



Womankind Worldwide

“We can do it”

Research on Women’s Political Participation in Zimbabwe

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Acronyms

BDO	Budget Development Officer
CCF	Constituency Consultative Forum
DFID	Department for International Development
EMA	Environment Management Agency
GNU	Government of National Unity
GoZ	Government of Zimbabwe
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
RDC	Rural District Council
SDC	School Development Committees
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VAW	Violence against Women
VIDCO	Village Development Committees
WADCO	Ward Development Committees
WCF	Ward Consultative Forum
WHR	Women’s Human Rights
WiPSU	Women in Politics Support Unit
WRO	Women’s Rights Organisation
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZIMASSET	Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation
ZUNDAF	UN Development Assistance Framework for Zimbabwe

1) Introduction

A short piece of research was carried out in Zimbabwe in August 2015, as part of a larger research programme undertaken by Womankind Worldwide to look into the different spaces (explained further in section 7) that had been created for women to promote their political participation at community level in four countries. In Zimbabwe this was the Ward Level, and the women who came represented all of the villages within each Ward. The purpose was to explore how women use these spaces to bring about positive change in their lives, especially the opportunities provided by these spaces to raise issues with women leaders and other decision makers. The research was funded as part of the Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW)¹ programme, by the Dutch Government, which was designed to improve women’s political participation in four countries through training and education, skills-building and working together in order to influence local development plans, get into leadership positions in the community, and to enable the women at the local level to promote their interests and hold decision makers to account. It was also designed to strengthen the accountability from national policy structures to local-level structures and from local-level political structures and personnel to individual communities. The projects had different priorities and different approaches in each country context, though there were many overlaps in implementation.

While Zimbabwe was not directly involved in the FLOW funding (their project was funded by Comic Relief), their aims and objectives were in line with the FLOW strategy. Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU), the Zimbabwe partner, has been involved in work promoting women in politics for over ten years and has a great deal of experience working at the national, constituency and grassroots levels. They are a long-term partner of Womankind and were keen to engage to learn more about their programmes from the perspectives of the women involved. Further, it provided them with an opportunity to take a step back in order to listen, learn and reflect on what was working well and identify some of the challenges to this kind of work. The key findings presented in this report were all discussed with the team.

Womankind was especially keen to engage in this piece of research to better understand the kinds of spaces created for women’s participation in different contexts and to learn what enables women – especially those with limited exposure or experience in decision-making and public life – to build their confidence, find their voice and engage in political activity at the local level. Additionally, Womankind wanted to understand better the processes that enable and prohibit change in these spaces. There is a dearth of information exploring what enables women to change and grow and how they fare once they enter what are often complex and difficult decision-making arenas.

The research process was intense and interesting and some of the debates and issues that arose during the process, as well as the findings of the research, are shared here. The details of the research visit are in Annex 1.

1. Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) programme (2012-2015), funded by the Dutch Government in Afghanistan, Ghana, Kenya and Nepal, with Womankind Worldwide as the implementing partner.

2) Womankind, the FLOW project and the inclusion of WiPSU

Womankind has a long history of supporting partner Women’s Rights Organisations (WROs) working on women’s participation and leadership. Learning to date has highlighted the importance of working at different levels – local, District, regional, national and international – as well as engaging with a range of formal and informal decision-making structures and supporting individual women as well as building women’s groups. Womankind has worked with WiPSU in Zimbabwe since 2005 and WiPSU has been addressing women’s political participation in Zimbabwe for the last 15 years. Womankind’s support started initially with a number of small grants to strengthen constituency forums for women. In 2008, further to the initial grants, DFID provided WiPSU with a four-year funding grant, to support them to increase the numbers of women in Parliament and in the Local Government. Additionally, the grant was to help ensure that women in the constituency and community played a greater role in the decision-making process and were able to better hold their leaders to account.

Building on the DFID-funded work, a new phase was introduced in 2012 (funded by Comic Relief)² and the core strategies resonated strongly with the FLOW programme. WiPSU brings a long and strong experience of working with women to promote and support political participation and better accountability of leaders at all levels. At the Ward Level, WiPSU has a model that focuses on working with female elected Ward Councillors, ensuring they listen to the women in their constituency and feed back to them decisions and issues of importance from the local District Council³. In order to do this they work with groups of women invited into a newly created space, The Ward Consultative Forum (WCF), which serves as a platform to train women in leadership, confidence building and personal empowerment, to enable these women to work with and support the women Councillors. See Annex 2 for more details on how the WCF are set up and operate.

For WiPSU, the intention is that the WCF and the training serve as a platform for women to increase their confidence, know their own value and build self-respect, are able to take action and work in solidarity, support each other into leadership roles and learn to influence community agendas, working with the Councillors. They emphasise that there is a need to balance the women’s expectations about what the local authorities can realistically deliver and what women can do for themselves, both collectively and individually.

The intention is that the WCF and the training serve as a platform for women to increase their confidence, know their own value and build self-respect.

2. In partnership with Womankind, WiPSU implemented a three-year Comic Relief Grant that finished in 2015 aimed at, ‘enabling more women to actively and effectively participate in Parliament and Local Government and improving accountability of decision-making structures to women constituents and residents of local communities.’

3. The 59 Districts of Zimbabwe are divided into 1,200 Municipal Wards. Each Ward is represented by an elected District Councillor.

3) The research methodology and limitations of the research in Zimbabwe

Focus of the research

In discussions at Womankind in the UK it was agreed that the research needed to be very focused in its scope due to the limited time and resources for the research process. As a result it was decided to carry out the study in the four research sites (Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nepal and Afghanistan) only at the community level, exploring how partners in each country work with women at the village and Ward Levels, exploring what spaces for women already existed, what spaces had been created, what strategies were followed and what some of the key achievements and challenges were in each context.

WiPSU (like several of the other partners) works from the grassroots through to the national level and has a strong reputation especially for its work on getting women into Parliament and working with them to increase their voice and effectiveness, for example through the Women MPs Caucus. It also works with women MPs and Councillors to increase their engagement with their constituencies, encouraging them to feed back information and decisions to them. There is a strong focus on building the accountability of women leaders. WiPSU shares information and learning from one level back into the work at the other levels.

Research methods

While a lot is known about the power of women in groups, it was agreed that there is still a limited understanding of:

- How women being involved in different spaces leads to an increase of confidence, agency (an ability to act) and empowerment;
- What difference the space makes to different women (as individuals and collectively) and who benefits most from participating;
- What women's participation in the space enables women to do.

The research was designed to explore the barriers which prohibit the active participation of women, the processes that enable them to successfully participate in the spaces and change their attitudes and behaviour in public spaces, the types of issues and concerns they are able to raise with decision makers, and the actions they have been able to take individually and collectively following the training by WiPSU, identifying where possible what is enabling these changes.

The research focused especially on what happens in the two selected Wards, in which the Ward Consultancy Forums (WCFs)⁴ were established by WiPSU, and explored what participants understand to be the purpose of these spaces, who is included or excluded in the space, what permits issues to get taken up by the group, and what enables women to make the shift from their personal issues to community and political issues.

4. WCFs are established at the Ward Level by WiPSU ostensibly as a space for women constituents to engage with their women Councillors.

Some of the other questions explored in the research were the following:

- How far do the women develop a collective voice⁵ around some issues, and are women seen as more legitimate agents by decision makers and the wider community if they are part of a group?
- What are women achieving and changing as individuals as a result of the training and exposure to new ideas and ways of being in public spaces?
- To what extent is participating in these decision-making spaces providing a stepping stone for some women to participate in more formal governance structures?

For each location it was seen as important to build an understanding of the local context and understand how this influences and shapes the decision-making space that exists in the respective areas and the women's experiences within them.

There were several components to the research methodology. An initial review of the existing literature on women's political participation was undertaken, then discussions were held within Womankind and with the research partner to decide the purpose, focus and methodology for the research. The basic project documents were read prior to the research starting. Two weeks were spent in Zimbabwe, working with WiPSU staff in Harare and travelling to two different research sites. The two external researchers (a Programme Manager from Womankind and an external consultant) worked closely with WiPSU's programme staff to confirm the research focus and questions, to select the research sites and to choose which participatory methods to use. One week was spent in the two Wards in Manicaland Province, whilst another week was spent with WiPSU in Harare. The research ended with a detailed feedback session with WiPSU's staff and the discussion of some of the core issues emerging from the research. The findings were later shared at a Womankind workshop with seven partners in Oxford in November 2015.

The primary research work in each Ward involved:

- Introductory sessions with the selected⁶ members of the WCF attending;
- Working in two groups finding out who the participants were, why they came, what they expected, the purpose of the space (WCF), and more about their local context, including other spaces open to women in the area;
- Using the 'problem-tree' approach to identify their key problems and the manner in which they address these issues;
- Role plays of planning for and working in a decision-making space, followed by a discussion;
- In one Ward a question and answer session was held following a presentation by the local female Councillor;
- Eight individual interviews of a selection of women participants were conducted, lasting an hour each;

5. Womankind understands this to mean having shared principles, speaking for each other and supporting each other speaking.

6. Selected by the Ward Councillor, WCF local coordinator or the local Chief.

- Interviews with the local woman Councillor in each Ward, interviews with some Council members from the local District Council and a local representative of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, interviews with the village head in one Ward and the Resident’s Association representative in the other Ward (they had slightly different political structures) were carried out.

12 women attended in one Ward and 16 in the other.

There were many positive aspects to the research. There was broad commitment to the research purpose as well as an enthusiasm to learn more around how these spaces worked for women. The communities that were visited knew the two WiPSU staff members, who had a high degree of respect and trust, making it possible to start work very quickly. While there were some reservations initially that their presence may bias the research, there was no evidence of the women holding back because of the presence of WiPSU staff members. This was not an evaluation of WiPSU, rather an exploration, albeit very brief, of the women’s lives and engagement with the project; their perspectives drove the research. Having highly experienced project staff members acting as translators and resource persons enabled the researchers to learn a great deal quickly, something impossible in that context and in the timeframe without this kind of introduction.

There was a high level of WiPSU staff engagement, which made working long hours enjoyable. The women enjoyed talking about themselves and their lives, though sometimes they were upset about things that had happened to them and their families. As one woman said to us, ‘I have not been asked about myself or told my story in many years and it is interesting to me to reflect on my life and I have enjoyed this opportunity.’ Several women shared their hardships and experiences in the space – such as their HIV status, the death of their children, failing exams, and feeling obliged to marry after becoming pregnant but before finishing school – during the case studies. Whilst this was upsetting for some participants, on the whole it was a genuinely positive experience. The research provided a safe space for discussion and an opportunity for the women to both ask as well as respond to questions. Further, many of the women said they enjoyed sharing their stories, working on the problem-tree and doing the role play together, as they learned a lot from each other during the process and strengthened their social networks.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to the research, which need to be considered. It was not possible to visit two sites in different Provinces as had been originally planned, because of security issues in one of the selected sites.

Another potential site was ruled out because of the distance and the lack of time to travel there, and other possible sites were eliminated because they had been recently visited for other reviews and evaluations.

“I have not been asked about myself or told my story in many years and it is interesting to me to reflect on my life and I have enjoyed this opportunity.”

Annex 3 shows all the potential sites that could have been visited, their different characteristics and what might have been learned in each site. In the event, both sites selected were in the same Province, albeit in different settings: one rural with the main economic activity being subsistence farming, and one peri-urban in an area where gold mining was a key activity. The issues and challenges for the women were very different but they did share the same language and culture.

Security issues affected the research, and thus in one of the areas, a police escort was required. The presence of the police, although not intrusive, may at some level have impacted on what the women felt comfortable to disclose. However, it did not appear to the researchers that this was the case and the women seemed as open as the first community in which there was no police presence. The security concerns did, however, seriously limit the time spent in each community to only two days (instead of the four originally planned), and as such the researchers were unable to explore the communities or speak to women who were not part of the WCF space. It was not possible to meet men in the community or to observe life in the areas visited to any great extent.

In the first Ward visited, Makoni, three of the invited women did not turn up because they were taking an examination that day on caring for livestock, as part of a Government initiative on women’s economic empowerment. It was, to some extent, random which of the women invited by the Ward Coordinator were able to attend on the day, due to external factors such as funerals and ill health.

4) The WiPSU context

WiPSU is working on a highly political project in a country that is politicised, polarised, living under sanctions and going through a serious recession. It is a highly sensitive and complex environment and thus all staff members pay a great deal of attention to the context at both the national and local level. WiPSU is well-respected, and a Women's Rights Organisation (WRO) that works across political party lines and has access to high-level political spaces. They have good access to MPs and promoted the Women's Caucus in Parliament; consequently their name can open doors and their voices are often heard.

They work with other WROs on lobbying for new policies and laws, especially around developing the new constitution under the Government of National Unity (GNU). Their positive access to MPs allowed them to initiate capacity building activities on gender mainstreaming across both parties during that period. They are always consistent in this cross-party approach at all levels and at the local level, they sign Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with the local authorities, which enables them to operate in the communities and they follow all the required protocols with District officials, security and the police. Sometimes this means they cannot work closely with other NGOs who do not get these agreements at the Council Level. They work hard to involve all relevant parties, who can often be suspicious and some can try to divert work to their own political interests.

The political challenges WiPSU faces are very real; there have been cases where a Constituency Consultative Forum (CCF) or the WCF have worked closely with the current MP or Councillor only to find themselves marginalised when a new woman MP or Councillor is elected. The newly elected woman may feel aggrieved that they did not receive the support from the WCF during their candidacy or think the group is too closely aligned to their adversary and so ignore them. In this scenario there is no future for that particular forum, as its whole *raison d'être* is to work with the elected leader. It is quite challenging to build a close relationship between a decision maker and the women constituents in order to promote information exchange, shared decisions and better accountability because it can sometimes mean that the MP or Councillor can use this group in quite a personal way for their own political agendas; this is an issue well understood by the organisation. Some women in leadership positions do not actually welcome better informed and educated groups to work with them and say 'don't make women clever' because they may then challenge them in future, something that has happened as women move from the WCF or CCF to stand for elections themselves.

WiPSU is working in a highly constrained funding environment. While there is a great deal of commitment to gender work discussed in the international community and some funding in the country through, for example, UN Women, it is increasingly difficult for local women's rights organisations to access funds reliably and regularly.⁷ It is a struggle to get funding; it is also a struggle to keep funding flowing regularly as the issue of late payment of money (well known to

7. Arutyunova, A. and Cindy Clark (2013) 'Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots.' <http://www.awid.org/publications/watering-leaves-starving-roots> (accessed 23 September 2015).

NGOs) affects this adversely and can cut across their planned work. The focus on project funding rather than core funding combined with the challenges around getting payments quickly means there is a lack of reserves or a savings cushion to draw on. This can mean that meetings are often cancelled and training sessions are postponed until the funding actually arrives.

The donors play a significant role in shaping the work on the ground, although it should be noted that WiPSU does not take funds from donors who do not share their basic vision and mission. The current issues that directly impact on their work and the way in which they plan and deliver it include the push for easily measurable results and quantitative data, and to demonstrate value for money, which in this context appears to mean reaching more people per dollar. These approaches have resulted in WiPSU cutting back on the number of contact days with women in the community for example, because the costs associated with staff staying in the rural areas is high and the dollar:participant ratio cannot be met. Resource and time constraints sometimes mean that WiPSU struggles to provide the different external actors with the documentation they require.

In addition, the research highlighted how two different donors, working close by each other, wanted different components of the work to be emphasised and had different timelines, donor requirements, and conditionalities which directly affect how WiPSU staff spent their time and accounted for their funding. These do not always build on the experience and learning of the staff and because there is no unrestricted funding for the organisation, working with tight project funding is constraining in several ways. Some donors are, however, flexible around plans and budgets, and that does help the organisation to work in fast changing and unpredictable contexts.

The significant cuts in the amount of time WiPSU may spend on training and return visits to the community inevitably means there is less time for shared planning or consultation with women in the community about what their needs are from the project. Rather, WiPSU defines the agenda and is very aware of the need to keep a focus on achieving agreed results. If women raise issues outside the agreed ones, 'we tend to push this aside' because there is no time to take on additional issues. The timetable is tight and a great deal of information around rights, women's empowerment, the governance structure, and constitutional issues has to be delivered and understood quickly. Therefore, issues around agriculture or women's economic empowerment, for instance, cannot be included, however important they may be to the women. While participatory techniques are used, these are often more about gathering information rather than sharing learning or the co-development of knowledge.

There is significant competition for scarce funding in Zimbabwe, which can affect sharing learning or approaches such as manuals. While WiPSU does successfully work with other women's organisations around critical national issues and the joint lobbying, it is less open about the methods and training done within the programme work because of previous bad experiences.

5) Zimbabwe country context

Zimbabwe is a large country with a relatively low population base of 14,229,541 people.⁸ The country attained independence in 1980 with the adoption of the Lancaster House Constitution, which enabled black majority rule but protected the white minority's property and land rights. These issues have dominated Zimbabwe's political and economic sphere since independence and have shaped, to a significant extent, the current political and economic crisis. For a country rich in minerals and land, it ranks 156 out of 187 on the Human Development Index.⁹ Additionally, the 2011/12 Poverty Income Consumption and Expenditure Survey showed that 72% of the population live below the poverty line of \$2.56 per day, with the rural population most affected.¹⁰

The Situation for Women and Girls at a Glance

Ranks 110 out of 187 on the 2013 Gender Inequality Index

Nearly 8 in 100 children die before their 5th birthday

For every 100,000 women giving birth, around 600 die as a result

UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women ratified not yet domesticated

60% of women do not own a house or land

9% of women are sole owners of a house or land

Child marriage (girls under 18) is 31%

33% of girls experience sexual violence before the age of 18

64% of women experience physical violence

Understanding the complex political situation in Zimbabwe is critical when examining the work of organisations such as WiPSU in undertaking work on women's civil and political participation. Governance work at the best of times is never linear and often changes, impacted by and responding to the external operating environment of the political arena; this holds particularly true in the context of Zimbabwe. The ever changing environment in which such programmes operate both impede and shape the approaches taken, often from one day to the next.

8. Central Intelligence Agency. 'The World Factbook: Zimbabwe'. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/zi.html> (accessed 23 September 2015).

9. United Nations Development Programme. 'Human Development Index Report.' <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi> (accessed on 24 September 2015).

10. Department for International Development. 'Operational Plan 2011-2016: DFID Zimbabwe.' 2014. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/389495/Zimbabwe_Operational_Plan.pdf (accessed 23 September 2015).

The economic crisis has impacted on the resources available for the State to promote women's rights and gender equality. The women's sector is poorly funded and women's organisations are competing for the limited resources.

In addition, a combination of economic conditions, NGO policies and other external factors heavily influence who is able to come and operate in the different areas to conduct projects and programmes, how long they are able stay and how many women can get involved.

Zimbabwe has a hybrid of presidential and parliamentary systems of government. The President of Zimbabwe (currently Robert Mugabe, who has been in power since 1980) is chosen by a separate election, held concurrently with parliamentary and Local Government elections. In the National Assembly women hold 85 seats out of a total 270 and out of these 85, only 25 were directly elected. The other 60 have come in through a newly introduced quota system.¹¹ There are 80 Senators (39 of which are women),¹² six are elected from each of the country's 10 Provinces through a party list system of proportional representation. A further 18 are elected from among Chiefs, while two represent persons with disabilities. In an effort to have more women in the Senate, political parties have to put forward candidates in a Zebra format with women topping the list. Despite this provision, it is still a male-dominated space as Chiefs are predominantly male. Women's low representation in politics has been compounded by the political crisis and violent elections, which have kept women away from participating both as candidates and as voters. This has resulted in Zimbabwe's failure to meet the 50% target provided in the SADC Gender and Development Protocol to be achieved by 2015.¹³

The highly politicised and volatile environment under which WiPSU is operating was exacerbated in the July 2013 national elections which delivered an outright majority to President Mugabe's ZANU-PF party, ending the Government of National Unity (GNU). Zimbabwe's coalition Government was formed in 2009 and was made up of ZANU-PF and the main Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The change in balance of power, the drive for a new constitution developed during the GNU and passed in 2013, and the increasing ineffectiveness, internal factionalism and discord within the MDC all contributed to the fragility of the situation and hindered efforts to increase women's political participation. This situation was further aggravated by the economic decline in the light of dollarisation and the Zimbabwean people's focus on survival and apathy towards politics.

A new Constitution was introduced in 2013. The new Constitution is stronger on women's rights than its predecessor, invalidating customary law and practices that discriminate against women.¹⁴ It mandates for gender equality in all state institutions and bodies and contains a progressive Declaration of Rights and strong equality and non-discrimination clauses. The introduction of a time-bound Affirmative Action (AA) measure in the form of a quota of Proportional Representation (PR) seats reserved for women also had an immediate effect on the

11. Inter-Parliamentary Union. 'Women in National Parliament.' 1 September 2015. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (accessed 23 September 2015).

12. Ibid

13. SADC framework for Achieving Gender Parity, <http://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/1215> (accessed 23 September 2015).

14. A direct result of the work of the Women's Movement of which WiPSU and other Womankind partners are part.

number of women in elected office. Female politicians (often trained by WiPSU) have been able to use this opening out of the political system to push through motions on women's rights, such as the ongoing review of the National Gender Policy, and the establishment of a Cabinet Inter-Ministerial Committee on Rape.

However, these successes are mitigated by the lack of implementation of constitutional and legal provisions on women's rights and gender equality and by the backlash currently facing women MPs who have come in via the quota system. The fragile situation of these MPs is further exacerbated by the lack of a constituency to support and bolster their mandate in Parliament. The concern is that any gains on securing WHRs are tokenistic and although they may seem progressive on paper there is limited will, commitment and resources to actually deliver on these. This situation is further compounded by three additional challenges that serve to create volatility in securing women's civil and political participation: political party factionalism, the supremacy of party politics and the weak economy.

Party politics in Zimbabwe is very strong and the prevailing concern is to represent the party first and the constituency second. This impacts governance at every level from the local to the national, so that even District Councillors often feel compelled to put the party agenda above that of the constituents who elected them.

Zimbabwe's current political turmoil has brought the economy to its knees. Soon after the 2013 elections, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) produced an ambitious economic recovery plan, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET). This plan is designed to reverse the recent fall in economic growth and to reduce high levels of poverty. However, to date survival and accessing basic services is still the main concern for the majority of Zimbabwean women. In this environment taking on leadership positions or participating in politics can be seen at best as secondary concerns and at worst as detracting from income generating and family survival activities. In this climate it becomes extremely challenging to articulate the gendered nature of that poverty and to promote women's human rights (WHR) as a solution.

The economic crisis has impacted on the resources available for the State to promote women's rights and gender equality. The women's sector is poorly funded and women's organisations are competing for the limited resources. The country is currently not receiving any bilateral aid and most of the resources are channelled through local and international NGOs and UN agencies. Zimbabwe is in arrears in repaying its loans to the IMF, World Bank and African Development Bank, and in 2014 its bid for renewed loans was rejected. In early 2015 the European Union offered £174m in aid to Zimbabwe for development projects in agriculture and health, governance and institution-building,¹⁵ which if Zimbabwe meets conditions relating to good governance and the rule of law, it could eventually receive as direct budget support. The UN Development Assistance Framework for Zimbabwe (ZUNDAF) 2016-2020 has six priority areas, with gender equality being one of them.

15. Discussing Africa. 'EU Resumes Aid to Zimbabwe, Maintains Travel Ban for Mugabe and Wife.' 19 February 2015. <https://discussingafrica.wordpress.com/2015/02/19/news-eu-resumes-aid-to-zimbabwe-maintains-travel-ban-for-mugabe-and-wife> (accessed 23 September 2015).

However, resource allocation for gender is just 7.4% of the total budget provision making it the least resourced priority area.¹⁶ Under the current ZUNDAF for the year 2012-13 gender equality received 1% of the total disbursements!¹⁷

Zimbabwe has a relatively highly educated population, with many women even in rural areas having secondary and even some tertiary education. However, in the current climate there are few formal jobs for women outside of the urban centres and there is limited access to credit and training for self-employment. The country has a high incidence of HIV and/or AIDS, with 2014 estimates suggesting that 16.74% adults, aged between 15-49 are HIV positive,¹⁸ thereby having a serious impact on women who are often the main carers of those who are sick and the orphans. The lack of jobs in the country means that many men, as well as some women, migrate to other parts of the country or other countries for work, leaving families fractured. Many women live in women-headed households. Formal jobs are being cut back and mining is also being scaled back in response to falling mineral prices as well as problems with the safe running of the mines and illegal mining that impacts on a range of social issues such as alcohol abuse and sexual exploitation. Economically the country is squeezed and women and men struggle to find viable livelihoods, even in the informal sector.

16. ZUNDAF 2016 – 2020: Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework. n.d. <http://www.zw.one.un.org/sites/default/files/Publications/UNZimbabwe/ZUNDAF%202016%20-%202020.pdf> (accessed 23 September 2015).

17. United Nations Zimbabwe. ‘Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework.’ Government of Zimbabwe. June 2014. http://www.zw.one.un.org/sites/default/files/Publications/UNZimbabwe/ZUNDAF%20Snapshot_June2014Final.pdf (accessed 23 September 2015).

18. UNAIDS Zimbabwe, <http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/zimbabwe> (accessed on 23 September 2015).

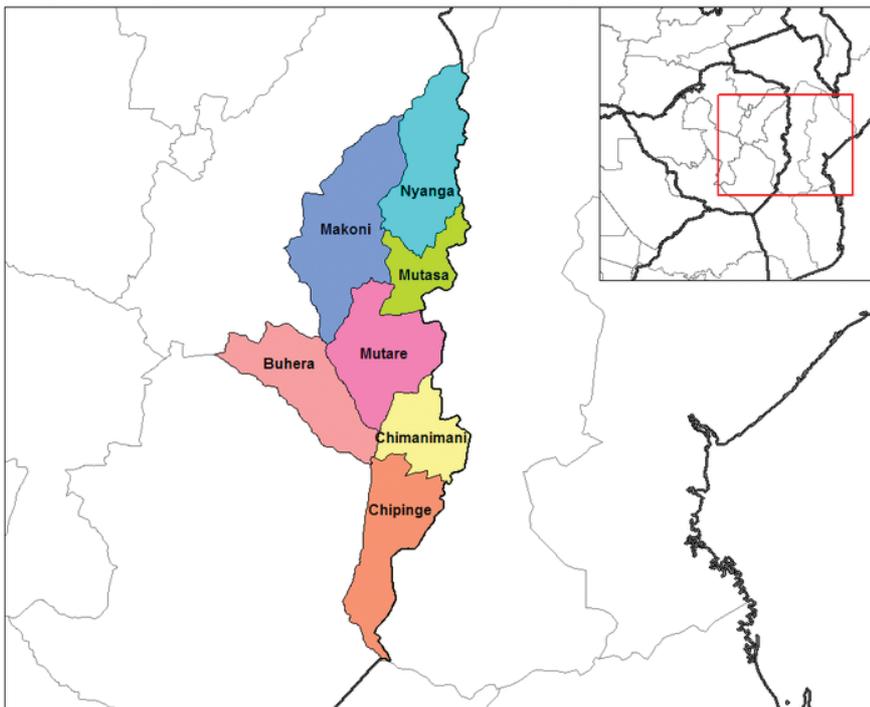
6) Context of the two research sites

6.1) WiPSU's Model

The research looked at two WCF spaces in different Wards. In one Ward the project, which had been funded by Comic Relief, had recently finished, while in the second Ward the project is funded by Trócaire and is still ongoing until 2016. WiPSU followed the same model (see Annex 2) in both areas, however under the Comic Relief project, the focus was more on women's empowerment and leadership in other spaces, whilst in the Trócaire project the focus was more on good governance and demanding accountability for social service delivery (see Annex 4 for a complete explanation of the models used in either site).

6.2) Manicaland

The research focused on two Wards located in Manicaland Province, which is situated in the east of the country; the capital city is Mutare. Manicaland is the second most populated Province in Zimbabwe, with 83% of its inhabitants living in rural areas.¹⁹ It is subdivided into seven rural Districts, two of which are Makoni and Mutasa, where the research took place. The people of Manicaland speak Shona. Manicaland boasts of some of the best performing schools in the country, though these attract pupils from all over the country and do not impact on the education opportunities for the rural population; it is the only Province to have improved school attendance between 2013 and 2014.²⁰



19. Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency. 'Census 2012: Provincial Report Manicaland.' 2012. <http://www.zimstat.co.zw/sites/default/files/img/publications/Census/CensusResults2012/Manicaland.pdf> (accessed 23 September 2015).

20. Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC). 2014. <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ZimVAC%20Rural%20Livelihood%20Assessment%202014.pdf> (accessed 23 September 2015).

Given the Province’s proximity to Mozambique a lot of the inhabitants are involved in cross-border trade, particularly the import and selling of second hand clothes. Historically, Manicaland’s proximity to Mozambique and Zambia meant it was caught up in Zimbabwe’s War of Liberation, as well as those being fought in Zambia and Mozambique in the 60s and 70s. Many raids were conducted by the white minority Government of Ian Smith into neighbouring countries, attacking the training camps of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). The Province saw intensive battles between the Government forces and the pro independence guerrillas. The local people were caught in the middle, schools were closed and many were forced to take shelter in refugee camps and other parts of the country.

Key Data for Manicaland²¹	Manicaland	National Average
The average household size	5.1	5.4
Members of the household providing labour on average	2.9	3
Marriages formally registered	27%	17%
Average household income (2014)	\$114	\$111
% household expenditure goes on food items	55%	58%

6.3) Research site 1: Makoni District Ward 20

Makoni District’s main town is Rusape where the Town and Rural District Council (RDC) is located and representatives of Government ministries work. There are 49 Wards (39 rural and 10 urban). The total population for the District is 272,340 (Rusape: 30,360). In the District Council there are 39 Councillors, where four are women. The District has 170 primary schools and 60 secondary schools. The HIV prevalence is 18% (the national average is 21%).

Ward 20 is part of Makoni Central Constituency which was created in 2008. It is a ZANU-PF held constituency. The MP is the Minister of Finance and Economic Development; he is a leading member of the ZANU-PF party. The District Councillor, Pemina Mawanga, is also ZANU-PF. She was first voted into office in 2013; she did not have a political background prior to being elected. Previously the Ward had a male Councillor. The Ward is rural and composed of 16 villages, where the reserves, resettled areas and settlements are far apart from each other. The people are mainly reliant on subsistence farming and cash crops such as tobacco. It is more easily accessible by road than the other Wards in the District due to recent road improvements made, and the site where the research took place in is approximately 10 km from the main town, Rusape. There are two primary schools in the Ward situated in Epiphany and Mangunda, and two health centres, one Government run and one Council operated.²² The community has high literacy levels.

21. Ibid.

22. Parliament of Zimbabwe, <http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/attachments/article/128/Makoni%20Central.pdf> (accessed 27 September 2015).

The prospect of gold has attracted many Gwejas (illegal gold panners). Displaced from farms during the farm invasions, hundreds of people have ventured into illegal gold mining.

The women in the community identified the following as the key service delivery issues they face:

- i. Poor access to health services at the local clinic;
- ii. Poor roads;
- iii. Poor infrastructure in both primary and secondary schools (classrooms, electricity, computers).

According to the Ministry of Gender representative based in Rusape, the local governance structures at Ward Level are more or less dysfunctional, mainly due to the lack of resources available from Central Government for their functioning. This is explored later in the report, exploring how it impacts on the effectiveness of the WCF and what strategies are used to mitigate it.

There seem to be few agencies currently operating in this Ward; one stakeholder suggested that this was because of its relative proximity to an urban area and some agencies tend to focus on more rural isolated Wards.²³

6.4) Research site 2: Mutasa District Ward 21

Mutasa District is located 30 km from Mutare and stretches up to the Honde Valley, which is about 100 km northeast of Mutare. In Mutasa there are 72 primary schools and 27 secondary schools. The Mutasa District is peri-urban and the economy is agro-based, although gold mining takes place in half of the area, whilst the remainder of the Ward is rural. Villagers practice semi-commercial agriculture. In addition, the District has several plantations and estates that provide employment. Villages raise cattle, goats and chicken and they also grow maize, groundnuts, sugarcane, etc. and have plantations for fruit trees. Some of the villages are smallholder growers of coffee, tea and bananas. Large-scale commercial plantations produce timber, coffee and tea estates.

In areas such as Penhalonga, gold mining is the main source of employment. The research site was the community of Old West, which is a mining compound and as such is administered by the mine company, who has a responsibility of provision of basic services to its inhabitants. In 2014 the Environment Management Agency (EMA), closed sections of the Russian-owned DTZ Ozgeo operations along the Mutare River, as they did not comply with environmental standards. This had a detrimental impact on the workforce and it is just recently that the mines have been allowed to resume some operations.

23. Representative from the Ministry of Gender local office in Rusape.

The prospect of gold has attracted many Gwejas (illegal gold panners). Displaced from farms during the farm invasions, hundreds of people have ventured into illegal gold mining. The illegal panners use mercury and cyanide to separate gold from the ore, and then flush the toxins into the same river; children have also joined in the gold hunt, which is having negative implications for their education and long-term development. According to the media and to some of the women we spoke to, the illegal panners were causing serious social problems in the area such as drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution and violence. It would seem that the mining companies that manage the communities should bear responsibility for addressing these issues, however, it was not clear what action they are taking. It appeared to the researchers that they are struggling to provide the infrastructure and basic services such as roads, sanitation and health centres that they are required to do, because of losses of income due to mine closures.²⁴

Mutasa Ward 21 is under the jurisdiction of Mutasa South Constituency and is located and administered under the Mutasa RDC. The Mutasa RDC represents 26 Wards and there are eight female Councillors and 20 male Councillors. The Councillor for the District is Councillor Duwa and is a member of the opposition party MDC. It is the first time she has been a Councillor, winning her seat in the 2013 election. The MP is a woman and a member of ZANU-PF.

Mutasa Ward 21 has a population of 7,591 people. This Ward is considered one of the most developed Wards in the constituency in terms of infrastructure.²⁵ That said it is lacking in some basic infrastructure; there is one secondary school, three primary schools in the Ward and four health facilities.²⁶ The baseline that was conducted as part of the project being implemented in Mutasa Ward 21 identified that overall services are poor in terms of affordability, accessibility and availability. The specific areas highlighted were concerning roads and infrastructure, water and sanitation. A key concern respondents identified during the research is the difficulty in travelling during the rainy season due to lack of gravel on the roads. There is also difficulty in obtaining water due to lack of access as well as poor sewage infrastructure.

24. The Standard. 'Renewed Hunt for Gold in Penhalonga.' <http://www.thestandard.co.zw/2014/09/14/renewed-hunt-gold-penhalonga/> (accessed 15 December 2015).

25. <http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/attachments/article/74/Mutasa.pdf> (accessed 27 September 2015).

26. Ibid.

7) Spaces for women in each of the sites

The research focus was on the spaces where women meet, especially the space created by WiPSU, designed to bring women together to improve their confidence and public speaking, to ensure they understand their rights and can engage with their local woman Councillor. It is intended to encourage their participation and enhance their ability to ask elected representatives to be accountable to them, and to build their leadership abilities thereby enabling them to enter other spaces where decisions are made. This was the focus in Makoni while in Mutasa the purpose was shifted slightly to working with women and the wider community to generate more political engagement resulting in better local services, a more governance focus with less emphasis on women's empowerment and leadership.

It is important to clarify what is meant by 'spaces' in this research. It is well established that bringing women together into groups increases their confidence and their ability to raise issues of concern to them, and it increases the likelihood of them joining other groups.²⁷ This research understands the spaces open to women as either formal or informal groups or meetings in which women participate; they can be established by INGOs, national or local NGOs, Government at national or local level, or they can be set up by women themselves. The typology of spaces is summarised below:

- **Closed spaces:** are hard to enter, decisions are taken by specific set of actors behind closed doors, they are non-participatory;
- **Invited:** spaces usually created by external agencies in which people are invited to participate; those who create them frame the rules. They are often constructed opportunities designed to encourage women to participate;
- **Claimed/organic spaces:** created by people themselves, sometimes against power holders; people unite around a common cause (political or economic for example); they are collective and popular spaces.²⁸

Spaces are differentiated by who set them up, their purpose and also by their rules, as defined by Andrea Cornwall. Spaces created by women themselves are open to those women and those they invite and they set the rules. There are many examples of women setting up their own groups, especially around marketing and small income generating projects. Spaces created by Government or NGOs for the community to participate in are open to those who are invited and those who created them set the rules. There are other spaces in the community context that are largely closed to the community and especially women. These are often decision-making spaces (the Council, the courts for example) where the qualifications for entry is either through being elected or having a specific job. These are hard to enter and are often the spaces which women need to lobby and advocate with in order to ask for changes to be made.

27. Newbury, E. and Wallace, Tina (2014) *The Space Between: an Analytical Framework of Women's Participation*, Trocaire.

28. Cornwall, A. and Vera Schatten Coelho (2007) 'Chapter 1: Spaces for Change? The Politics of Participation in New Democratic Arenas' Development Research Centre: http://www.drc-citizenship.org/system/assets/1052734500/original/1052734500-cornwall_et_al.2007-spaces.pdf?1289508570 (accessed 30 September 2015).

Before focusing on the specific WCF space at the centre of the research, it is important to understand the closed, invited and organic spaces and resources available to the women prior to the introduction of the WCF. Zimbabwe has a long tradition of communities coming together and working on community-based projects, with a tradition of one day a week off normal work for people to do community-based work. Therefore the concept of coming together to work communally is not new; it builds on traditional elements present in the country. In addition, it was clear from talking to the women that there have been many different spaces in their specific communities over the past ten years, where women have been able to go to seek help, receive training, and participate in a range of activities that have included decision-making. These are communities that have been exposed to different outside influences. The presence of a range of different opportunities for meeting and working together has been essential for the WiPSU programme because the time available for training the community women is quite short and the curriculum is large. Thus, the ability to cover all the material and engage the women in a short space of time is made possible by the external influences in other spaces. Some were invited into the WCF because they were leaders in other spaces or were involved in community affairs; in addition most women in this area are literate and have primary or secondary education.

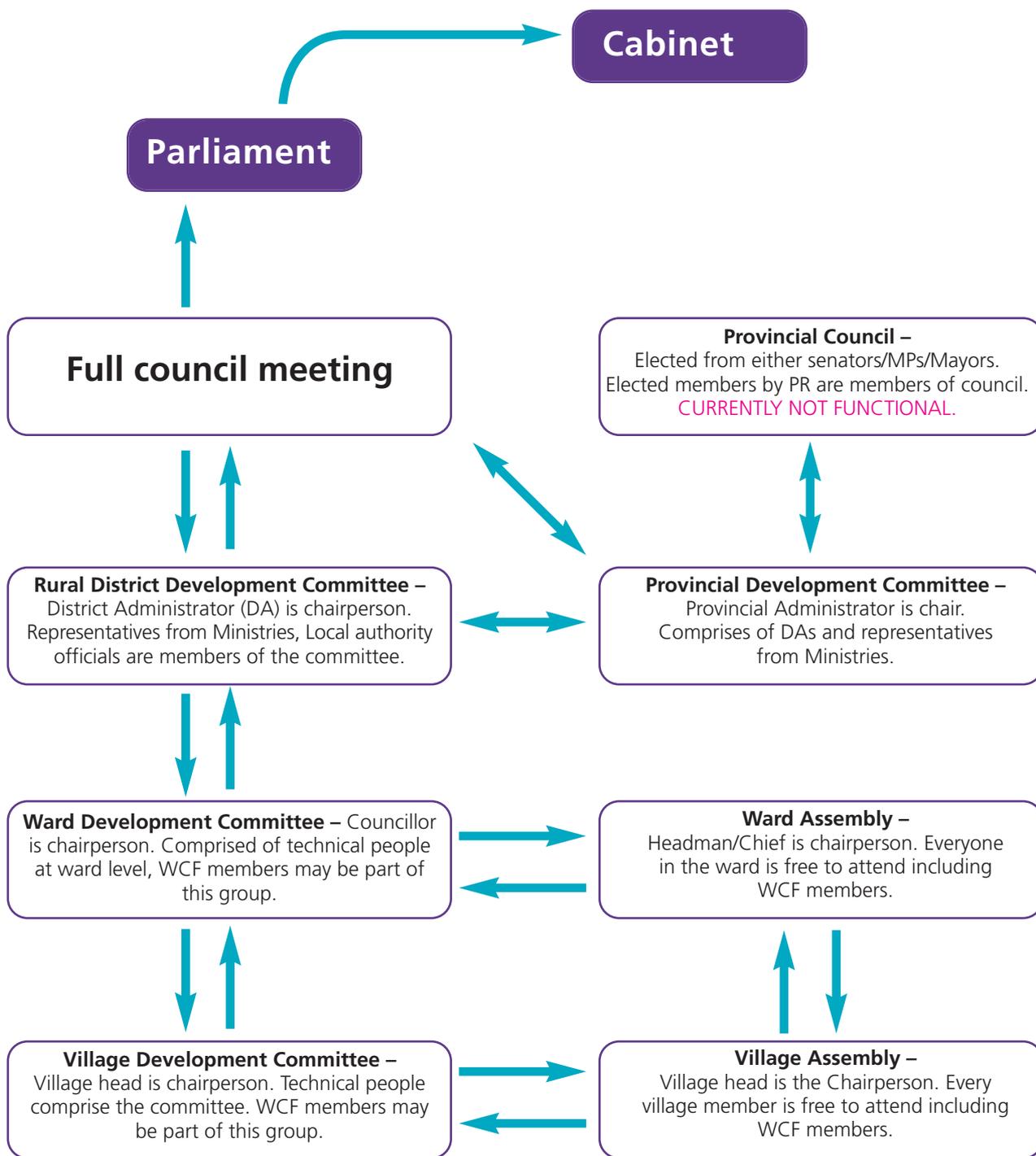
Closed Spaces in the Community

In both communities there is a clear governance structure, set up by the National Government. There are small differences between those designated as rural areas and those that are peri-urban; one area also has mines and the mining community have some responsibilities within this formal governance structure. These are structures that have traditionally been closed to women and where WiPSU has worked hard to both get women elected into the local Council structure and to enable community women to access these structures in order to present their needs and lobby them for a response. The Government now also has a commitment to increasing the number of women elected and able to engage with these spaces.

There have been many different spaces in their specific communities over the past ten years, where women have been able to go to seek help, receive training, and participate in a range of activities that have included decision-making.

In Makoni the structure is like this:

Diagram of the Community to national development structures



The closed spaces in the two Wards are the governance structures at the village to District Levels; on this chart these are the Village Head Committees at the lowest level, while in Mutasa these are Resident’s Association meetings. District Ward committees are also closed spaces and they feed directly into the District Level committees. These are all closed spaces with elected or recruited people working behind closed doors on plans and budget allocations for the village, Ward and District. Formal development plans at the village and Ward Levels are developed by the village and Ward development committees (VIDCOs and WADCOs). However, it was not clear which village or Ward committees were operational and/or actually had a plan and there were very few available as yet. The women appeared to have little engagement in these formal planning processes. The national Government also plays a significant role in the District Council decisions.

In Mutasa there are other closed spaces, created by the mining companies. Their role is determined by their agreements with Government and implemented by mining officials. The women are excluded from these closed spaces although there are opportunities to discuss with the mining companies in invited forums – see below. One of the emerging trends witnessed, is that when the mines close down some of their operations, some companies are forced to leave the respective area. Consequently, the initial resources that were available for making contributions towards community infrastructure are no longer accessible, thereby stretching already scarce resources.

There are assemblies at the village and Ward Level, and these – in contrast – are open spaces where all can attend and give their views; in the past women said they did not attend these meetings regularly, or if they were present, they did not speak out. These are spaces where women’s engagement has now increased as a result of the project and the decisions at these assemblies are fed into the formal closed Village and Ward decision-making structures.

Invited Spaces

In both Wards a significant number of invited spaces were listed. Only a few women had accessed some of these before the WCF started and had been asked to join the WCF because they were participating in or were leaders of some invited spaces. However, many women spoke of entering of these spaces following their engagement with the WCF.

In the past women said they did not attend these meetings regularly, or if they were present, they did not speak out.

Some of the Government invited spaces that women participated in, mentioned in Makoni and Mutasa, included:

- Community police constable, a post created to encourage community policing (one woman involved)
- School Development Committees (SDCs) for primary and secondary (more women engaged in these after training in the WCF, but a few were active before)
- Women's Associations of the local party-playing roles such as Vice Chair at Ward Level for one party
- Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Affairs training courses, vet training courses
- Case care workers
- Resident's Associations (only in Mutasa)
- Secretary to the village head
- Village head committee on justice
- The women's centre (in Makoni)

Private sector invited spaces women entered included:

- Agritex, for agricultural extension training and activities around agriculture
- Mines development committees (only in Mutasa)
- Evans, for marketing poultry

NGO or church created invited spaces included:

- FACT Mutare, providing HIV and AIDS training and support, active in both Wards until 2009; some women were trained in care and prevention and continue this work now
- BEAM, support for orphans for school fees, ended in 2014. A few women sat on BEAM committees
- Church groups and clubs and positions in these groups as well as within the church structure, e.g. deaconess, church secretary

There have been several INGOs and Government projects run in these Wards over the past ten years though most have now finished. Although these were not spaces designed specifically for women a few women had been actively involved and they did provide the community with resources that were of importance for women. These included:

- HEAL Zimbabwe – working on peacebuilding in Mutasa
- GOAL – providing food relief
- Plan International – providing food packages and still providing food supplements for children
- MUSASA – a one stop shop involving the UN and local NGOs around all aspects of HIV and AIDS that is still running and coordinated by the Ministry of Gender
- CAPENUM – providing computers for children
- HOPE – paying for school fees of high performing children

Organic Spaces

There were many examples given of organic created spaces at the grassroots, where women had participated at some point, though many of these spaces are not sustainable. The spaces that were particularly mentioned were:

- Poultry groups for income generation
- Savings and credit groups
- Burial societies
- Kitchen top up parties (where women contribute kitchen utensils to other women)
- Sewing clubs
- Caregiver groups

Several points emerged clearly from the discussion of the different spaces open to women in their communities: first these are communities exposed to outside agencies and some women have been involved in different spaces and even become leaders in these spaces before WCF arrived. They have had training in different skills by different projects and by Government Ministries and some of them are using these skills several years later.

Secondly, many of these spaces are quite transitory. NGOs and their funding come and go and women's groups are often hard to sustain. The economy, NGO policies and other factors affect who comes into the area to work, how long they stay and how many women get involved. In terms of the economic groups that women set up themselves, these are highly influenced by the economic context and opportunities present, and currently are hard hit by the declining economic conditions in Zimbabwe.

Thirdly, most women in these areas are able to leave their houses, though some are not; this varies by household and whether there is a male household head opposed to women going into the public arena. The women, while often lacking in confidence when they joined WCF, were often participants in other spaces and used to being outside their households and operating in other spheres, e.g. trading, taking goods to market, savings and loans groups and churches. The first hurdle to women's participation, women leaving the private sphere and entering public spaces, had been overcome for most of the women in the WCFs that were interviewed.

Many of these spaces are quite transitory. NGOs and their funding come and go and women's groups are often hard to sustain.

8) The WCF space; an invited space

The WCFs have been set up by WiPSU and they are invited spaces; while WiPSU sets the agenda for the meetings they run, also the frequency and length of meetings and the curriculum, the village heads, the Resident's Association head or the female Councillor invite the women into the space. There was a little variation between the two Wards with respect to why women joined the WCF and those responsible for inviting them; in Mukoni the Village Head did the inviting while in Mutasa the female Councillor took that role.

WiPSU runs 2-3 days of formal training and discussion and confidence building with the women and between these meetings women are expected to run meetings in their local area and bring in more women and raise community awareness. From the research it appeared that the WCF members continue to follow the broad agenda set by WiPSU in their own village level meetings, when WiPSU is not present. However, some of the women when interviewed say they also raise issues in their meetings around violence against women (VAW), child protection, early marriage and the social problems caused by the illegal miners in the area, which they also want to address.

Who attends?

A lot of information was gathered about the women who attended the workshop for the research, however it was not possible to assess how representative they were of the other women in the WCFs in their Ward. While the women do complete registers for WiPSU, which provides basic information, such as their name, age, village and how often they attend, these registers are not used for analysing the group and were not available for research purposes. It was not possible to ascertain more general information, such as how many sessions the women attend, who joined late or what the overall profile of the women in the WCFs was.

In Makoni Ward 20, 12 women out of the 50 members (about a quarter) of the WCF came and most of them were area coordinators; the Ward coordinator also participated. The Local Councillor was unable to attend (we met her separately in Harare). It was not possible to check whether there were any major differences between these coordinators and the ordinary members who were not represented at the meeting. In Mutasa Ward 21, 15 women out of 35 attended (almost half) and most were ordinary members so there is confidence that they are quite representative of the group. Although the Councillor attended, the Ward coordinator was not able to attend.

In Makoni, women between the ages of 26 and 52 attended; all were either married or widowed with children and many were looking after AIDS orphans from their wider family. All the women had some education at least to primary four and many had secondary education up to 'O' level grade (16 years of age), although only a few had actually taken the exams and none had done very well. Many married quite soon after their education ended, usually because they became pregnant.

“It is difficult for a woman to live without her husband and I was scared before.”

In both sites there was a high proportion of women who identified themselves as the head of the household because they were widows, or their husbands were ill or elderly, or the husbands worked away or they were divorced. Due to social stigma, many women who are either widowed or separated from their husbands merely state that their husbands are working away, to avoid being marginalised or viewed with suspicion. Women living by themselves disclosed that other women in the community worry that you will “try to steal their husbands.” A widow in Makoni said, ‘It is difficult for a woman to live without her husband and I was scared before.’ 90% of women were married between the ages of 18 to 20, with one case of a woman from Mutasa who was married at 14 years of age. Many are married through traditional ceremonies, and very few of the women are in marriages that are formally recognised by the authorities. This creates all sorts of problems for women’s rights on separation or the death of their husbands. Inheritance is very problematic in Zimbabwe, where in many cases the man’s relatives often claim all rights to the land and property.

Most of the women were farmers growing a range of cash and subsistence crops, for home consumption or sale in local markets. The cash crops included honey and tobacco. Several of the women have animals ranging from poultry such as guinea fowl through to cows. In addition some women were also traders, selling goods such as fish or sausages in Rusape.

Mutasa is a peri-urban area, so only women living in outlying villages were able to do any farming; several in the peri-urban area set up by the mines were married to miners and dependent largely on their income, while others were involved in trading second-hand clothes often bought from nearby Mozambique. One bought school uniforms in Harare and sold them locally, whilst another lived almost entirely on the pension she had from shop work in the past in Mutare. Recent policy changes mean that the second-hand clothes trade is to be stopped and people were very anxious about where they would get an income in the future. The economic activities which women engaged in varied greatly. Whilst some women reared chickens or were hairdressers, others relied on selling small items such as mobile phone airtime and cosmetics to attain their incomes. Although the importance of getting their children and grandchildren educated was apparent, the limited availability of jobs in the mines combined with the economic turmoil, has meant that the ability to pay school fees is difficult, ‘we are trying our best but it is very difficult because of the fees.’ This is a great cause for concern for women.

All were struggling with a lack of income to pay for their children’s school fees and other basic costs, such as the cost of healthcare, due to the very poor economic climate. Market traders are no longer visiting the area to buy goods to take to town, the few markets they can access pay very low prices and many of them are forced to sell on credit that is rarely paid. It is a rural area with some outlying villages that have very poor road infrastructure and few facilities.

A few of the women had leadership positions before coming to the WCF including community policewoman, member of a savings and loan group, a care case worker. Several of the women here had held leadership positions before joined WCF including Chair and Vice Chair of SDC, child case care workers, behaviour change peer educator, member of Resident's Committee, political party secretary and elder at the Apostolic church. However, many said that while they had been asked to join groups before, such as SDCs, they were too shy or lacked the confidence to do so.

In Mutasa the age range was 24 to 73 with two under 30, seven between 30 and 40, three in their 50s and two over 60. 'Mothers' and 'wives' was how they chose to identify themselves as first and foremost. They also care for AIDS orphans in their homes. In both sites no women had studied up to A-levels with a high proportion of the women citing pregnancy for not continuing with their education, or dropping out and getting pregnant straight away. Women who were born in the 60s and 70s also spoke about the War of Liberation and how it affected them and their schooling, having to leave their communities for their safety and as such missing out on parts of their education, or schools being closed. It came across very clearly in the life histories collected that some of the women said their childhood had been a relatively happy and carefree time and that education played a key role in that. Life changed and so did their expectations of it when they reached puberty and boyfriends came into the picture, or they had to take on more of the household duties and care for sick parents, or work to pay fees for male siblings, who were prioritised to continue schooling in the absence of enough funds for all children to attend.

A woman from Makoni who had to leave school to look after her sick mother, epitomised this general situation and feeling:

"This was a very difficult time for me, as I suddenly assumed all the previous responsibilities of my mother. During this period, my father had lost his job due to the economic climate and I had lost my childhood. I went to work on a neighbouring farm as a labourer to earn a sufficient income stream to support me and my father."

(Member of WCF, Makoni)

Another said she reached form four (around 16 years of age) but there was no money for her exam fees. She left school and went to work as a maid so that she could help to pay for her siblings to stay in school, 'I didn't want them to experience my predicament' and her brothers went on to get good qualifications. A fourth again reached form four, did badly in the exams and then dropped out due to pregnancy. All the women had regrets about not continuing or completing their education and one young woman attending in Mutasa said she wished now she had kept going with school and gone to University; instead she got pregnant and went to train locally. She has a formal job but she explained to the researchers that she felt she could have done so much better.

Two of the eight women who were interviewed at length disclosed that they were HIV positive and many were caring for grandchildren of children (or siblings) who had died from HIV:

"In 2004, I started to feel unwell and developed hives on my arms. I was scared so I immediately went to the clinic, only to be told that I that I was HIV positive. I was devastated and traumatised. I was filled with distressing thoughts and I was scared about the future of my children and my grandchildren."

Many women are the sole carers for the children of their siblings or for their grand children and provide support to people affected by HIV in the community.²⁹ None were in formal employment, and some recounted how they or their husbands had lost their formal employment working for white landowners as a result of the Government land reform programme. Most are subsistence farmers or petty traders.

Over and over again the researchers heard how tough life had been for the women, and how resilient they had been despite all the challenges thrown at them:

"I survived and am still standing." (Woman, 62 years old, Mutare)

"Life has been up and down, it has not been what I wanted out of life, it's been a struggle." (Woman, 34 years old, HIV+, Mutare)

"It has been a tough life for me, I could not express myself in the day and acted as if everything was normal but at night I would cry myself to sleep." (Woman, 29 years old, Mutare)

Why do they come to WCF meetings?

In Makoni it was clear from the responses that several of the women who came to the initial meeting run by WiPSU had very little idea what the meeting was for. The village head had limited information about why the meeting had been set up, but invited women to attend saying the group was for the benefit of women.

Their reasons for coming at the beginning included:

- It was an opportunity to learn
- They were curious about a women-only group and found that attractive; they thought it might be an opportunity to get money and get into projects
- Some were selected by the village head and felt compelled to attend
- They were keen to meet the Councillor
- They wanted to learn so that they could teach and disseminate information to others.

29. HIV was not mentioned in the baselines or the reports on these communities yet prevalence stands at 18% or above and discrimination against those who are positive is rife; people fear to disclose publicly.

They talked about women who did not attend initially and said the reasons for this included feeling shy, the distance to meetings was too far, or they had too many household chores and seasonal commitments. They said some women see themselves as superior and do not like to join meetings while others are ignorant and 'dismiss anything new.' Some did not come because they could not see there would be anything tangible to be gained financially. Once the women heard about the training taking place by WiPSU many wanted to join but by then it was too late for most of them, though one or two joined on day two.

Once they saw what was being offered by the WCF they responded positively; they contributed a list of benefits that they get from the WCF. Interestingly the two small groups had rather different perspectives, with one group focusing especially on what they did get (transport costs to attend, lunch, training) and that they hoped to get more financial support by attending, whilst the other group focused more on what they had learned and how the learning had influenced them.

The reasons that kept them coming included:

- The fact that they were given ideas to help themselves
- They learned they could make contributions to the meeting
- It built their self-confidence
- They got encouragement
- They enjoyed working together as women
- They learned their rights, especially from the Constitution which showed them their right to vote, they're right to stand for voting, their right to education, health, work and participation
- They saw that women and not only men can be leaders
- They learned how to work with women who have experienced gender-based violence, where to report such cases and how to raise awareness. They learned about women's rights to land and new laws on inheritance making land grabs by relatives no longer allowed and that they can go to the community police or village head to get the rights they have in the constitution
- They learned about child marriage and how to report offences and to advocate on these issues
- Respect for them grew in the community as they had information to share with others especially about referrals
- They are now able to 'walk with pride' and 'feel good'
- The grooming sessions raised their confidence and they all know how to look good when they go to meetings
- They know now they can go and get ID cards and birth certificates
- They get their bus fares of \$5 and if they walk they can perhaps save a dollar for essential expenses such as grinding their maize
- Some still hope they will get some financial benefit in the end.

Much of the above resonates with the aims of WiPSU for providing the initial training especially around personal empowerment training, which looks at issues such as hygiene; confidence building; perceptions; culture; effective communication; and how to approach people. Other sessions focus on the barriers to women’s participation; the Constitution and relevant laws; leadership skills, roles and responsibilities.

When asked about the purpose of the group it took a little prompting for them to discuss the issue of their relationship with the Councillor; this did not appear to be the main priority for them. However, once the issue was raised they were positive about having access to the Councillor and said this is important and makes communications with her much easier. In Makoni Ward the Councillor lives outside the area in Harare, and the contact is less frequent than is normally the case in the Wards where WiPSU creates WCFs. The relationship is more distant, although is still important because she has very good contacts with the local MP who is the current Minister of Finance. She does call meetings, she runs kitchen top up parties and a Christmas party for the women, and their contact with the Councillor has led to improvements in some of the villages, especially because she has the ear of the MP. Several positive changes listed by the women included getting a grader for some of the roads and getting electricity to the schools and clinics in some of the villages.

In Mutasa the process of joining was a little different and the Councillor herself invited people to come directly; she looked for women who did have experience in working in different spaces and some who had experience of leadership. She lives in the community and is well known to many women. Others came from curiosity and one or two said they attend any meetings they can in order to network and learn. The discussions here focused more on what the women had gained from being in this space rather than why they were attracted to it initially.

In this Ward the training was still on-going and there had been more contact days between WiPSU and the WCF than in Makoni, where the training had finished in 2014. The women in Mutasa listed many reasons why they liked the WCF, many similar to Makoni and some a little different. The women stated that they:

- Have learned how to be empowered and independent and acquire leadership positions
- Have learned to represent her area and other women
- Enjoy it because learned as a woman she can participate and acquire influential positions in communities. This ‘motivates’ her
- Learn to work and assist the Councillor to do her duties
- Like how they can link well with others in communities and family
- Have learned how to be financially independent to put children through school
- Think knowledge sharing is important and get information from others
- Did not care much about community affairs before but now shares WCF information at church (and for others in their own communities)
- See a platform has opened and see opportunities for improvements as women – e.g. gender equality and women can do what men can do
- Realise women should not be afraid of the political involvement, even without good education

- Learned about the Zimbabwean Constitution, especially:
 - Their rights
 - Freedom of expression – way to dress and express themselves, they do not need to be insulted
 - Issue of Gender Based Violence – the right to protection, report to police
 - Children’s rights, especially against abuse
 - Citizenship rights
 - Child marriage – used to be rife here but education is leading to a decrease. Police do awareness raising and ask people to report to them
- Learned to work for myself and with her husband to make school fees
- Learned more about WHO we are: our duties and rights and to share with each other
- Teach other women in community and raise awareness on community development. Teaching women is important – other women sit and do nothing– need empowerment to make an income and improve families
- Enjoy the company of WiPSU staff
- Got t-shirts and water buckets which motivates them
- They got bus fares and they feed us, ‘they (WiPSU) are so good and so caring’
- See it as a platform for networking and there are many young women in the group
- Anticipate it will take them far, to Harare, Zambia or even UK to learn more
- Learned grooming, hygiene and ‘we all look presentable.’

This learning does not start with WiPSU, but rather WiPSU build on the education and experiences that have already been acquired by these women, from their participation in different spaces³⁰ – however limited – and people identified the different skills they have learned from other agencies, Government interventions, and their involvement with the church. When thinking about why women continue to come, despite limited financial incentives (transport fare), and limited free time, several issues emerged strongly. These women are looking for a better future for themselves and their children and this forum thus gives them hope, new understanding, confidence and a place to share their ideas, problems and discuss possible solutions. Being a member of WCF raises their status in the community as they go back and teach women at the village level what they have learned and help to refer them to the right agencies for the problems they are facing – around HIV, violence, child protection. They have improved their appearance and so their status and now feel able to go out into other spaces and stand for leadership or to become members, to go and discuss issues with the Councillor and other decision makers. These activities in turn increase their knowledge and experience and this enables them to see new opportunities and horizons.

30. It was clear in Mutasa Ward that the majority of women interviewed had participated in other community/ward spaces before joining the project. In Makoni Ward it was not so clear and this could be due to the rural setting of the Ward where women are more engaged in subsistence farming which takes up all their time.

This learning does not start with WiPSU, but rather WiPSU build on the education and experiences that have already been acquired by these women, from their participation in different spaces.

They were able to list many changes they have seen as a result of their contributions, even early on in the project. Some have become leaders in e.g. SDCs or work well with the Councillor, and this has led to:

- An increase in classroom provision for one school
- SDCs working on a new play area in another
- The building of a school fence to protect children
- The rebuilding of a damaged bridge – with the help of the Councillor, the Council and community contributions – that has been unattended to in almost 20 years
- The building of a nurse’s house needed in order to open the new Government clinic, where again the Council and the community are working together.
- Provision of toilets in a local market.

It was clear that there were benefits and progress on some concrete changes through the work with the Councillor and the Council, but there are still other issues that women would like WiPSU to help them with. These focused especially on income generating work, where the women wanted help and advice on writing proposals and mobilising funds – five of them had applied with five non-WCF women for new revolving funds from the rural District Council but they would like more guidance on how and where to access scarce credit. This is desperately needed, as it can help with finding new markets for their agricultural products, seeing as current markets are not working. They are also finding it hard to get positive responses from the mines about some of the critical issues facing the community around mining, including the loss of jobs, the lack of money for roads and infrastructure the mines should attend to, and issues such as the dangers of open cast mines being abandoned and filled with water and not being protected. These issues are explored further in the next section.

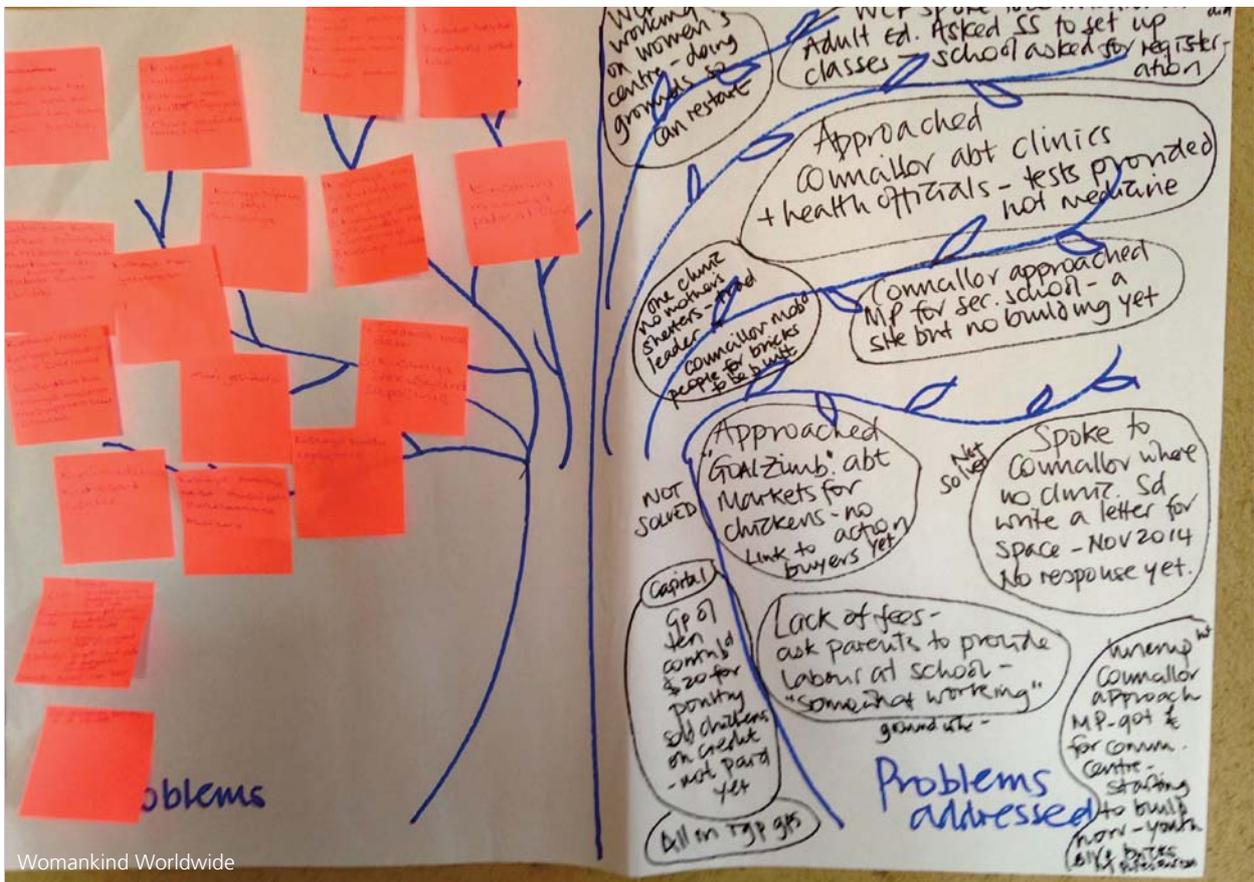
The reasons for women not attending, reported by the WCF members interviewed, included the fact that the numbers are small (only 35 in this Ward as requested by the donor) and the groups are closed, so many women cannot join once the training has started, even if they want to. For some ‘their husbands don’t allow it,³¹ and seem suspicious that the women who go ‘are prostitutes’, some ‘cannot be bothered’, while many have ‘low self esteem and do not think they can attend.’ For others, the timing of the meetings coincided with other responsibilities they had, whilst some ‘looked down on it.’

31. The majority of women interviewed were the head of their household, due to being widowed, divorced or separated, illness or age of husband, husband working away. This could explain their ability to attend.

Identifying and addressing the problems women face, especially through political engagement

One of the main purposes of the WCF for WiPSU is to promote political participation in order to address problems facing the women and their communities. The women also saw this as a critical part of the WCF women were asked to identify the key problems they and the community face and how they had addressed them in a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercise. What had been achieved?

Three simple problem trees were worked on, the fourth group (in Makoni) focused on the problems the women had that they had found a solution to – these were more personal problems, highlighting how critical these groups are for enabling women to find ways to address their own problems such as domestic violence. One woman took her case to the Councillor and WCF members are also raising problems of domestic violence in the communities and sensitising men and women to this issue. Another talked of tackling a misuse of bereavement funds (cooperative savings group at the village level to help pay for community members' funerals) at the village level, through taking it up with the village head.



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Diagram from one group in Makoni

Other problems included lack of access to land for farming, how afraid they have been to appear and participate in public meetings in the past and how WCF has helped them to overcome this fear, their shyness and traditional lack of solidarity as women. In addressing these problems they all referred to their increased confidence, the new posts they have taken up in the community and their learning from other women in the groups. They have received much encouragement from the WCF and learned a great deal about their rights, which enables them to go out and speak about these things with others in the community. Many share their learning with women in their village after WCF meetings.

The three other groups wrote down on post-its their individual list of problems facing the community or themselves and stuck them onto a flipchart on one side of a tree. The group then worked jointly to analyse what action WCF has taken and what the results have been to date. The women highlighted their problems as follows, in order of priority:

- Lack of capital and lack of markets
- Distance to services
- Lack of school fees
- Lack of medicines and medical equipment
- Unemployment
- Lack of adult education
- Problems with roads, bridges, electricity, poor school equipment and the closure of the women’s centre.

Some of these are not the responsibility of the Councillor or the Council or fall outside their ability to address them, e.g. the lack of credit and poor markets. Several of the other issues had been raised with the Councillor, or at the village head’s meeting for taking forward to the Council but the response has been slow to date. The answer to each request – when it comes – is that the Council ask that the community raise funds themselves for basic materials (\$1 per person) and offer their labour for e.g. road or bridge repair or for renovating the women’s centre. The village head confirmed that the ‘community has no choice but to contribute funds, labour and materials.’ Their money is banked with the Council and ‘they wait for the Council to do their part.’

The community – though not all – do contribute financially, or provide resources such as making bricks or collecting raw materials. However, to date the Council’s response with regards to their contribution e.g. the provision of cement or engineers, has been slow. Political influence through the Councillor has been important but the WCF has not found getting a good response from the Council very easy. There has been some limited success; for example, land has been allocated for a school in a remote village but no work has started on the site; some basic equipment was found for testing for blood pressure and diabetes in some clinics but the lack of medicines in the clinics remains acute; the bricks have been made for the women’s centre but nothing else has happened. Women are now working on the gardens and renovating the outside of the centre themselves. They have applied for funds for a poultry project to the Council but so far, no reply, and the Council only has \$5,000 for revolving funds for women for the whole District for the year and each group can only get \$500.

Women 'have a voice now' and are getting engaged in health issues, creating gardens at the clinic, getting into groups for income generation.

There were more stories of success in the afternoon when the women met with the Councillor (see below) and she raised other areas of progress; in the group one or two were angry about meeting the same responses repeatedly and one woman said it made her feel stupid.

In Makoni Ward, there has been more activity as a result of the Councillor working directly with the MP and work has taken place on road grading in some villages and the provision of electricity in some schools and clinics. It appears that the MP, who is the Minister of Finance, is in large part responsible for changes in the Ward, and these are much appreciated. The women do feed into the Councillor when she visits and feel they have had some influence on decisions.

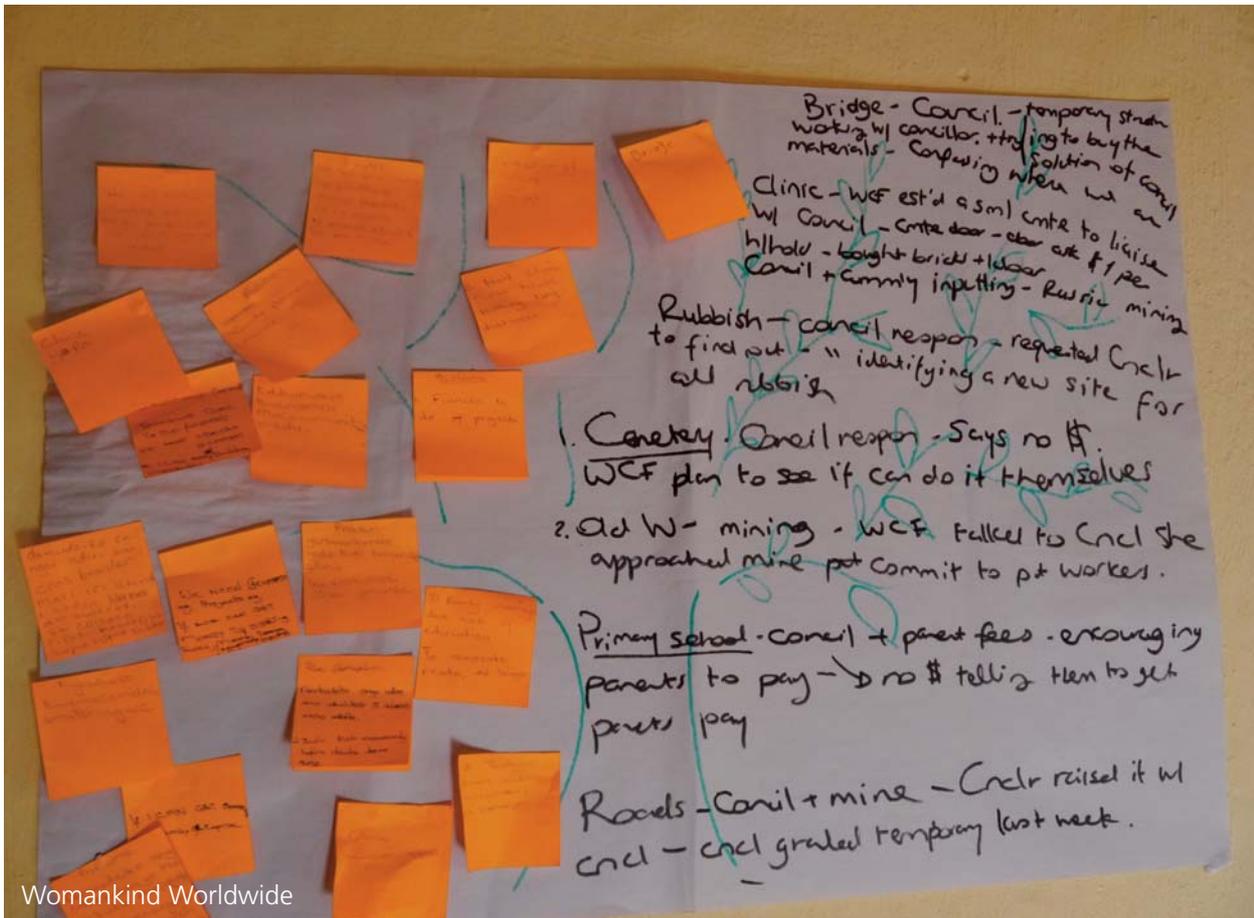
Overall, the women felt there was some but often limited success in relation to getting a good response from the Council. The Council staff who were interviewed for both Districts confirmed this is often the case, due to lack of resources and the belief of some that people need to help themselves and contribute, otherwise they take the work for granted.

However, through the WCF women have learned about other places they can go to seek help and get their problems addressed, including attending and speaking at village head meetings, working with other women e.g. to create teams to monitor and report domestic violence, and alerting men to issues they need to help to address. They are solving some challenges themselves through their increased confidence, speaking out and finding other avenues to address their problems. The village head confirmed this growth in activity among the women and he sees them 'doing things in the community as they get empowered'. In the past women did not engage with leaders and 'it is a new thing to see this relationship develop' in meetings. Women 'have a voice now' and are getting engaged in health issues, creating gardens at the clinic, getting into groups for income generation – although they lack capital and so for many 'their plans remain plans'.

In Mutasa the context is different but there were many similarities.

Each time they approach the Council they are told they need to provide a lot of self-help and then the Council will add to their contributions. Change is slow, though there has been progress in some areas. The 'model' of the women going to the Councillor and the Councillor going to the Council usually gets a very similar response – you need to help yourselves and once you have collected the money and materials and show you will provide some labour then the Council will bring in expertise and specialised materials.

People feel they are often ignored, told there are other Wards with greater priorities, the Council has no funds and sometimes this process 'makes them feel stupid'; 'it makes us angry.' However, despite this disappointment they still felt it was important they go and make these requests and valued having the skills and support to do so.



Womankind Worldwide

Problems listed by women in their community in Mutasa

Many problems were similar but also included serious water problems and people being cut off from taps for non-payment of bills, the lack of boreholes, few clinics, very poor roads and broken bridges, little support for orphans, and the lack of refuse collection and poor state of the graveyards. The problem of the mines cutting back their work is affecting many. There have been some notable successes here in a relatively short time though, including the new bridge as noted above, the provision of new toilets in the market (mentioned by the Councillor and one of the women) a new fence for the primary school. Nonetheless, there are also many frustrations. The Council is still cutting off people who cannot pay their water bills and the mines claim that they lack resources to make their contributions to e.g. water and roads. There is no money to help the orphans with school fees; the Government fund (BEAM) was closed in 2014. There is no money for medicines and the clinic is not open so people have to go privately to a mission hospital for treatment. There is a little progress on the nurse's house (needed in order to open the clinic) but it is slow and nothing is being done about the refuse or the graveyards.

The needs are multiple and all affect the quality of life and well being of the women and the wider community. However, the constraints on the Councils are very real – budgets are low, priorities are often set by central Government, there are many Wards with several basic needs and there is a low tax income. The communities are expected to do a great deal themselves and this can be frustrating for the women who go to discuss and plan with the Councillor, who can then only provide what the Council agrees.

Council meetings are infrequent due to lack of funds, decisions are often delayed, and many requests cannot be met because of lack of resources and competition between Wards. The research took place as a time of serious economic contraction and in this context there are many frustrations in an approach that asks Local Government for resources when the Local Government has little to offer. The picture of scarce resources was the same in the Ministries and the Ministry of Gender, for example, has no funds to run programmes, rather it is a coordinator and goes out to seek donor funding for needs in the District.

Discussions with members of the Councils in both Districts confirmed their need to raise funds for the basic service delivery and infrastructure work from donors because of the lack of Central Government funding, and the need for communities to help themselves. Many are unable to pay the water fees, school fees and stand fees so the Council lacks a local income stream as well as adequate revenue from the Government.

The needs are multiple and all affect the quality of life and well being of the women and the wider community.

9) What is the power of the WCF space for women?

The research explored what the space meant for the women, who joined and what happened in that space that had value for them; what the space enabled them to do for themselves and for their community, especially in relation to political participation. Given that the space was established to promote women's engagement in politics at the local level it was expected that this would be the area where women might have found the most gains, but the real constraints were clear (discussed above) and the picture was more complex than that.

It was very clear that women working together in a shared space, being trained and receiving a lot of new information, as well as working together on developing community action plans and taking issues forward to decision makers had many benefits for them. The power of women coming together to work in women only groups, known in the literature, was confirmed by this research.

All the women said they felt much more confident and were able to participate in WCF and other spaces after the WiPSU training. Additionally, they attended village head meetings and spoke, ran village meetings to share learning with other women and there was a lot of evidence that more had branched out into taking leadership positions in e.g. SDC's, saving groups, church groups, health committees. Some were talking about standing to be Councillors in the future.

Positive learning: women can do what men can do

There appeared to be many elements that contributed to women finding the WCF space a positive experience. Among the most important (resonated by many women we spoke to) was learning that women can do what men can do and that they are not excluded from participating or taking positions of leadership or speaking out by virtue of being women. Many women articulated this and said it with pride. This knowledge about their rights gave them a sense of value and confidence that many of them said they had been lacking and which had prevented many other women joining the group. This positive message counteracts many of the messages women have received all their lives: when they are told that their education is less important than their brothers, very prevalent in this area; when the boys get preferential treatment over the girls in relation to health care; when they see their mothers or female relatives experiencing domestic violence; when their experience in marriage is one of being told what to do, being dependent and experiencing men making all the decisions. Women are usually excluded from decision-making in the community.

An older member in Mutasa only went as far as primary school because her father thought that was enough education for women; only the boys in the family went further. She did however work with her father in the market until she got married very young.

Another said that women have been left out and '**men don't let women express themselves**'; male leaders discriminate against women even though they know this is wrong.

From WCF she learned that women can be leaders and have a right to stand in the community, they need not be afraid and can ask questions and engage with leaders.

Many of the women talked of realising that they could do a lot to help themselves, that they did not have to wait for their husbands, that they had the right to speak out and participate in public affairs, and that they could become leaders. Both Council staff and the village head talked of women now voting for other women in elections, something they had not done before. Even if they lack education women now feel they can achieve a lot.

A woman from Makoni said since she met WiPSU staff, **'life took a different turn, I now have a new strength and knowledge. I know as a woman now I can take care of myself, I want my child to succeed and have a better life.'** She learnt that women can do things for themselves and work together and although she is divorced ...she is now fully involved.

A member in Mutasa said women had learned to be financially independent and not to wait for men, before they were waiting for men and dependent on their salaries. They used buy on credit in shops and the men were expected to pay later but this often led to arguments. She said women can now take-up leadership positions and go far with training, even to the top.

"I thought influential positions were only for men. I can participate now as a woman'; this member in Mutasa had learned skills and qualities of leadership, including being cheerful, understanding the issues, recognising the challenges, and promoting gender equality. The personal empowerment taught me confidence, I am no longer shy to speak my mind. I am now involved in other programmes and groups since joining the WCF."

(Mutasa coordinator)

Women in Mutasa talked of gathering evidence, organising their argument and taking a clear proposal to the village head and the Councillor because they know the importance of clarity and using evidence to back their case for change.

Positive learning: women share ideas and support each other in the group

The women talked about the support they have received from other women in the group, for example getting support to become leaders, which has led to their personal development and contributed to building their confidence. In the group setting they all have to participate and they learn to speak out, something they can then carry into other spaces in the community.

A young member in Mutasa said, **'WCF is where I found friends and it inspired us to find opportunities.'** After the first meeting she realised she could do something and could be a leader even without education; this inspired and strengthened her. The group identified her as a leader, something she had never imagined.

The programme includes training in how to dress and personal appearance and again many of the women explained how important this element has been for them and they took great pride in pointing out that they were all well dressed and well presented and that they are all able to take themselves now into meetings with decision makers and feel proud.

One older woman in Mutasa pointed out how well dressed everyone was and did a twirl for the group, saying how proud she was of her appearance now and she can go anywhere.

Positive learning: Women’s rights and the importance of the new constitution

There is a lot of training in the WCF. The women particularly liked – and mentioned several times – knowing what the constitution says about the rights of women. The researchers probed the women on this because reading constitutions is not normally an easy task or one that engages rural women. However they were all able to say what rights they had learned from the constitution and which ones mattered to them most. These included:

- Their right to a life free from violence
- Their rights to land and to inherit land
- Their right and their daughters right to education and health
- Their right to participate in voting and to stand to be voted for.

They did have a good grasp of what was in the constitution to protect the position and status of women and this matter to them greatly.

“The sessions I really liked were on knowing my rights as a woman; it made me value myself as a woman, saw myself as equal to others.”

(Mutasa coordinator)

Their learning raises their status and they can become leaders

In the WCF they are trained in new skills and knowledge, which lead to them having more status and respect in the community. This is reinforced when they go back to their villages and share the experience with the other women³² and when the village head or other decision makers consult them for their opinion. They are becoming seen as ‘women of value’ in the community, people who understand how decisions are made and who know where to go for advice or help in relation to different problems.

Some of the women were also moving on to become leaders in other spaces such as the SDCs, their churches, in the health centres and again this reinforced and promoted their sense of value in the community. Many now have aspirations for the future, including standing as Councillors, which they could not have dreamt of before they worked together as a group with the staff from WiPSU.

32. Part of the WiPSU project is to encourage WCF members to replicate learning with other women in their communities. The women interviewed said they do this individually or in pairs or even bigger groups and they do it formally, calling meetings or informally at the end of church service or in other community meetings. We were unable to interview any women who had received the training by WCF members, but the WCF members said the feedback was that the women found it very useful.

The women took pride in the fact that they could now approach the Councillor, especially in Mutasa where the Councillor was part of the community, and they go with her to Council meetings to present the priorities that they had agreed together in advance. They present these as a Ward. She is a role model for some of the women in WCF:

One young woman member in Mutasa said she thinks the Councillor running is a good idea, she is a decent person and good communicator. The women support her and she has empowered other women, **‘we can do it ... we see through her example what women can do for themselves.’**

One coordinator said that the WCF support the Councillor in her work and they are instrumental in supporting her in identifying development issues at the grassroots level. When the Councillor calls the community to assist her they (WCF) are the front runners. They discuss issues together and put forward the most pressing ones.

Positive achievements:

Women contributing to changes for the community through the Councillor and Council

The Councillor in Mutasa outlined several achievements that she and the WCF, along with the Resident’s Association, had made including mending the bridge broken for over 20 years, road grading in some areas, work on the nurses’ house for the clinic and a school gate. It was obvious in the session the Councillor held during the research that the women, while respectful, were able to ask questions and challenge the Councillor on the issues they felt strongly about – especially the urgent issues around water that were unresolved. WCF members stressed the challenges of the water supply and the fact that they felt the Council were not listening to their requests to defer the cutting off of people who could not pay their bills, which is becoming a serious problem in the community.

Women were able to be open and share their concerns about progress with the Councillor, who was responsive to their questions. The women know it takes time to prepare and present a case to the Council through (or with) the Councillor and they understand the need to collect the evidence and organise the material and be very clear in their requests. They particularly liked this aspect of the training they received on effective lobbying and advocacy and the need to do research and build a case. However, many times they felt that they came up against the constraints of the Council; there is a severe lack of funding for basic services for the communities. This meant they were often told to solve their own problems and in every case the community had to make a contribution and this was not always matched by a contribution from the Council. While they are proud of their ability to write letters and to make good cases for the issues they want a response on, it is out of their control whether or not the Councillor or the Council do in fact respond.

One coordinator from Mutasa went to present the challenges to the Rural District Council that came out of their community action plan. They were informed about the resources that were or were not available and the most frequent response received from the Council is that there are no resources. However the coordinator feels it is still important go there as they have had some successes such as the grading of the road.

Women are now able to help themselves and their communities

In spite of the barriers, the women were learning to do a lot for themselves, relating to issues surrounding child abuse, HIV and AIDS, orphans, and domestic violence for instance and finding ways to work together on income generating projects. What was much harder for them was to make progress on issues that the Government is responsible for and which are too complex for the community to do themselves, for example stocking clinics, repairing bridges, the need for dams for water reserves, exemptions for those who cannot pay school or water fees. It proved frustrating at times taking these up at the Councillor Level because of the limitations of resources at the District Council Level and a lack of clear understanding of what was most likely to be funded and what was not. However, they all wanted to continue trying.

Meanwhile the woman talked of the meetings they run in the villages and across the Ward, between the WiPSU meetings and after the project has been completed, where they share their learning with other women, raise awareness around core challenges facing the community with women and men (including early marriage, HIV, child abuse, domestic violence, the need to respect women and allow them to participate). They are proud of playing these roles and being respected in the community, able to work to bring other women along. They attend Resident's Association meetings or village head meetings to raise their voices and they feel they are heard there and at Ward assembly meetings; others confirm that they are now respected, listened to and that they raise their voices well (Council members and the village head for example). They feel able to take up individual cases and concerns with e.g. SDC when they have been elected onto them, they are no longer afraid to speak up and they are taking on new roles across the community in the clinics and schools, in the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare and as volunteers in projects such as the new vet scheme. They are forming groups and writing proposals to access credit for income-generating groups where they can, and some are starting savings and loans schemes.

Challenges:

Learning from three role plays performed by the women

While women learn a lot from each other and are working together or individually to help themselves and others in the community, several women did raise the issue that there is still a lack of solidarity between women that remains to be addressed, which was illustrated through the role plays. Three different role plays were done during the research about how women decide which issue to take to the Councillor and how the Councillor decides which issues to take to the Council.

The WCF does play a real contribution in putting pressure on the Councillor to take urgent issues to the Council. The village head also feeds into the District Council but now says that the women are a major voice in the village meetings.

In two role plays women came from their different villages, settlements or peri-urban areas and had different priorities about what mattered to them most. In one role the members presented how they were unable as a group to agree on a process of prioritisation and so instead took a long list of issues to the Councillor, which included roads, bridges, dams, access to markets, medication, expanding schools, access to credit, better water systems, improved agriculture, better electricity and repairing the women's centre. The women, in this role play, graphically played out how each one pushes for the priorities of her own area and there is a lack of solidarity or agreement about whose needs are greatest or what issue should be taken first.

In these cases it was left to the Councillor to decide on a priority, which was then taken to the Council. Other women had a different experience and felt that in their group women did come together and agree a priority, and all accepted the priority chosen by the Councillor to take forward to the Council. There was often a long gap between the request being made and any kind of reply and each time the replies communicated by the Councillor, following Council meetings/debates, were a bit disappointing to the women and each time required them to mobilise others to contribute money, labour and materials to the project. Not everyone in the community agrees to contribute and it was clearly quite an onerous task for the WCF women, or in the case of Mutasa, the Resident's Association, to collect the donations and mobilise people to make bricks or clear the ground.

It was clear from the role plays that the WCF is not the only player trying to lobby the Councillor and the District Council and that the changes that are achieved are not those of only one organisation or one space. However it was also clear that the WCF does play a real contribution in putting pressure on the Councillor to take urgent issues to the Council. The village head also feeds into the District Council but now says that the women are a major voice in the village meetings.

In the discussions following the role plays some other issues emerged. In this area village plans (the VIDCO's) in Makoni – they do not have them in Mutasa – or Ward plans (WADCO's) do not play a significant role in the community. People did not know what was in the plans at any level, or even if the community plans had been done. They do not know what the Rural District plans and budgets are. As identified through a problem that was shared by the women in Makoni, the researchers concluded that they also do not know what to do when the community contribution is banked supposedly by the Council, while waiting for the Council response, if that money goes missing. They asked where the money was but did not feel able to check up if it was there and anyway lacked access to the bank. The limits of what they could question or demand were clear to them and they knew they would have to wait until others resolved the problem, even though it was their money.



Womankind Worldwide

Role play in Makoni Ward

The purpose of calling decision makers to account is hard to achieve

It is easy to talk about calling decision makers to account but what was clear in the discussions and the role plays is that while the women can get feedback from the Council through the Councillor they have no power to demand different responses or to object to what they are being told. To call for accountability requires the women to have some kind of power or sanction in the situation and it is clear that this does not exist for them. The real constraints on how much power women actually can have in relation to decision makers as well as the constraints that decision makers at the local level themselves face mean there is no linear relationship between demanding rights and receiving rights. The relationship is far more complex and affected by a wide range of factors including political affiliation, available resources, District priorities, what donors are willing to fund in the District, and the interests of the MP.

10) Some reflections on participation and accountability arising from the women's feedback

The power of women-only spaces was confirmed by the research

The role plays showed that the women were clearly proud of the way they were able to raise their voice in meetings and have some influence on different agendas now. They were proud of their strong working relationship, their attempts to generate an income in small projects, and the kitchen top up parties that the Councillor organises, which make them feel better because they have some resources at home now. They are no longer afraid to volunteer and some are now leaders; for the first time women vote for other women to help get them into decision-making positions and because of their work together they have been able to improve the treatment of women by staff in one of the clinics in Makoni. They take initiative and are encouraging women to go for testing and to learn more about ARVs, they are teaching women about abuse and the need to protect, for example, women with mental health issues from rape, and they are learning to be self-sustaining and contribute to the family income within their own homes.

Their confidence and self-belief as well as their belief that they have a right to go and engage and participate and make changes happen was very evident, confirmed by key stakeholders interviewed and WiPSU staff and supported by earlier evaluations by DFID and Comic Relief (see Annex 5 for findings of previous evaluations). The women are able to go out and talk to decision makers and men and there is little evidence of a male backlash against them because we were told by the men interviewed that they can see the value of the work the women are doing and men like their determination to contribute to school fees and household costs as well as making demands for better services from the Council.

Participation is clearly rising with this approach

Women said they are able to participate more in political processes as a result of their work with the WCFs because of their raised confidence, their ability to speak out, their improved appearance, their knowledge of where to go to address different issues, their knowledge of their right to participate and have a voice in issues that affect them, their determination to both help themselves and to promote a whole range of new attitudes and behaviour at the community level and in relation to local decision makers.

The WCF promotes participation in a number of different forums. First, women come and learn new skills and knowledge and share with each other in the WCF group itself and over the course of a few days spread over 12-18 months they discuss with WiPSU staff, get intensive training, work together to draw up a community action plan and meet with their female Councillor.

Women said they are able to participate more in political processes as a result of their work with the WCFs.

Many of the women then go back to their own communities in the villages or peri-urban areas and share their learning with women who had not attended but were now interested in the issues, having seen how the WCF women are changing and growing in confidence. According to the women interviewed, they meet monthly as a WCF without the involvement of WiPSU. This work is carried out without any formal support or funding and is something the women interviewed were excited about, mobilising and raising awareness in their own communities. Concerns were expressed, however, in Makoni where the project had ended, about their sense that they will need more support with this work in future – both financial support for meetings and transport as well as further training.

The participation also extends to participation in e.g. village head assembly meetings where women are now invited to speak where before they were silent or did not attend. The men see in these meetings that the WCF women have ideas and plans to offer and are now supporting women's engagement in community affairs, something frowned upon before. Some of the women also join the Resident's Association (they get elected) and some attend the Ward assemblies to discuss issues with the Councillor, alongside other community members, women and men. A few of the women have participated in Council meetings, presenting their case for improved services directly to Council members.

The evidence of the increase in women's participation was clear in all the evaluations and mid-term reviews of this work, and in the interviews conducted for the research.³³ These spaces have enabled women to learn a lot, raise their knowledge and skills around community affairs and understand how political decisions are made, and this encourages participation at a number of levels. Some women do go on to participate in other spaces, sometimes as leaders (though these are a minority), especially in local development committees for school and clinics, working as care case workers for the Ministry of Health, and in different churches and church groups. WiPSU has enabled the women they have trained to express themselves, participate, and take up leadership positions using their voice underpinned with knowledge, these processes in turn as experienced by the women as empowering.³⁴ Those who do not become leaders are often active in the community, mobilising other women, raising awareness among the men about the importance of women's participation and encouraging the community to raise funds and contribute resources to community projects. Without that community participation the Council does not easily respond to local demands for better service and infrastructure provision.

33. Alexander, K. (2015) 'End of Grant Evaluation of the Comic Relief project – Promoting Women's Political Participation in Zimbabwe (Reference: GR002-06070-OMKB)'.

34. Ibid.

Asking for rights/entitlement to services does not ensure they are provided

The level of activity and commitment is significantly raised in the WCFs and the women learn strategies for collecting evidence, building a case, writing letters and presenting their requests to the Councillor and Council. Sometimes they take a collective approach to an issue but often the women are still promoting the issue of most concern to their village or area.

It became clear during the research process, however, that the rather linear model of women knowing and articulating their rights leading them to attain their rights from those responsible for delivering them is misleading. In reality there are multiple factors that affect what actually happens, few of which the women have any control over.

These factors include: the political make-up of the area, whether the Councillor and the MP are from the same party or from different parties; how well they communicate and what the MP can offer (not all requests go through the Council, a Councillor with good relations to an MP may go direct to the top); whether the Councillor is of the same party as the Council; and what the priorities of the Council are as well as their budgets. As neither WiPSU nor the WCFs had been able to locate plans and budgets for these two Wards or the two Districts there is a lack of transparency about resources that means the women could be lobbying for issues that may not even be included in the District plan and may not have a budget. It is clearly hard to lobby successfully in the absence of a clearer understanding of the Council priorities and what they have a budget for.

Unlike in other contexts (e.g. Ghana), where there is a clear agreement and expectation of the Central Government that people should participate and have a voice in local affairs, there is no decentralisation plan in Zimbabwe and no clear commitment from the Government to enable people to shape local plans in practice. The groups cannot call on a clear contract between the Local Government and its citizens to uphold their right to participation and they lack the authority or tools 'to demand a positive response from District Government' in any meaningful sense.

There is a difference between getting organised, being heard and gaining influence in some spaces such as village head meetings, meetings with Councillors, Ward assemblies and actually getting a positive response. The role plays, as well as the focus group and individual interviews, all confirmed the growth in women's knowledge, skills and participation while at the same time showing that it is challenging to get a positive response, especially in resource poor environments. The community are always asked to raise funds and work together, 'unless you step up nothing will move.' And if there is no positive response there is little that can be done by the women to demand action. They are in a very unequal power relationship with the local authorities.

One role play showed that many of these issues have been raised before by the Resident's Association including the dumping of rubbish, the broken bridge, and the lack of classrooms but often nothing gets done and the women were cross. They talked of the lack of facilities and said there is corruption in the Council and 'nothing is progressing.' In spite of these barriers the Councillor is working hard for them and knows what channels to use and progress is being made on a few of the issues and the women seem determined, for now, to continue to push for the services to be improved.

The biggest challenge the women identified throughout the research is the need for financial projects and the need for them to have an income, as well as viable markets. These are not issues the Council can address directly, except through establishing a revolving fund, and they are not really addressed in the WiPSU project, which is focused on building this relationship between the women and the decision makers, especially the female Councillor. Being a political project, it has deliberately not focused on women's financial needs, but these are very great especially at this time of economic crisis and a real concern to the women.

Accountability is a difficult concept in this context

Women in these contexts lack the power to demand a positive response from the Council; there are other challenges around accountability. At the moment neither of the WCFs had access to the Council plans and budgets; there are few Village plans yet completed and the same was true of Ward plans. While the Council members interviewed said that their plans and budgets were published in local newspapers, to date WiPSU and the WCFs had not been able to get hold of these, yet without sight of the Council priorities and what budget they actually hold for each issue it becomes very difficult to talk about 'holding them to account.' The transparency needed to know what resources are available in the District is lacking, so how can women ask for them to account for their progress against priorities or how the budget is actually being used?

It is also hard to hold RDCs to account when they say they have inadequate resources for basic provision and they know they cannot provide what is needed; both Councils confirmed this. Central Government passes on limited funding and much of that has to meet Government set priorities for the District. In addition, local ratepayers find it hard to pay their bills because of the economic challenges facing the people, so in reality both Councils interviewed rely heavily on raising donor money to carry out essential projects in the District. They know who is active in the District (UN and NGO agencies) and in future INGOs and NGOs will be directed where to work and what the Council priorities are; at the same time the Council will be fundraising from these agencies to enable them to implement projects. Money is so tight that realistically unless projects in e.g. HIV, child sponsorship, water and sanitation and orphan care can find an external donor or sponsor they are unlikely to be addressed. It is very unclear how the WCFs could relate to external donors or ask them for accountability in their work – either what they funded or how well the work was done.

This problem is especially acute in Mutasa where there are few donors for 'growth points' (peri-urban areas). In addition few Ward development plans exist so it is hard to plan coherently for the Ward. They have no funds for women's groups, although they are experimenting with a small revolving fund for income generating projects. One Council member said 'communities here are far behind' and they don't understand the situation of women – their relative lack of education, the culture that marginalises them, their lack of voice, their heavy domestic tasks and the challenge of the environment in relation to e.g. firewood. While these issues are well understood and of concern to the Council there are no external funders yet to address this work.

The focus on increasing accountability embedded in the project, in a context where lines of accountability are unclear and there is a lack of transparency about plans and budgets, can take attention away from all the other achievements and changes for women that are being gained through the WCFs. The entire concept of accountability is based on a clear contract between citizens and the state where both have responsibilities and obligations; when fees and taxes cannot be paid and decision makers lack the basic funds to deliver essential services this relationship becomes very weak. In the absence of clear commitments to decentralisation and budgets for women's needs women lack the power to call those more powerful to account. Clearly the primary lines of accountability are between the Council and its donors and the Council and the Central Government, and the rights and roles of the community are unclear in this context.

Politics and the economic context affect what can be achieved

While WiPSU is neutral in relation to political parties and always works cross-party, in fact each Councillor that is elected belongs to one of the main political parties, and they may or may not belong to the same party as the MP for their area or the party that dominates the District Council. It may well be easier for a Councillor to have more influence if they share the political persuasion of the local MP or the District Council and in contexts where the Councillor is from a different party to the District or the MP it can prove harder for them to influence decisions. Similarly a Councillor with close ties to the MP who shares the same political party often has more influence.

This work is highly political in a very politicised context and political tensions can flare up and create problems for the project, as was encountered while selecting locations for the research, due to security concerns. Yet somehow the discussions around the work (and the project documents) are rather more technical in their language. Real challenges caused by where power lies, and the relative powerlessness of women in the villages and peri-urban areas if decision makers decide to ignore them or make them wait a long time for work to be done are implicit rather than explicit in this work.

The constraints of poverty and the economic collapse in Zimbabwe also have a major impact on what can be achieved by the women through political participation. The lack of capital and credit for supporting small business makes it hard for women to address the economic challenges they face including paying school fees, clinic fees, travelling to meetings, meeting their basic needs.

The economic decline means that Councils have few resources to spend on providing services and building infrastructure.

The economic decline means that Councils have few resources to spend on providing services and building infrastructure and they lack funds to provide revolving and other funds to help women make products to sell, process agricultural goods and access viable markets. Poverty in turn prevents communities from paying the fees and bills they have to pay, further reducing income flows for the District Councils.

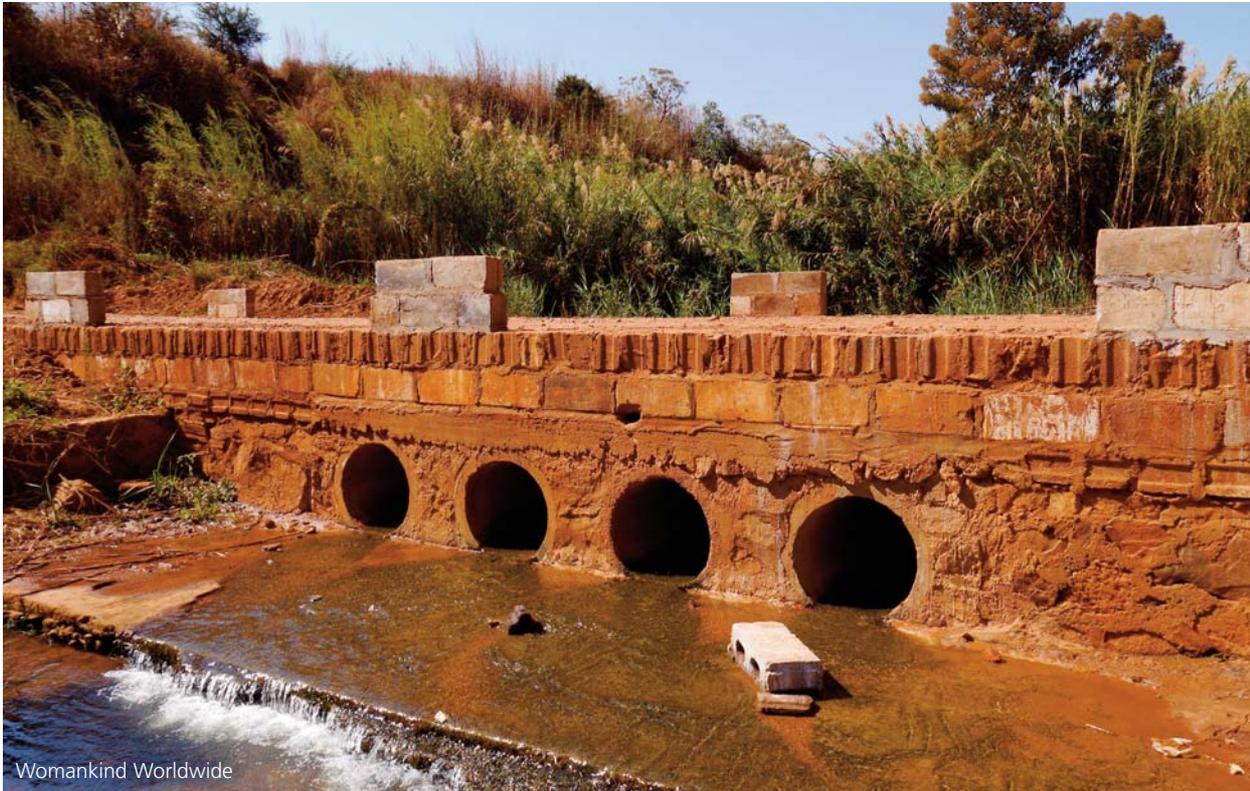
The Councillor perspective may differ to that of the women

While the women in Mutasa were, at times, frustrated by the lack of progress or slow progress on some issues they saw as very important the Councillor had a different perspective; she saw many changes being achieved by the Council. She stressed that the Council has few resources and they need to meet the needs of 31 Wards, yet the Council have agreed to discuss concerns around one of the most remote villages in her Ward and a playground in one school is being rebuilt, some roads have been graded and sand has been brought in to purify the drinking water for the schools. A lot of work has been done in Penhalonga where there is a busy market with buses coming from Mozambique; the water and sanitation have been upgraded to prevent ill-health in the area.

The Councillor reminded the WCF that the mines are expected to fix the roads in some areas and they have agreed to attend to the graveyards. The closure of some mines means they too are struggling economically and this impacts on their provision of services for the communities under their responsibility. The Council lacks money to buy gravel to fix some of the roads and also to pay for transport for taking gravel to the right areas, however the worst bridge has been fixed recently after 20 years and this is a great achievement, due to the Council and community working together; the WCF played a role in achieving this. The Council has renovated the Council-run beer hall and this will bring in revenue and some of the schools are improving; a donor has been found to fix the community hall roof, and a system for allowing parents to do some work on the school compound instead of paying fees is getting put in place. Some of these were not issues raised through the WCF, however, and were not all in their CAPs.

She says the community needs to provide more volunteers for the work and sometimes the bricks made by the community are not of good enough quality to be used. In the light of questions and concerns from the group in discussion she promised to look into the situation of those whose water had been cut off for non-payment of bills, but she reminded them that one reason for lack of funds is their non-payment of bills. In addition all decisions have to be ratified by the full Council and they lack funds to meet regularly and often meetings are only every 3-6 months, so decisions are made slowly.

The Councillor appreciated the concerns of the women about a new Government bill forbidding the import and selling of second hand clothes as women in this area rely on this trade, but said this is a Government directive and will have to be enforced by the police.



Bridge Project in Mutasa Ward

She does understand women need income and viable livelihoods, but there is little that can be done to stop this law being enacted. The Councillor is a good conduit for explaining the opportunities and limitations of what the Council can do, but this can be frustrating for the women who are working hard to lobby the Council to meet some of their basic needs.

The women in Makoni do not see their Councillor very often as she is based in Harare, but they do receive some direct benefits from her in the form of gatherings and parties as well as small gifts. While the Council there is also very short of cash and the same approach is taken of community and Council working together, the Councillor does get some issues addressed directly, such as road or electricity upgrading, through discussions with the local MP and the Minister of Finance.

1 1) The enablers and barriers to change

What enables change? At personal and community levels

There are clear enabling factors that support the women in the WCF to learn, build confidence and engage in both political processes as well as self-help activities for bringing about change in their communities:

1. **Education and literacy:** and having prior experience of leaving the house and working in public spaces, for a few working as leaders prior to WCF
2. **Knowledge:** learning new information about their rights, where to seek help, who is responsible for what in the community, and what they can participate in are all essential for creating the self-belief and ability to engage in new forums and processes
3. **Advocacy skills:** learning how to use facts, investigate well, observe, take evidence and present the data are important for women when taking their requests to decision makers and presenting their arguments
4. **Constitutional literacy:** learning about their rights carries several purposes for the women. They know they have rights that are rooted in legal structures and that these are theirs as of right. They can build on this foundation to ask for a whole range of rights to be honoured, including their rights to land and property, proper inheritance, to prevent abuse and early marriage, to get documents they need such as ID cards, to ensure their girls can go to school and much more
5. **Empowerment training:** this includes how to dress and present themselves, how to speak in public, learning that women can do what men can do, how to support each other and vote for each other, to learn how to run for leadership positions and even as Councillors
6. **Learning from other women:** sharing their experiences, issues and ideas together builds rapport between the women and strengthens the understanding of women
7. **Working in groups:** getting together to form e.g. poultry groups and other income generating groups; forming groups for marketing to e.g. large wholesalers to buy their products (an idea not yet achieved), funding ways together to address their poverty and poor cash flows, especially for paying school fees
8. **Speaking out:** coming together in a safe space and learning to speak in public and then speaking at meetings outside and finding they are being treated with respect. As women gain this experience their confidence grows and their motivation for participation can rise
9. **Men being supportive:** the men are now mostly encouraging the women to participate because they have seen how well the women are doing and what they can contribute

10. **Being able to participate in new spaces:** women can then take on leadership in other groups, mobilise women and men at community level, speak at Ward and Council meetings
11. **Working with women Councillors:** who are able to listen to their problems and engage with them. They support the Councillor and she in turn can work to present their needs to the Council
12. **Taking learning down to village level:** sharing WCF knowledge with others and so spreading the information and approaches more widely in the community, raising awareness and engaging with people to understand their needs better
13. **Self help:** women are solving many issues themselves in their communities or finding other places to get problems resolved including the village head meetings, Resident's Association, the One Stop shop for HIV and AIDS, different agencies dealing with health, vet skills, credit: 'most of the achievements we have achieved ourselves' – this statement was loudly clapped in the WCF meeting
14. **Participation, engaging on political influencing and self help:** Finding ways to address problems are empowering for women, whose confidence grows from both learning and using that learning in practice.

What are the barriers to change?

1. **The lack of a clear law:** on decentralisation and no obligation on District Councils to engage women in political decision-making. No or very limited allocation of public funds for women's projects
2. **Discrimination:** against women in public spaces and their participation in decision-making until very recently. There is still evidence of resistance and prejudice against women in power and women in politics
3. **Limited solidarity at Ward Level:** women often push for the issues that affect them most (some are more collegiate) and have few mechanisms for negotiating and agreeing shared priorities to take to the Councillor/Council. They may prefer to look to their own problems first although the Councillor helps to clarify priorities
4. **Lack of community contributions:** some in the community won't contribute if they do not directly benefit from the services or infrastructure agreed with the Council as needing work, or if they lack the funds or interest in doing so
5. **The lack of Council funding:** leading to irregular Council meetings resulting in slow decisions that always require community efforts. The community is often willing to work, especially WCF, but sometimes the Council fail them because there is no money for cement, engineers etc. or the delays are very long

6. **The problem of mixing development and politics:** these need to be separate – some politicians benefit their own families, according to the women, rather than the Ward or District. There are issues of corruption or rudeness, which put some women off cooperating with the politicians. There can be a lack of trust and women felt that development should be separate from political parties and interests
7. **Fear:** to ask the Council or even the Councillor sometimes about slow decisions or where funds have gone
8. **Lack of power or sanctions:** to demand responsiveness or accountability. The delayed responses and disappointments may put people off participating again; expectations can be dashed and there were signs of anger around some issues that had not progressed much in the two Wards
9. **Husbands:** do not let some women join WCF or go to public meetings
10. **Poverty and lack of funds:** for more meetings threatens the continuation of the work for some women who need support and basic funding to continue travelling to meet together, plan and lobby
11. **The level of commitment of the Local Council:** and their proximity (both physical and socio-economic) to the women, as well as their political affiliation and whether it is the same as the Council's, can all be either an opportunity or a barrier.

12) Conclusion

Importance of women only-spaces in promoting participation leading to empowerment and sometimes leadership

The research showed that these invited spaces have enabled women to achieve a range of successes, by building and honing their existing skills, by providing a safe space to share and learn and to practice public speaking, through training on rights, the Constitution and how to undertake political lobbying, as well as encouraging women to find ways to solve their problems individually or collectively.

The space does build confidence and promote participation, enabling women to build self-esteem, move into other spaces and for some (not all) to take on leadership positions. The new skills and knowledge contributed to developing women's understanding of their value and their rights and to take some action; these processes were empowering for the women and others in the community noticed changes in their attitudes and behaviour and respect for them rose. The research showed the value of such safe spaces for women to enable them to transition into more active and political roles in their communities.

The research recorded many changes as presented by the women themselves and corroborated by officials and others in the community. However, the research could not ascertain in a short time how frequent meetings need to be to enable women to change and how long is needed to really embed new learning, attitudes and behaviour that will be sustainable. The issue of further long-term support was raised by the women but not discussed in detail. At present there is little post-project evaluation that would enable WiPSU to know which groups or women keep running and why and which fade away, perhaps due to lack of top up training and resources to run meetings and travel to meet with decision makers. It was clear in Makoni, where the project is complete, that the women really do want more contact with WiPSU to discuss challenges as they arise and funding for meetings and travel.

The work has real value for the women

The WCFs are strong spaces, where relationships are built with the Councillor and between women, where women learn many new skills and start a range of new activities in their own lives and within their respective communities. Training women in leadership, communication, advocacy, and campaign strategies has increased their capacity to take the lead in the development of initiatives and to work in collaboration with the elected woman leader, as well as initiating various community development projects in their Wards. The work is influencing some decision-making and resource allocation at the local level, women are seeing improvements in some services and infrastructure. Women also learn where else to go with different problems and feel more able to resolve issues within their households and the community and feel proud that they are able to take issues up with different authorities, including the Council and the Councillor.

The WCFs are strong spaces, where relationships are built with the Councillor and between women, where women learn many new skills and start a range of new activities in their own lives and within their respective communities.

The women appreciate the space, and thoroughly enjoy it – something to be highly valued in a very constrained and difficult environment. They make friends, they learn from each other, they work across party lines, again something of real value in this context, and they use these in many ways to improve relations within their homes and the community, to find new ways to resolve problems and to speak out in different forums.

In spite of many challenges and frustrations, they are able to see results from working with and through the Councillor to influence the Council and or their MP and feel proud of their ability to take up issues with people in authority, something completely new in this context. They are gaining reputations for being competent, having knowledge useful in their communities, and being able to organise and present arguments to achieve greater access to key resources. They have learned how to present themselves well, to speak in front of men, to argue their case and the knowledge and experience of putting it into practice is empowering. Some go on into leadership in other forums.

Accountability and responsiveness

The research did open up questions around how far women can hold Councils to account and whether focusing so much on that prevents learning about all the other ways in which women are changing and benefitting and seeing change in their communities. It is challenging to expect much accountability in a context where decentralisation is not law and where policies promoting local-level engagement in decision-making are lacking. While women certainly realise that they have the power and voice to try and influence decisions – through e.g. the WCF, SDCs or Resident’s Associations, where they may exercise considerable agency and shape some decisions and push some agendas through – the issues of demanding responsiveness and accountability from decision makers in the Council are a different story. Both the women and those interviewed in the Council noted that there are many factors affecting what women can expect and what can really be achieved.

Women can certainly organise and present evidence on issues they want addressed. They are achieving some influence in different forums. What they cannot do is demand a response; they have to wait for a response. If their priority is ignored there is little they can do about it except talk to the Councillor; if they are asked to mobilise others for resources – time, money and materials – they cannot guarantee the Council will provide their part or ensure the Council deliver in a timely way. If answers do not come they lack the power to call them to account.

In addition, they are lobbying and demanding services and infrastructure from cash strapped Councils, where transparency around plans and budgets is hard to find and where Central Government rather than Local Government sets the overall agendas. What the Council can do is limited and even within those limits women lack real power to get a response, or to hold them to account if they do not deliver or do not share essential information. The governance paradigm of

people knowing their rights and demanding their rights and the obligation of decision makers to respond and be held to account is not one that fits easily into this kind of context, or possibly in any context. There is a need to re-examine some of the assumptions around how governance works, where power lies and what women can really achieve and how.

This raises questions about how much emphasis should be laid on this element of the work. It could be better for development organisations to look more deeply into what influence women can have and where and how they can exercise this influence and what is being achieved? The narrow focus on accountability, in Zimbabwe at least, may be a chimera that is often unachievable and can obscure learning and understanding where all the other values in the work lie. Many things do change for women as a result of engagement in these spaces and these contribute to women’s empowerment and their ability to think and act in new ways to address the multiple problems they and the communities face. Women use their new skills, knowledge and sense of agency to influence others; raise awareness of issues that affect their lives such as: violence, HIV and AIDS, lack of fees and their right to documentation and a voice; form groups to work together to generate funds or provide care and support to others and seek out different ways to address problems through becoming leaders in other groups, and more. These benefits for women were highly valued by both the women themselves and others in their communities.

Sustainability

The issue of sustainability of this work rather hangs in the air. While WiPSU has anecdotal evidence and feedback from a few groups they have supported in earlier years that they are still continuing, the lack of long term evaluations makes it hard to quantify and evidence this or understand how the work does become embedded and self-sustaining or whether over time women get tired, move away, or need to devote their time to other things. At present there is no funding for any kind of formal follow-up work or support to maintain the WCFs and their continuation depends entirely on the WCF itself, the motivation of individual women and the female Councillor working with them.

Collecting some data on the past groups would enable WiPSU to get a clearer idea of which ones continue and what enables that to happen. They do know that groups can stop when the female Councillor is not re-elected or a new female Councillor does not want to work with an existing WCF. The politics of each group may also be critical in determining whether or not they last and indeed what purpose they serve for the Ward and for the Councillor.

The work is highly political

Clearly work around political participation is by definition highly political and the research confirmed this, yet the project documents consulted – as part of the research – do not reflect the complexities that exist and focus more on very technical descriptions of governance work, as does the reporting.

The political context includes, which political party is in power; where alliances exist; whether the Councillor, the Council and the MP share a political allegiance or come from different parties; corruption; the highly contested allocation of scarce resources and how lines of accountability actually flow. In one Ward the women work closely with the Councillor and have lines of accountability and responsiveness with her, she in turn goes to the Council; in the other Ward the women are able to go to the Councillor but also to the Ward assembly and to the Council. The ability of the Councillor to get results for and with the women varied between the two sites; in one the Councillor has political influence through relations with the ruling party and a highly placed MP, and often by-passed the Council to get things done; in the other influence had to be exerted within the Council structure and the Councillor was of a different party to the Council. However, she was working well with the women and within the Council.

The picture is further complicated by the reality that many responsibilities of the Council cannot be delivered by cash strapped Councils, who have to apply for grants and account to donors for any funding they receive for delivering on their service delivery responsibilities. It is not at all clear what lines of accountability there are or could be between donors who fund projects in the District and the WCFs. How would women access these donors to influence their decisions or funding patterns, how could they call them to account? This donor-Council relationship weakens further the links between the citizen and the state and muddies the lines of accountability. It is also hard for women to access the mines and influence their responsibility for providing e.g. roads or water in peri-urban areas, though a few do attend mine committee meetings when they are held.

The lack of discussion around these political complexities means that the projects appear at times to be working in a vacuum rather than a highly politicised environment. This can limit discussion about what is possible in the context and what other approaches might be tried, and although the partner has these discussions internally they are not reflected in the documents that were seen during the research for the INGO or donors. These issues do not appear to influence how the project is assessed, the targets set or the indicators used and yet setting these without taking proper account of the local political and economic realities is problematic. It prevents learning about what is working and why and where the blockages lie beyond the women-Council relationship.

The work may need to be more contextualised and more time taken

WiPSU is an urban-based NGO and relatively little time is spent in the communities. Further, the programme is delivered in a very tightly structured way, which has become more structured as the value for money agenda places increasing demands on organisations such as WiPSU to find ways to cut costs to meet donor demands.

The women in the communities are not asked what their priorities are or what they most need from a programme like this and the basic model is delivered with little time for active participation. Yet even within one Province the contexts were very different and women had different challenges and priorities as well as different political contexts to work within.

At present the baselines carried out do not give the profile of each village or Ward, they are often collated across several areas and there is little specific disaggregated data available. The weakness of the baselines and the constraints in having enough resources to spend time in the identified communities/ward means that the contexts are not always well understood, although the partners have built good relationships with the women in each context, they do constant political scans of each area where they work. There is clearly mutual respect and liking yet with more time for preparation and delivery of the project it might be possible to better understand the opportunities provided by different spaces in each context and identify where women could have the most traction and impact.

More tailored and participatory ways of working might enable women to learn to work together more closely, in solidarity and to prioritise issues better, and for staff to understand more about the specific needs of each community and the best ways to support the women in each area. This could include ensuring that women from across the communities were involved, and the groups met did not include women with disabilities for example or those from other religious groups living in the Ward; all the women were Christian though of different denominations. It might also enable more work to be done to ensure that the women who go to speak do see themselves as representing other women, something that is not always clear at present.

Donor involvement

There are many ways in which donors and some partners are shaping this work, some positive and others less so:

- There is a lack of funding for women’s rights organisations so all funding is welcome and much appreciated. These organisations need support to do the work they are doing to build up women who know their rights and can participate in political processes
- However, the concern with value for money – which is understood to mean reaching more people with a dollar – risks ignoring where the real value lies in this kind of work and how best to ensure that value is realised. According to WiPSU the Value for Money (VFM) agenda is forcing them to make decisions to cut the training back, from five days to three and now in one Ward down to two days leaving little room for open discussion or participatory ways of working with the women. Tightly packed agendas have to be delivered so the space for participatory ways of work has been squeezed
- Donor priorities sometimes shape the way the project is presented and delivered, so while the Comic Relief funded project in Makoni was clearly a women’s empowerment project aimed at raising women’s voice and agency, in Mutasa the nature of the funding means the focus is much more on the community demanding and getting better service delivery and less is done around women’s participation and empowerment
- In both cases women’s priorities do not drive the work. If they did issues such as livelihoods, income generation and finding markets would be high on the agenda. Securing better services, while important, was not always their priority at this time of economic squeeze

- Donors appear to place less value on women’s participation, voice and agency – especially in their own lives – than the women do. Their increased knowledge, confidence and appearance was paramount to the women while measuring changes in Council provision is higher for donors – at times almost irrespective of the barriers faced
- Donors do not yet provide funding for work post project, and this has not been asked for by any of the programmes implemented around political participation in the research, so women lack funds for transport and meetings once the project is completed. They do want to continue the meetings and were in the Ward where the project was complete, but they raised their need for small amounts of money for meetings and further training. Having invested so much in the training, creating spaces, and building relationships the lack of follow-on funding appears short sighted. There is no real attention to sustainability
- Similarly there is no funding for retrospective evaluations, so while WiPSU has years of experience in these approaches they only have anecdotal and incidental feedback on which groups are continued and which have stopped. So much could be learned and better understood if some funding was available for retrospective evaluation.

Concluding comments

Much of the work is impressive, carried out in a highly political context where constant monitoring and sensitivity to the environment is needed for the work to continue. The women met clearly appreciate and benefit from the training and other inputs and are able to use the learning and knowledge they gain to find new ways to solve some of the problems they face at the household and community level. They are able to present themselves and their issues in public in ways that have not been seen before and slowly they are eroding some of the social norms that keep women excluded, voiceless and marginalised.

The women are achieving some successes with lobbying the Council for more resources and also finding other ways to address their problems, including getting into other decision-making forums and becoming leaders there or working together on specific challenges around e.g. low income or the care and prevention of HIV and AIDS and women’s rights to a life of non-violence. Their experiences are felt as empowering and their status and roles in the community are changing and improving. They are participating in decision-making in their homes as well as outside and achieving growing respect from the men in the community.

The research highlighted the reality that this work takes time and resources and suggested that issues of funding for the work and post-project need revisiting to ensure the real value of the work is realised and embedded long term; this is an issue of real concern to the women interviewed. It has also shown the power and value of listening to women and letting their agenda drive aspects of the work, including the setting of targets and indicators that have meaning for them, and the need to look beyond the narrow focus of governance work to explore what women gain and do with these spaces that works outside the imperative of lobbying the Council for change and demanding accountability from them, issues that are problematic in this context.



Womankind Worldwide

Role play in Mutasa Ward

The need for contextually appropriate work driven, in part, by the women themselves emerged from this research. The report ends with a reminder of some of the statements from the women themselves:

"We are becoming women of value."

"I now have a new strength."

"I like knowing my rights as a woman."

and

"We can do it."

Annexes

Annex 1: Zimbabwe visit itinerary

Days	Activity and purpose	Where
Tue 11	Depart LHR 21:05	London
Wed 12 Aug	Arrive in Harare 12:20 – WiPSU pick up and transport to hotel	Harare
Thur 13 Aug	Meeting/workshop in WiPSU office:	WiPSU office Harare
Fri 14 Aug	Meeting/workshop in WiPSU office:	WiPSU office Harare
Sat 15 Aug	Writing up notes	Harare
Sunday 16 Aug	Travel Mutare	Mutare/Manicaland
Mon 17 Aug	Day 1 in Makoni District Ward 20 (i) Group work with 12 District women who participate in the WCF to explore what they perceive to be the purpose of the space, which women attend and which don’t, their motivation for being involved, how they have determined their priorities and what actions they have taken, what they have achieved as a result of being part of the space, what has changed for them as individuals and for other women in the District	Makoni District
Tue 18 Aug	Day 2 in Makoni District (ii) Individual interviews with: 1. local Chief 2. representatives from the local Council in Rusape 3. Representative from the Ministry of Gender in Rusape to explore the views of decision makers who engage with the women both on the purpose and effectiveness of the space, their views of the women and their legitimacy, the influence of the women and how their own views and actions have been shaped by the women and how they are held to account and to explore the role of leaders in promoting women’s participation and engagement and what they consider as the benefits and negative consequences of women’s participation. (iii) Individual interviews with 4 Ward women who attend WCF who have a decision making role: to understand how the space is structured and organised and to gain a deeper understanding of barriers and enablers to participation and changes for women in their lives as a result of their participation and whether they have been able to access other/ political decision-making spaces.	Makoni District
Wed 19 Aug	In Hotel in Mutare with WiPSU staff feeding back on Day 1 and 2 in the field and planning for Day 4 and 5. Discussion over the governance system from local to national	Mutare

Thur 20 Aug	In Mutasa Ward 21 Group work with 15 Ward women who participate in the WCF to explore what they perceive to be the purpose of the space, which women attend and which don't, their motivation for being involved, how they have determined their priorities and what actions they have taken, what they have achieved as a result of being part of the space, what has changed for them as individuals and for other women in the District	Mutasa Ward
Fri 21 Aug	Day 2 Mutasa (i) Individual interviews with: 1. District Councillor 2. Representative from the local Council (at hotel in Mutare) 3. Representative of the Resident's Association to explore the views of decision makers who engage with the women both on the purpose and effectiveness of the space, their views of the women and their legitimacy, the influence of the women and how their own views and actions have been shaped by the women and how they are held to account and to explore the role of leaders in promoting women's participation and engagement and what they consider as the benefits and negative consequences of women's participation. (ii) Individual interviews with four Ward women who attend WCF who have a decision making role: to understand how the space is structured and organised and to gain a deeper understanding of barriers and enablers to participation and changes for women in their lives as a result of their participation and whether they have been able to access other/ political decision-making spaces.	
Sat 22	Travel back to Harare	
Sun 23	Writing up notes	Harare
Mon 24	Discussions with WiPSU staff	WiPSU office Harare
Tue 25	Discussions with WiPSU staff	WiPSU office Harare
Wed 26	Feedback to WiPSU Interview with Councillor from Makoni Ward 20	WiPSU office Harare
Thu 27	Flight departs 14:35	Harare/London

Annex 2: The WCF Model

WiPSU:

- Select Wards that have a female Councillor and assess the access they will be able to have to the community, the Councillor, the Council and the MP for the area.
- Undertake a baseline study of the area.
- Hold an initial one day workshop in the selected Ward with the village head; Councillor; women; and local authorities/service providers. Up to 70 people attend, 50 of them being women community members. Together they map the Ward, the services available, existing community structures; where women are in leadership positions and women's participation; and which other agencies are operating. There is a session on gender looking at roles, expectations, the differences between sex and gender. WiPSU calls this 'Phase 1'.
- Run Phase 2, which tends to be the following day. The 50 women are invited to return and local facilitators support 'Personal Empowerment' training, which looks at issues such as hygiene; confidence building; perceptions; culture; how to approach people and communication skills. Other sessions look at the barriers to women's participation; the Constitution and relevant laws; leadership skills, roles and responsibilities. Women revisit the community problems identified in Phase 1 and work in their respective groups (based on the communities they come from) on drawing up Community Action Plans (CAP); each group elects a village coordinator and the whole group elect the Ward Coordinator.
- Leave after Phase 2 and it is expected the newly formed WCF will meet regularly and put into action the CAP, working with the Councillor and as well as share the learning with other women in their communities.
- Return 4-6 months later, when Phase 3 happens where WiPSU comes to assess progress and get an update on the status of the CAP. They then strengthen areas of learning requested by the women and introduce sessions on 'accountability'.
- Conducts monitoring visits in between these phases and WiPSU sometimes engages directly with the local Council. In addition they may return for other reasons, such as donor visits, research or special programmes that are funded from other sources.

Annex 3: The WCF Sites under consideration

CR evaluation sites Politically risky at this time to visit Too far to travel WiPSU potential sites for research

Ward 21 – 300km from Harare 3 hrs away. Ward 20 – 3 to 4 hrs from Harare. An hour between them

No.	Wards	Platform Type	Province	Party	Established	Donor	Location	Economic Activity	Socio-cultural	Local authorities/ resources	Political situation at Constituency Level	General context
1.	Mutasa Ward 21	WCFs	Manikaland	MDC-T	2014	Trocaire	P-Urban very green / hilly / misty	Timber / Gold Mining	Secretive, closed communities more conservative	M Type RDC 26 Wards – out of which 7 are female WiPSU working with 2 Mix-mining / timber income and central gov funds Originally majority of diamonds originate from.	ZPF	First authority to be re-classed as town. There are Resident's Associations. Part of Ward is owned by mining. 1 side urbanised and 1 side very rural
2.	Mutasa Ward 27		Manikaland	ZPF	2013	Trocaire	Rural (re- settlement*) very green / hilly / misty	Timber / Mining / subsistence farming / cash cropping	Secretive, closed communities more conservative		MDC-T	
3.	Tsho Ward 1		Maf North	ZPF	2014	Trocaire	Rural dry and arid savannah	Wildlife / camp fire / Timber (teak, mahogany) / borders ntl park / cattle ranching (fixed)	Conservative Ndebele 4 lang grps. Migratory area – women and elderly – no young men in the communities	TRDC 21 Councillors working with the only 2 W. Heavily reliant on central govt and their interference but funds come from camp fire and timber	Originally MDC- Renewal W MP. Lost by- election ZPF now. Difficult to work there – but a lot of interest to know what WiPSU is doing	
4.	Tsho Ward 6		Maf North MDC-T	MDC-T	2014	Trocaire	Rural dry and arid savannah	Camp fire / timber / subsistence cattle				
5.	Mutasa Ward 20		Manikaland	ZPF	2013	CR	Rural	Subsistence **farming	Manika. Very patriarchal, secretive society.	MRDC Central govt resources	ZPF. Finance Minister. Area benefits from this	
6.	Makoni 22		Manikaland	MDC-T	2013	CR	Rural	Subsistence **farming				

No.	Wards	Platform Type	Province	Party	Established	Donor	Location	Economic Activity	Socio-cultural	Local authorities/ resources	Political situation at Constituency Level	General context
7.	Shurugwi		Midlands South	ZPF	2014	CR	Rural	Mining diff. minerals (chrome) / artisanal mining / Community Share Ownership Trust (CSOT) – mining co. supporting community inits / subsistence farming / trafficking belt	Makaranga 3 ethnic grps. Used to being visited by people. Nhema (Chief's line)	TRDC 7 W Councillors WiPSU working with 1 Own resources and CSOT and central govt resources. Trad a lot of support	ZPF. MP Francis Nhema (son of Chief) long standing minister. Deep linkage with Pres – but now expelled from Exec. Now a backbencher. Persona non-grata	
8.	Binga		Mat North	MDC-T	2013	CR	P-Urban (developing)	Borders ntl park / subsistence fishing & farming / camp fire / tourism / herbs	Marginalised, v closed / Tonga community / maintained their lang and way of life. Relate to neighbouring counties depending on location (Zambia / Botswana)	BRDC 1 W Lot of central gov interventions	MDC-T. Province senior ZPF come from – so a lot of ZPF activity despite it being an opposition area. Govt opening doors to the community	

*Land resettlement areas tend to be virgin land with very limited infrastructure and services

** better off communities – close to eastern border – cross border activities

NB. 16 languages recognised in the Constitution. 3 main ones Shona/Ndebele/English

East of the country more developed and more densely populated/ closer to the coast also so higher trade. Eastern more verdant, better terrain for farming.

Selection Criteria:

- political environment; constantly changing situation around sensitivities
- police clearance

Annex 4: Project site variations

Comic Relief Project

The project started in 2012 and came to an end in June 2015 and had three aims:

- To get more women participating in Parliament and Local Government.
- To improve the accountability of decision-making structures to women constituents, residents of local communities.
- To strengthen WiPSU’s capacity to play a leading role in promoting women’s participation.

The key approaches to achieve these aims included providing training and capacity building support to women leaders; establishing, training and supporting community forums to increase women’s participation at Ward and constituency level and organisational development strengthening, particularly on monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL).

The beneficiaries included:

- Women with leadership positions in the women’s wings/assemblies of political parties.
- Women candidates contesting parliamentary and Local Government elections.
- Women MPs and Councillors.
- Women constituents (CCF and WCF members) living in target constituencies / Wards – 4 constituencies: Gokwe Mapfungautsi, Mutoko North, Harare West and Gutu East and 4 Wards: Binga Ward 24, Makoni Wards 20 and 22 in and Shurugwi Ward 14:
 - Male and female community members.
 - Community leaders.
 - Policy makers – i.e. male and female Government officials and political party leaders.

Trócaire Programme:

Mutasa Ward 21 is part of the civil society support programme of Trócaire (2013-2016) titled implemented in five Districts in Manicaland Province and four Districts in Matebeleland North Province. The overall objective is for citizens to bring about a more accountable, responsive and participatory system of governance where the state respects protects and fulfils the basic rights of the poorest and most marginalised women and men. Specifically:

- To improve responsive and participatory local governance where the social service needs of women and men in the target communities are prioritised.
- To improve respect and protection of the human rights of women and men in the target communities.
- To strengthen the capacity of partners to deliver quality projects for the benefit of women and men in the target communities.

Unlike the CR project the programme only focuses at the community and provincial level and it is not specifically concerned with women being the main agents of change and beneficiaries. WiPSU is one of 7 implementing agencies in the programme, who all follow their own models to achieve the shared objectives, which in the case of WiPSU is working with women and women Councillors. WiPSU is working in 2 Districts Mutasa and Tsholotsho.

In both Wards the research took place in WiPSU's has a common aim which is to increase women's participation/engagement in existing decision-making structures. Their approach has been to strengthen the existing organising that women have been involved in. Part of that is the formation of women only spaces, Ward Consultative Forums (WCF), which serve as a platform to train women in leadership, confidence building and personal empowerment and for these women to then work with and support the women Councillor to demand accountability for service provision.

WiPSU do this by:

- Selecting Wards that have a female Councillor and assessing the access they will be able to have to the community, the Councillor, the Council and the MP for the area.
- Holding an initial one day workshop in the selected Ward with the village head; Councillor; women; and local authorities/service providers. Up to 70 people attend, 50 of them being women community members. Together they map the Ward, the services available, existing community structures; where women are in leadership positions and women's participation; and which other agencies are operating. There is a session on gender looking at roles, expectations, the differences between sex and gender. WiPSU calls this 'Phase 1.'
- Phase 2 tends to be the following day where only the 50 women are invited to return and local facilitators support in 'Personal Empowerment' training, which looks at issues such as hygiene; confidence building; perceptions; culture; how to approach people and communication skills. Other sessions look at the barriers to women's participation; the Constitution and relevant laws; leadership skills, roles and responsibilities. Women revisit the community problems identified in Phase 1 and then start to work in their respective groups (based on the communities they come from) on drawing up Community Action Plans (CAP);³⁵ each group elects a village coordinator, and the whole group elected the Ward Coordinator.
- After Phase 2, WiPSU departs and it is expected the newly formed WCF will meet regularly and put into action the CAP working with the Councillor and as well as share the learning with other women in their communities.
- Phase 3 tends to happen 4-6 months later where WiPSU come to assess progress, hear of the status of the CAP; strengthen any learning areas as relevant and introduce sessions on 'accountability.'
- In between these phases WiPSU conducts its monitoring and engages with the local Council.

35. The CAP looks at the issues, who is accountable, how to approach the issues and timeframes

For WiPSU the intention is that the WCF and the training serve as a platform for women to increase their confidence, know their own value and self-respect, take on leadership positions and lead in other groups, to take collective action, work in solidarity and support each other into leadership roles and be able to influence community agenda. They see that there is a need to balance expectations as to what authorities can deliver and what they can do themselves as a collective.

The above is the model followed in the two Wards the research took place in. However there are few variations. In Makoni Ward 20 which was part of the Comic Relief project that ended in June 2015, there was a strong focus on getting women into leadership positions, and due to lack of resources less of a focus on interacting with the Council. In Mutasa Ward 21 which is part of the ongoing Trocaire funded project the focus is more on demanding accountability for improved service delivery. As part of this WiPSU are also engaging more with the Council and its members – as they are considered responsible for providing these services – through training and having more frequent opportunities to interact.

Annex 5: Previous evaluations of WiPSU’s work at the community level

A review of the previous independent evaluations undertaken of WiPSU’s work, as part of the DFID and Comic Relief funded projects, showed a number of similarities in the findings of this research. In particular evidence that:

- WiPSU had empowered WCF members to develop income generating projects. An increase in leadership skills had boosted women’s confidence to initiate and lead income-generating activities. Ranging from savings clubs, vending, animal husbandry and horticulture. (DFID final evaluation)
- Women now had the confidence to speak and articulate issues. (DFID final evaluation)
- WiPSU has empowered all the direct female beneficiaries, ranging from personal confidence and better grooming, through giving voice to women and underpinning that voice with a knowledge base. (CR final evaluation)
- Women are now confident to express themselves in public; more willing to participate and contribute to discussions on issues affecting their communities and are now taking up leadership positions in politics and community based organisations. (CR final evaluation)
- Women using the skills acquired to contest for leadership positions in churches, schools, agricultural produce display contests, water point committees and others. (DFID final evaluation)
- WCFs were helpful in creating strong functional relationships between the Councillors and their constituents. With the support of their Councillor WCFs have initiated various community development projects in their Wards. (DFID final evaluation)
- Training women in leadership, communication, advocacy, and campaign strategies increased their capacity to lead in the development of initiatives such as action plans, to be implemented in collaboration with the elected woman leader. (DFID final evaluation)

It’s worth noting that these evaluations were assessing WiPSU’s work across the board, from the local to the national level, as such the community level focus is limited in the reports. But they do help to triangulate some of the findings from the study.

Annex 6: Case Studies:

Representative from Makoni 20 Ward

I was born in 1966 and attended St Luke’s primary school in 1972. However, I had to run away for some time because of the war in my country and I was forced to take a break from my education. We ran away to Gweru, where my father worked. When the war finished, I returned and stayed with my maternal grandmother. But I don’t know why. Perhaps it was because my grandmother needed my help with chores and household duties. My father continued to work in Gweru whilst my mother stayed back in the rural areas. I started Grade 1 when I was 8 years old, because my grandmother did not know at what age children were meant to start school. My father sold life insurance but could not find work after the war. Times were difficult, but I was able to attend the newly built Government secondary school. I took my Cambridge examinations at the age of 18 and passed in two subjects, English and Shona.

When I was 19 years old I married a man who was in his late 20s. My mother was not too happy at first, but I fell pregnant immediately so she had to accept it. I had four children, two sons and two daughters and we were happy. But my husband died shortly after, in 1995 due to an accident. I was devastated. I didn’t know what to do. I was young and naïve and confused about who or what I was meant to be. So, I took my children and moved back home with my mother using my father’s pension money for support.

I later met a man and fell in love once again. I became pregnant and moved into his family. But his family never accepted me. To them I had too much ‘baggage,’ and so he ran away and left me whilst I was still pregnant with his child. He deceived me. After the hardship I endured in his family, I decided to move back once again into my mother’s house. I started to work after moving in, and the child I had with him, went to live with his father.

At the age of 27, I met my third husband, a military man, whom I had two sons with. I thought I could finally be happy, but he too deceived me. He had another family on the side, who he never told me about. He didn’t take care of me or my children, so I decided to leave him. I later found out, that he died in an accident at work. I had seven kids and no one to look after us.

In 2001 I began to take adult literacy classes and I was very excited about the prospect of teaching adult education at the primary school. However, a combination of scarce funds from students and the lack of interest displayed by our community meant that I had to stop. It was not benefiting me anymore. It was at this time, when I began to embrace spirituality and turned to the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM).

In 2004, I started to feel unwell and developed hives on my arms. I was scared so I immediately went to the clinic, only to be told that I that I was HIV positive. I was devastated and traumatised. I was filled with distressing thoughts and I was scared about the future of my children and my grandchildren. But the counselling and guidance I received from the clinic meant that I had the available information to lead a healthy lifestyle and follow through with the requirements of the medication I was taking. Every two months I visited the health centre to receive my medication, which was now readily available.

Later that year, my CD4 count fell below the 350 threshold and so I was started on ARV treatments. My family has been my biggest support network. My mother has supported me throughout my journey, and my son-in-laws have also helped me.

Later, I participated in the WCF (Ward Consultative Forum). I missed the first day of the workshop because I was not aware about the meeting. But one of the members of the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) committee told me about the gathering and nominated me. I joined on day 2. We meet monthly as a local group of about 15 people and also once a month as a Ward group, consisting of about 20-30 people (16 villages). The training I received from the WCF taught me not to be afraid of taking on leadership positions. Over the years, I have participated in many such groups, including the income-generating groups, school development committees, and the HIV Support groups.

It is difficult for a woman to live without her husband and I was scared before. But I now know my rights. Before, women found it challenging to register her child without a husband. We were required to get a marriage certificate and register our children in our husband's name. But now, I know that I can register my child without my husband. All I need is a birth certificate. WCF has taught me and the other women in my community, a lot. We support each other and are taught valuable life lessons, such as about hygiene and about respect for one another. We stand up for our rights and together we have improved our living conditions. For instance, domestic violence in my community has reduced because more of us are aware about what is right and wrong.

WCF has provided us with new ways of getting things done. I believe that power begins with members of the WCF. They identify the issues, they bring it to the attention of the Councillor, and the Councillor then takes the issue to the Council and MPs. As a member, I now have the power to get things done.

Representative from Makoni 20 Ward

I was born in 1970 and was the youngest of 6 siblings. I lived with my mother and father, and we lived somewhat a normal life. I started my primary education in 1977, at the age of seven and took my Grade 7 exams in 1983. I did quite well in my primary school and received my qualifications in English and Mathematics. Soon after, however, my mother fell sick. My older siblings had moved out of the house after marriage, and so the responsibility to look after my mother fell on me. Additionally, I was responsible for looking after the livestock, completing all household chores, and looking after my father. The burden of my duties meant that I was forced to miss school quite often and consequently I did not do as well in my O-Levels in 1987, passing only two subjects, Shona and Science.

I continued looking after my sick mother until 1993, when she passed away. This was a very difficult time for me, as I suddenly assumed all the previous responsibilities of my mother. During this period, my father had lost his job due to the economic climate and I had lost my childhood. I went to work on a neighbouring farm as a labourer to earn a sufficient income stream to support me and my father.

I got married in 1999, at the age of 30, which is regarded as being very late in my community. Living in my household, I was unable to socialise like other children and it was only after I started working full-time on the farm and moved into the compound, that I met my husband. We fell in love and got married. Three years later I gave birth to my daughter, Fortunate. A woman, in my community, is expected to give birth straight away after she gets married, and so it was seen as being abnormal that I did not have a child sooner. But I suffered from stomach problems which caused me to have a miscarriage. So, three years later when my daughter was born, I decided to name her Fortunate, because it was a miracle that she was born.

In 2012, my husband left us in search for work in Kariba. He did odd jobs here and there, and sent us money whenever he could to help sustain the household. I managed to see him only 6 months at a time. I currently live with my daughter, who is now in Grade 7. She is an average student, but she works hard in school. I try and help my daughter whenever I can, but I have the responsibility of doing all the daily household duties, providing for my family, and helping with my father’s upkeep.

WiPSU has played an important role in my life. When I joined the project, my life took a different turn; I now have a new strength. I have seen a lot of positive results from the skills that I have learnt here. I now know that as a woman, I can take care of myself. I want my child to succeed and have a better life. I no longer look down on myself. People emulate me, even though I am without my husband. I am not begging and I am able to put meat on the table – I can have the same lifestyle as the rest of my community.

In my community, when a woman lives without her husband for a long time, they suspect that she is divorced and doubt that she can survive without begging. There is suspicion and you can be ostracised because they believe that you might steal their husbands.

But by being actively involved in WiPSU I have learnt that I have the potential to work for myself and earn a form of livelihood and respect. Therefore, I and a group of women formed an income generating project amongst the WCF (Ward Consultative Forum) members. We pool our money and then other women can borrow it with a small interest. When the money has grown, because of the interest, we share the money and invest in fertilisers and seeds. This has improved our farming techniques and enabled us to grow more crops to sell on the market. It has improved my life.

Women are now working together and collaborating with one another. We even established the ‘Kitchen Top-Ups’, where we would buy household utensils, such as pots and pans for each other. This has boosted our morale and women’s relations, because in our community, a woman who has household utensils is considered organised and is seen as being able to look after her family. Since joining the WCF, we have created action plans for the building of a clinic and bridge. The biggest challenge that we face is that the clinic is very far away and the transportation costs very high. So when it rains, we are not able to take the shortcut route and many people don’t go to the clinics to get treatment.

I am the coordinator for Nyaukwe WCF and I was nominated by my fellow WCF members because they felt that I was trustworthy, dedicated and committed to the cause. I also had a background in working in community projects, so my peers believed that I was the best person to gather all the relevant information from meetings and share this information with other villages.

At the WCF, we meet once a month at the local level, where approximately 15 people attend. The whole WCF Ward 20 also meets monthly, and here over 30 people attend. At each village, immediate challenges are discussed, and then it is all brought together into coherent issues at the Ward Level WCF. I am satisfied that our concerns are being taken seriously and heard at the Ward Level.

Issues that have specifically involved Nyaukwe are concerned with the expansion of the existing secondary school; medication for clinics; support to have better access to markets; and income generating projects. Each of these issues is under consideration by the Councillor. She strongly believes that the Councillor has the power to do something.

“We can do it” Research on Women’s Political Participation in Zimbabwe

This country report from Zimbabwe is part of a larger research programme undertaken by Womankind Worldwide funded by the FLOW (Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women) programme, funded by the Dutch Government. The research aims to try and understand better the kinds of spaces created for women in different contexts to promote their participation and to learn what enables women – especially those with limited exposure or experience in decision-making and public life – to build their confidence, find their voice and engage in political activity at the local level. It aims to address the question: how do these spaces work and what are the barriers and enablers for change? There is a dearth of information exploring what enables women to change and grow and how they fare in complex and difficult decision-making arenas and this research aims to address this gap by focusing on the experiences of women.



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