced	Middle
Chikozha	40	Tertiary	Married	Low
Chirebvu	45	Primary	Married	Low
Maduve	21	Secondary	Married	Low

Table 2: Key informant profile

Name	Gender	Occupation	Experience
Officer 1	M	Headman	4 years
Officer 2	F	Social Worker	7 years
Officer 3	F	Community Worker	3 Years

Guided by the principles of latent thematic analyses as ratified by Baum & (2006), the study has unpacked the major challenges which women are facing in lithium mining communities in Zimbabwe. Table 3 below shows four interconnected themes, which include triple roles burden, social dislocation, economic vulnerability, and sexual deprivation, highlighting the multifaceted hardships women face

in lithium mining communities. They collectively hinder women's empowerment, well-being, and participation in community development.

Table 3: Challenges faced by women in lithium mining communities

Theme	Description	Key Points	Impact
Triple Roles Burden	Women bear multiple responsibilities with limited support	Domestic chores (cooking, fetching firewood, caring for children) Community involvement (meetings, traditional medicine)	Blocks economic empowerment Lack of role division based on eligibility
Social Dislocation	Disruption of social ties and community cohesion	Family breakdown (husbands abandoning wives) Children leaving for lithium sites or growth points Isolation: Women walking alone. Low participation in community meetings.	Reduced participation in social structures Feelings of loneliness and helplessness
Economic Vulnerability	Financial hardship and poverty	Inability to afford basic needs (bread, cooking oil) Debts and land arrears Court actions over debts: Women being sued for land debts Community service for debt clearance	Falling below the poverty line Persistent cycle of poverty and indebtedness

Sexual Deprivation	Lack of intimacy due to husbands' absence and loneliness	Absence of sexual relations since husbands' migration	Emotional distress
		Emotional and physical stress	Strain on marital relationships
		Concerns about infidelity:	
		Husbands staying away or spending money on girlfriends	

Triple roles burden on women

Women have reported that the triple role burden is struggling them a lot due to the unbearable circumstances of lithium mining communities. This can be testified by the verbatim notably on the participants' accounts, who had to say:

"My brother spends the whole day alone doing all the work at home. Imagine cooking, looking for firewood, going to community meetings, fetching water and sometimes looking for traditional medicine to sell."{Chihoro}

The same situation is not stressing only Chihoro but even a participant, notably Mandlove, who had this to report:

"I wake up early at 3 am and do my entire domestic work waiting for my children to wake up, sometimes my children can escape their domestic responsibilities by going to play with their friends or to go to Majuru growth point I am left with no option than to do all on my own and when it comes to the night I can't even sleep because my baby can wake up and cry for 3 hours, imagine my son."{Mandlovu}

Mandlovu, a participant, purported the phrase "do my entire domestic work", reflecting complete household duties. She then mentioned the phrase "children can escape", respectively to abandon and increase the burden of work and stress for their safety. Commendably, a key informant had this to say;

"Our culture says a family is a woman, so we expect a woman to do everything so that the house can be presentable, yes I am aware on their work, but everything at home is for the wife and the man must go to look for work to feed his wife and children."{Officer 1}

Social dislocation

Although women in lithium mining communities shared a variety of concerns, social dislocation was shared as a straining challenge. This was also strengthened by one of the key informants, who illustrated the empathetic feelings of women. Therefore, the participants' accounts had this to say;

"The coming of lithium in our village made my life difficult a lot. My husband abandoned me, going on lithium, he just left me with children, and right now I don't have someone whom I can cry to."{Chihera}

Another woman had to report:

"This thing, lithium, is the reason why I am crying every day. My husband went there, and my children also left home. They are no longer going to school, they are now living at Majuru growth point. Even my relatives are no longer reachable if I get into a problem, I don't have someone whom I can tell right now, this is difficult, the load is too much for me."{Manjenjenje}

Manjenjenje echoed the phrase "this thing" as a sign of dissent on lithium, which directly affected her life. The phrase "no longer reachable" refers to the disconnection of the support system for women. Nevertheless, even the key informant had this to say:

"Mostly, I see women walking alone. If I call for community meetings or even if I visit the community, only women will come, but in feel numbers again. Sometimes I do home visits and I only see just a single woman or two at home."{Officer 2}

Economic vulnerability

The participants of the study highlighted that they are facing economic vulnerability contested as a financial burden. This was also supported by the key informants, who observed a lot. This can be anticipated by participants' accounts who had to say;

"Right now I can't even buy a loaf of bread on the market and even a bottle of cooking oil, because I cannot work and my husband, since he went there, hasn't come back. This kind of life is very stressful."{Mwenewazvo}

The participant's verbatim reflects the phrase "can't even buy" to refer to the degree of absolute poverty. Even the phrase "he hasn't come back" suggests a position of economic hardship at home. Not limited to that, but another participant had to express;

"My life is full of burden, burden, burden and burden all the time. Right now, I don't even have a place to walk freely because I have debts for the entire village. Right now, I can't even pay school fees for my children and just 10 USD for land bills."{Makore}

From the echoed statement, the phrase “full of burden” reflects stress in terms of financial muscle. Even the phrase “I have debts for the entire village” eludes economic burden, which stems from vulnerability, even “10usd” failure to pay it per farming season testifies to the thresholds below the poverty data spectrum. This was supported by a key informant who had to account:

“Yes, I have observed a lot of women who are being sued by the Goromonzi Council because of their debts on land, sometimes other women are given community service by the court just to clear their arrears but that circle of poverty continues and continues because there is no where they can fetch that money.” {Officer2}

Sexual deprivation

Women also testified that they are experiencing sexual deprivation due to continuous loneliness. Key informants also accounted for the same observations from the unique circumstances of women. This can be highlighted by participants who had this to say:

“Since my husband went on lithium about four months I haven’t experienced any sexual intercourse, but I am a woman need that I need that pleasure. That’s why I got married, but right now I don’t have anywhere to get it.” {Masivanda}

The statement echoed by the participant reflects the point of reference of sexual pleasure in marriage. Another participant added that:

“Spending many nights without my husband is stressing me, and it is making my mind eat my body because I am a woman, I need what other women are given by their spouses in the bedroom. I miss my husband, but sometimes when I think about it, I just feel that he is cheating me over there, since sometimes when he comes, he can just say he is tired of sex.” {Manjenjenje}

Supplementary to the participant’s sentiments, which reflected a victim of sexual deprivation. Even a key informant reinforced that he had this to say:

“I have noticed that a man who goes to Arcadia for work can do a lot of shifts, and sometimes they cannot come home easily, they just leave their wives at home. A few men who do artisanal mining on lithium can come back, but some of them can spend their money with girlfriends at Majuru and refuse to go back home.” {Officer 2}

Healthcare

The participants also reported that they are facing diverse health challenges, which are hurting them. This was also supported by a Social Worker, a key informant. This can be testified by participant accounts who had this to say:

“It’s really difficult to be a woman staying alone without a next person to help you, especially when you are pregnant. I faced difficulties at that time, I gave birth to my little child you are seeing in my arms, imagine I was alone at home and I failed to go to the clinic, what I managed is to cry and no one heard me until I gave birth to her in my house.” (Maduve)

The participant echoed the phrase “pregnant”, referring to the late stage of the perinatal period. The phrase “failed to go to clinic” reflects a major call for health challenge of both children and women. This can also be commendable by another participant who had this to say:

“My brother mostly can fail to purchase medication for my children and even to purchase my sanitary pads to use, it’s really difficult being a woman. Yes, at times we can receive some pads from Social Welfare, but they don’t last, and I ended up using my bra.” (Mazungunye)

The participant echoed the phrase “fail to purchase medication”, reflecting a lack of access to a coping structure. Even the phrase “purchase my sanitary pads to use” and “ended up using my bra” reflects a main call for reproductive health support. A key informant had this to say:

“The Chinese came into our community and moved the local clinic to Rusere village, which is far from our village, because they said they needed to use that place for the offices of their plantation. Women in our community can’t go to Rusere on foot, especially when they are alone without anyone who accompanies them.” (Officer 1)

Discussion

The findings from women’s accounts in lithium mining communities reveal that the most critical challenge they face is the triple role burden, which encompasses domestic care, income generation, and community participation. This phenomenon aligns with UN Women (2023), which emphasises that, in traditional societies, women are central to maintaining order through their roles in child-rearing, caregiving, and participating in communal activities. Landman and Shumba (2020) further note that women often hold authority within families, especially in developing countries, where they are esteemed for their domestic roles. However, many of these responsibilities, such as childbearing and breastfeeding, are inherently biological and disproportionately fall on women, a reality that the International Labour Organisation (2019) highlights as affecting approximately 2.5 billion people globally, with women performing 76% of unpaid care work. This triple role burden limits women’s opportunities for education, employment, and social

mobility, a situation that Structuration theory (Bhataasara, 2017) helps explain by illustrating how traditional norms and societal expectations reinforce these gendered roles, creating structural barriers that hinder support and perpetuate inequality. Consequently, this ongoing burden not only hampers women's economic independence but also increases their vulnerability to neglect, social dislocation, and social ills, including neglect of children and exposure to harm (Munemo and Mwapaura, 2023; Munemo and Mwapaura, 2024).

This social dislocation is further compounded by social isolation, as women often lack confidence or the opportunity to participate in community development programs due to prevailing norms that restrict their involvement. Bebbington and Bebbington (2017) describe how the exodus of men to mining sites disrupts traditional social networks, leaving women feeling disconnected and marginalised. Prolonged social isolation can have severe mental and physical health consequences, including depression, anxiety, and increased susceptibility to substance abuse and cardiovascular issues (WHO, 2018). From a Structuration perspective, Giddens (1987, 2014) emphasises that societal structures, reinforced through shared norms and values, shape individual actions, which in turn reproduce these structures. In lithium mining communities, industrialisation driven by economic ambitions has entrenched social inequalities and norms that reinforce women's loneliness and social dislocation, especially as men's migration for work perpetuates traditional gender roles. This structural arrangement sustains social inequalities, with women becoming vulnerable to mental health issues and social exclusion, thereby impeding their integration into community development initiatives and broader societal participation.

Economic vulnerability among women in these communities is another pressing issue highlighted by their financial hardships and abandonment by spouses working at mining sites. The World Bank (2019) reports that the boom-and-bust cycles of mining economies create economic instability, reducing household incomes and increasing poverty, especially among marginalised groups. The International Labour Organisation (2020) notes that around two billion families worldwide experience economic insecurity, with women disproportionately affected, often lacking access to alternative income sources due to societal structures that favour male-headed households. From a Structuration perspective, Lamsal (2022) underscores how societal norms that endorse male migration and labour separation reinforce economic dependence and restrict women's financial autonomy, trapping them in cycles of poverty. This economic disempowerment leaves women vulnerable to further social risks, including

increased exposure to violence and exploitation, as they lack the means to attain financial independence or seek alternative livelihood options.

Women in lithium mining communities face significant relationship strains, particularly regarding sexual and emotional intimacy with their spouses. Studies by the ILO (2021) and WHO (2018) reveal that industrial work schedules and prolonged absences disrupt marital relationships, often leading to emotional distress, loneliness, and depression among women. The social norms and gender expectations embedded within these communities restrict women's agency in seeking sexual fulfilment or alternative sources of emotional support, as highlighted by Giddens' (1987, 2014) theory, which demonstrates how societal structures influence personal actions and experiences. The persistent loneliness and sexual deprivation can also heighten women's vulnerability to exploitation and violence, including the risk of sexual assault by opportunistic perpetrators. These structural and social dynamics create a cycle of vulnerability, where women's unmet emotional and sexual needs, combined with social dislocation, increase their exposure to further social ills and undermine their overall well-being, reinforcing the urgent need for targeted interventions that address both structural inequalities and individual vulnerabilities.

Implications for development work

This study emphasises the vital role of targeted casework and community-based interventions in empowering women in lithium mining villages, addressing their unique challenges and fostering resilience. As a result of leveraging individualised support, social workers can facilitate access to essential resources, such as healthcare, education, and economic opportunities, while strengthening social capital through community engagement and collective action. According to Turner (2019), such personalised care not only improves outcomes for mothers and children but also enhances their ability to navigate social networks and support systems. Emphasising group activities, capacity-building, and conscientisation based on Longwe's (1990) gender analysis paradigm empowers women to voice their concerns, challenge gender inequalities, and participate actively in decision-making processes. Community interventions like social support groups, income-generating projects, and educational initiatives foster a sense of agency and shared responsibility, which is crucial for sustainable development. These approaches align with the principles of developmental social work, promoting grassroots empowerment, and resonate with green social work's focus on community resilience and environmental sustainability (Ledwith, 2020). In due course, integrating individualised casework with community

mobilisation and empowerment strategies ensures that women's needs are addressed holistically, their potential harnessed, and their communities positioned for sustainable growth.

Recommendations

- Implement policies that incentivise men's active participation in household chores and caregiving roles. Additionally, support the development of accessible childcare facilities to reduce women's unpaid labour and enhance their economic engagement.
- Authorities should promote capacity-building and leadership training for women to enhance their economic independence and decision-making power. Strengthening legal rights related to land and credit access can further empower women and reduce their vulnerability.
- To effectively support women's economic empowerment, policymakers should prioritise creating accessible financial services and tailored training programs. Additionally, encouraging mining companies to invest in women-focused CSR projects can foster sustainable community development and improve gender equity.
- Implementing comprehensive gender-sensitive policies and ensuring their enforcement can promote equitable access to employment and decision-making roles for women. Additionally, fostering community awareness and support networks will help challenge gender-based discrimination and enhance women's economic resilience.
- Implementing comprehensive health education and reproductive services will enhance women's well-being and empowerment. Additionally, fostering community engagement and male involvement can promote shared responsibilities and support women's mental and sexual health.

Conclusion

In summary, the triple role burden, a mix of reproductive, productive, and community responsibilities, exacerbates already-existing gender disparities. This study has shed light on the intricate interplay of socioeconomic challenges faced by women in the lithium mining communities of Goromonzi, Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe.

According to the women participants' insights, social displacement and pressures from unpaid domestic work, in addition to direct economic vulnerabilities, threaten their livelihoods and make it difficult for them to participate fully in community life and make a significant contribution to economic development. Sexual deprivation, economic suffering, and increasing loneliness are all important markers of the larger structural problems in these mining towns. Through the application of a Structuration theoretical framework, we have been able to analyse how deeply ingrained social structures sustain these difficulties, demonstrating that although numerous organisations seek to assist women, the existing dynamics of lithium mining frequently make matters worse rather than better. Future interventions must therefore be created to address these interrelated concerns, taking into consideration the particular experiences of women in this setting, and promoting more equitable routes to economic development that support women's advancement rather than impede it.

References

- Banda, African Development Bank (2021). *African Economic Outlook 2021*. Abidjan: African Development Bank. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/african-economic-outlook-2021> (Accessed: 14 March 2025).
- Arthur-Holmes, F., & Matey, P. D. (2025). Gender as an entangled force: Gendered mining entanglements, labour organisation and leadership structure in artisanal and small-scale mining. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 115, 103594.
- Bebbington, A. and Bebbington, D. (2017). *Political ecologies of lithium extraction in Argentina*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bhatasara, V. (2017). Structuration theory and women's empowerment: An analytical framework. *Social Science Research*, 65, 112–125. doi:10.1016/j.socres.2017.04.002.
- Charamba, S., Mushunje, M., Mwapaura, K., Simango, T.G., & Risinamhodzi, N. (2024). Climate change and vulnerable groups in Zimbabwe: Implications for social work practice. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 39(2), 68–87. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jsda.v39i2.5>
- Chikoko, W., Nyabeze, K. and Zvokuomba, K., Mwapaura, K. and Mhizha, S. (2021). The Harmonized Social Cash Transfer Program in Zimbabwe: Achievements and Challenges. *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 5, pp. 12-21. [http://doi.org/10.22610/jebis.v13i5\(J\).3234](http://doi.org/10.22610/jebis.v13i5(J).3234).
- Creswell, J., W. & Creswell, J., D. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed methods approach*. California: SAGE Publications Limitations.
- Gavaza, K.T., Sadomba, F.A. and Mwapaura, K. (2025). Chasing promises, facing realities: Women's perspectives on family members' migration to lithium mines in Goromonzi, Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe. *UAI Journal of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences*, (UAIJAHSS), 2 (3), 56-64, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15081566>
- Giddens, A. (1987). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (2014). Structuration theory: past, present and future. In *Giddens' theory of structuration* (pp. 201-221). Routledge.
- Hilson, G., Mondlane, S., Hilson, A., Arnall, A., & Laing, T. (2021). Formalizing artisanal and small-scale mining in Mozambique: Concerns, priorities and challenges. *Resources Policy*, 71, 102001.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2020). *Economic vulnerability in the global workforce: Key statistics and trends*. Geneva: ILO.
- International Labour Organization, 2021. *Global Wage Report 2020-21: Wages and Minimum Wages in a Globalized World*. Geneva: ILO.
- Kabeer, N. (2020). Women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth: Challenges and opportunities. *World Development*, 132, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105047>
- Kabonga, I., and Zvokuomba, K., Musara, E., Chikoko, W., Mwapaura, K., and Nyabeze, K., (2022). Non-governmental organizations' enablers of asset accumulation and poverty reduction in Zimbabwe. *International Social Work (ISW)*. 00(0), 1-7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728221127658>.
- Lamsal, M. (2022). Agency and structure: Revisiting Giddens' structuration theory in modern context. *Journal of Social Theory*, 58(4), pp.300–315.
- Landman, T. and Shumba, R. (2020) 'Gender roles and the triple burden: Implications for women in mining communities', *Gender & Development*, 28(1), pp. 115-130.
- Ledwith, M. (2020). *Community Development: A Critical Approach*. 3rd ed. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Longwe, S. (1990). *Gender Analysis Framework for Social Development: A Focus on Women's Empowerment*. Harare: Zed Books.
- Mensah, L. (2024). Battling on multiple frontiers: an African feminist examination of women's struggles in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2399935.
- Miah, M. (2023). The Role of Fintech in Bridging the Divide for Economic Empowerment. *Economics and Business*, 37, 206-219.
- Moyo, F., Dube, Z. L., Nkala, P., Ncube, V., Mathe, T. T., Murai, T. and Ndlovu, A. (2025). Climate-Change Resilience and Women's Participation in Food-Security Initiatives. A Review of Amalima-Loko Programmes in Nkayi, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 00219096251313536.
- Munemo, W. and Mwapaura K. (2023). 'A burdensome journey': The plight of mothers of children with disabilities in Torwood Community, Kwekwe, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Social Issues in Non-Communicable Conditions & Disability*, 2(2), 63-76.

Munemo, W. & Mwapaura, K. (2024). The utility of coping strategies employed by mothers of children with disabilities (MCwDs) in Torwood, Redcliff, Zimbabwe: Implications on development work. *People centred – The Journal of Development Administration (JDA)*, 9(1), 1-10. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jda.v9i1.1>

Mwapaura, K. (2024). Key considerations when doing research involving people with disabilities. *Journal of Social Issues in Non-Communicable Conditions & Disability*, 3(2), 309-313

Ncube, C. T., Dzvimbo, M. A., Mawonde, A., and Chaminuka, N. (2024). The Invisible Women: Emerging Intricacies of Livelihoods, Empowerment, and Mining in Zimbabwe. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Change* (pp. 1-21). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Nyabeze, K., Jakaza, T., Chikoko, W., Mwapaura, K. and Zvokuomba, K. (2021). The Resilience of Female Sex Workers in the Wake of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Asian and African Studies (JAAS)*. pp. 1-15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096211013411>

Savadye, L. T. and Mwapaura, K. (2025). Development implications of Village Savings and Lending Associations in alleviating household poverty: Insights from the Salvation Army Project in Guruve, Zimbabwe. *People centred – The Journal of Development Administration (JDA)*, 10(1), 1-12.

Tamin, J., Samuel, O., Suraya, A., Ebuenyi, I. D., Naicker, N., & Rajput-Ray, M. (2021). Vulnerable workers and COVID-19: insights from a survey of members of the international commission for occupational health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(1), 346.

Tshuma, D. (2022). *Bridging the gender gap through local peace committees in Zimbabwe* (Doctoral dissertation).

United Nations Women (2019). Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World. New York: UN Women.

United Nations Women (2023). The impact of the triple burden on women's empowerment. New York: UN Women.

United Nations Development Programme (2020). *Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier – Human Development and the Anthropocene*. New York: UNDP.

United Nations Environment Programme (2019). *Environmental Governance in Mining Communities: A Gender Perspective*. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme.

United Nations (2020). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*. New York: United Nations.

World Health Organization (WHO) (2023). *World Health Statistics 2023*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

World Bank (2021). *Women, Business and the Law 2021*. Washington, DC: World Bank.