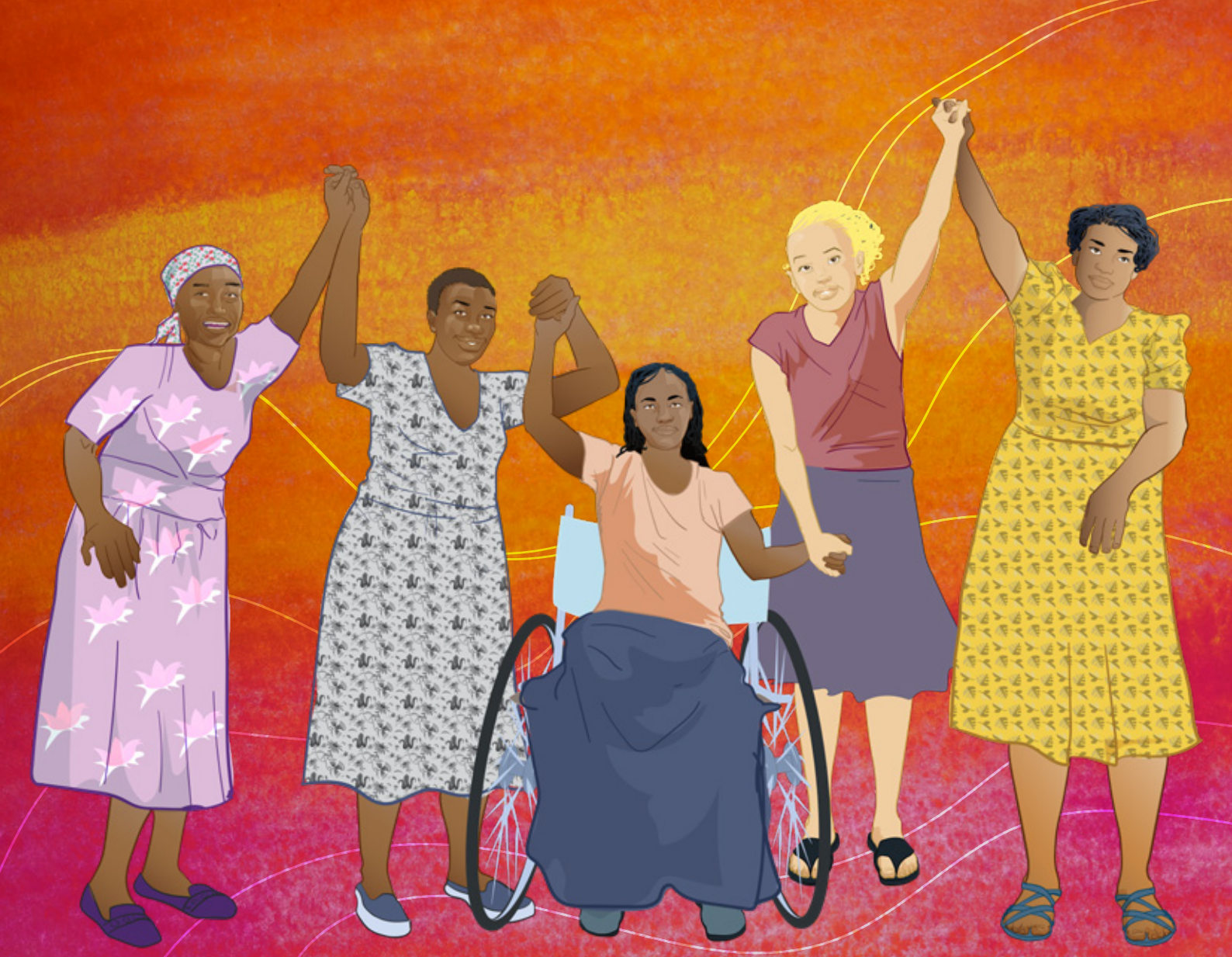

Building Collective Power and Navigating a Women's Agenda:

Feminist lessons on Adaptation, Resistance and Leadership from Women in Zimbabwe

REPORT

Womankind Worldwide

WiPSU

WOMEN'S COALITION OF ZIMBABWE

Contents

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This paper is based on the analysis and findings of adapted Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) facilitated by Melania Chiponda, along with the context of the wider Collective Action to Realise Equality (CARE) project within which this FPAR was commissioned.

The team of research facilitators who contributed to the research implementation and analysis was made up of Rumbidzai Mpahlo, Providence Warinda, Thandiwe Miti, Tatenda Machingauta, Ngoni Jemwa and Sharon Manenji. This report was written primarily by Melania Chiponda with inputs from Rumbidzai Mpahlo.

Thanks also to the wider CARE project team for their contributions during the research process and inputs into writing and editing this report: Rumbidzayi Cordelia Machimbirike (WiPSU), Mercy Jaravani (WCoZ), Tutsirai Makuvachuma (WiPSU), Sakhile Sifelani-Ngoma (WiPSU), Sally Ncube (WCOZ) Natasha Horsfield (Womankind Worldwide), Laura Brown (Womankind Worldwide), and Sarah Masters (Womankind Worldwide). This work was funded by Comic Relief under their POWER UP! funding stream as part of the wider CARE project running from October 2019 – September 2024.

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ACRONYMS

CARE	Collective Action to Realise Equality
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
Covid-19	Respiratory Infection caused by Coronavirus
FDGs	Focus Group Discussions
FPAR	Feminist Participatory Action Research
LBTQIA+	Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Queer or Questioning, Intersex and Asexual + all other identities not encompassed in the short acronym.
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PEP	Post-exposure prophylaxes
PPE	Personal protective equipment
PReP	Pre-exposure prophylaxes.
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH/SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health / Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
STCs	Story-telling Circles
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
VIDCO	Village Development Committee
WADCO	Ward Development Committee
WCoZ	Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe
WiPSU	Women in Politics Support Unit
WM	Women's Movement
WROs	Women's Rights Organisations

TERMINOLOGY WITHIN THIS REPORT

Woman and Women

The use of the terms 'woman' and 'women' in their traditional spelling throughout this report is in no way intended to be exclusionary. They are a reflection of the fact that this terminology was not interrogated as part of this FPAR research, however it is intended in the broadest most inclusionary sense.

Black African Women

Additionally, within the context of this report, the term women' refers specifically to Black native African Women within the Zimbabwean political landscape. The political identity of Black African women within this report is recognised to acknowledge the historical and political nuances that shape the experiences of women in the region of Southern Africa

LBTQIA+ and defining queer identity

Although queer identities were not explored in detail themselves during the research, we acknowledge that queerness encompasses many aspects beyond simply sexuality, which is the primary focus of how these identities are discussed in this report. Although there is not space here to explore and capture the diverse dimensions of queer identity in Zimbabwe, we wish to acknowledge the broadness and multifaceted nature of these identities.

Feminist / Women's Movement (WM)

Feminist or women's movements in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere, are comprised of multiple parts and many actors, including WROs, activists, academics, journalists, lawyers and trade unionists. Whilst WROs, whether formal or informal, can be considered 'the primary structures in or through which movement leaders, activists, and members are organised, trained, capacitated, protected and energised to pursue the transformational agenda of movements'[1], the role of women as individuals and those organising collectively at the grassroots are also significant. Women in the community are therefore as much a part of the ecosystem of these movements as WROs, and it is in acknowledgement of this that we refer to the Feminist or Women's Movement in this report. Where we are referring to specifically to the role of Women's Rights Organisations within the WM, we have endeavoured to clarify this.

Womanhood

Although Feminists have previously eschewed patriarchal meanings of womanhood[2], in this report the term is used to refer to the multifaceted experiences of being a woman within the particular context and how women's intersectional internal and external experiences and actions are shaped by their own sense of power and self, as well as their environment in terms of social norms, culture and history (which are often driven by heteropatriarchy and nationalist post colonialism).

1 Batliwala, S. (2021): Changing their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements https://www.awid.org/publications/changing-their-world-concepts-and-practices-womens-movements

2 Mohlabanea, N & Tshoaedi, M – *What Is a Woman? A Decolonial African Feminist Analysis of Womanhoods in Lesotho* – https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21528586.2021.2015716

COLLECTIVE ACTION TO REALISE EQUALITY (CARE):

Feminist Movement Building in Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

The Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) and Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU) with support from Womankind Worldwide and funded by Comic Relief commissioned a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) under the Collective Action to Realise Equality (CARE) project in Zimbabwe's Binga and Nyaminyami Rural Districts. The study took place between February 2022 to November 2022 within a context where Zimbabwe was facing multiple and compounding threats that constrain women from participating in law-making and decision-making processes as described below.

To understand the context requires directly engaging with women on their lived realities but also understanding the historical context that led to this point surrounding the lack of women's participation in positions of power. Long histories of violence and systemic discrimination which date back to the country's violent colonial history have created deep inequalities that disadvantage some people from the outset. This study recognises that making constitutional and legislative demands for women's involvement in formal politics is critical. However, such efforts should be supported by the necessary structural changes within the country to ensure the systemic changes needed to enable women's participation take place.

Over the last three years (2020-2023) in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic[3] government institutions were largely non-functional. Parliament shut down, the courts shut down[4] and women in all their identities experienced a lot of violence[5]. The Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis that the country is currently facing have perpetuated the pre-existing gender inequalities and injustice and their impacts are not evenly distributed. The Covid-19 pandemic showed that the country is far from achieving gender equality as vulnerable groups battle a multitude of injustices that are overwhelming.[6]

Within this context, the CARE project partners commissioned this FPAR following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions in Zimbabwe (after the pandemic required the original plans for a more longitudinal FPAR to be reoriented), with the aim of rooting their work in women's lived experiences and strengthening accountability to the movement by documenting strategies for demanding accountability and the ways in which women are organising for change, and exploring ways to achieve 50/50 representation, grounded in the lived realities of women in Zimbabwe.

Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR), the methodology used in this study, comes out of both the radical Participatory Action Research (PAR) tradition and the global feminist movement. The approach facilitates the building of collective consciousness through feminist popular education processes therefore enabling women to collectively understand their lived realities and, in doing so, increases women's conscientisation about the systems and practices that marginalise and oppress them. By centring women, the approach creates the necessary spaces and processes for women to interrogate power and to de-centre traditional power hierarchies of knowledge. This FPAR also acknowledged that the oppression of women and their marginalised position in society has also largely been shaped by their history. As noted above, in Zimbabwe, this history includes a violent colonial past that has continually oppressed women and that has shaped the country's dominant ideas around culture, religion as part of the culture, the education system, the political system and the value system in general.

3 11 March 2020, The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 a global pandemic and called upon countries to take measures against the pandemic.

4 19 March 2020, the Government of Zimbabwe declared a State of National Disaster in terms of the Civil Protection Act of 1989 and the Ministry of Health and Childcare of issued Statutory Instrument 77 of 2020 which set out a raft of lock down measures in which Parliament and the Courts were initially not exempt.

5 WCoZ, Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation (SAFE) Technical Assistance Facility Report, 2021, https://www.wcoz.org/download/safe-zimbabwe/

6 UNDP 2020 socio-economic assessment https://www.undp.org/zimbabwe/publications/preliminary-assessment-socio-economic-impact-coronavirus-covid-19-zimbabwe and World Vision International Impact Report: Access Denied on COVID-19 & girls Educationhttps://www.wvi.org/publications/case-study/zimbabwe/covid-19-aftershocks-and-their-impact-girls-education-zimbabwe

Ultimately, FPAR creates an environment where women can realise their existing power and the approaches, they have already used to challenge oppression and gives fresh hope for new and renewed collective action for the future. In so doing, FPAR is a critical movement building tool for rural women in Zimbabwe.

The following section outlines background context, background to the study, including the rationale for this FPAR, approach, methodology and adaptations and considerations for the research. The analysis of the research findings begins on page 23 of this report.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Democracy and respect for human rights are based on the premise of equal and equitable participation of all individuals in a country. This forms the basis for women's full and meaningful participation in all political, social, and economic spaces. For democracy to be a reality, women have to be adequately represented in all decision-making and policy-making processes. Women constitute 50.7% of Zimbabwe's population[7] but their participation in governance and electoral processes remains minimal. The Constitution of Zimbabwe[8] in Sections 17 and 56, speaks to gender balance and gender equality, Section 124 introduced the proportional representation quota system where an additional 60 seats were added to the 210 National Assembly direct election constituency seats with the 60 additional seats reserved for women only. The proportional representation provision is guided by the rationale that electoral processes in the country are highly competitive, male dominated and not safe and friendly for women to fully participate. However, it should be noted that this provision just states women without taking into consideration that women carry different identities, privileges and vulnerabilities, which include age, disability and sexual orientation, to mention a few. These intersecting identities are a defining factor for women's effective participation.

To promote women's representation in politics and achieve the gender agenda (50/50), the proportional representation provisions were extended beyond Parliament to Local Government through the Constitutional Amendment Bill Number 2 of 2021[9]. A total of 30% of Local Council seats are reserved for women in Local Government[10]. This is in addition to the existing 1970 council seats. However, without addressing the structural barriers and the systemic injustices that are embedded in society, women's equal participation will remain a fallacy. Even if women are successful in gaining positions in the local or national government, there is need for continuous training, capacity strengthening and advocacy to ensure elected women make use of their leadership positions to represent and be accountable to the needs of other women in their communities.

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) on the Rights of Women in Africa which was adopted in Maputo in July 2003. Known as the Maputo Protocol, its Article 9 speaks to 'Participation in Political and Decision-Making Processes'; the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development and other Regional and International Human Rights instruments. However, these instruments have not been accompanied by a shift in mindsets in terms of addressing the structural constraints that prohibit women from actively seeking and occupying political positions at local and national levels in Zimbabwe.

7 https://www.africaportal.org/features/rethinking-womens-political-participation-zimbabwes-elections/
8 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act,2013
9 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.2) Act of 2021
10 Statutory Instrument 115 of 2023 sets out the formulae for women only seats in Local Authorities with a total of 602 women.

Covid-19 and ongoing crises

When the CARE project was designed, Covid-19 was not a reality and not something that was expected to be factored into the FPAR study. However, Zimbabwe is not new to crisis and even without Covid-19, Zimbabweans were facing ongoing food shortage and drought linked to economic and political crises[11]. These have led to high unemployment and increased risk of sexual and financial exploitation as women seek other means of income. Covid-19 added additional burdens for women who faced high incidences of domestic violence in the home during lockdown, lack of access to reproductive health services and lost income as informal trading had been moved off the streets.

Being grounded in women's lived realities, this FPAR therefore reveals how women live through multiple crises in their daily lives, including Covid-19, and surfaces the complexities and interconnectedness of the issues they face.

How the CARE project was designed to respond to the context

The increased collective participation and representation of women in political processes is hopeful with the Collective Action to Realise Equality (CARE) project that is being implemented in Zimbabwe by Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) and Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU) with support from Womankind Worldwide and funded by Comic Relief (October 2019 – September 2024).

The CARE project aims to support the strengthening of the women's movement through Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) in Zimbabwe, making it more accountable to and inclusive of the women it serves. It also seeks to increase collective leadership, voice and agency of diverse women by working with women leaders in formal and informal decision-making structures, and women in communities. The project is grounded in a deep understanding of women's lived realities but also the rapidly shifting political and economic context it works in. As a result, it intends to achieve the following three outcomes in an adaptable and flexible way building on evidence and feedback and being responsive to critical issues as they arise.

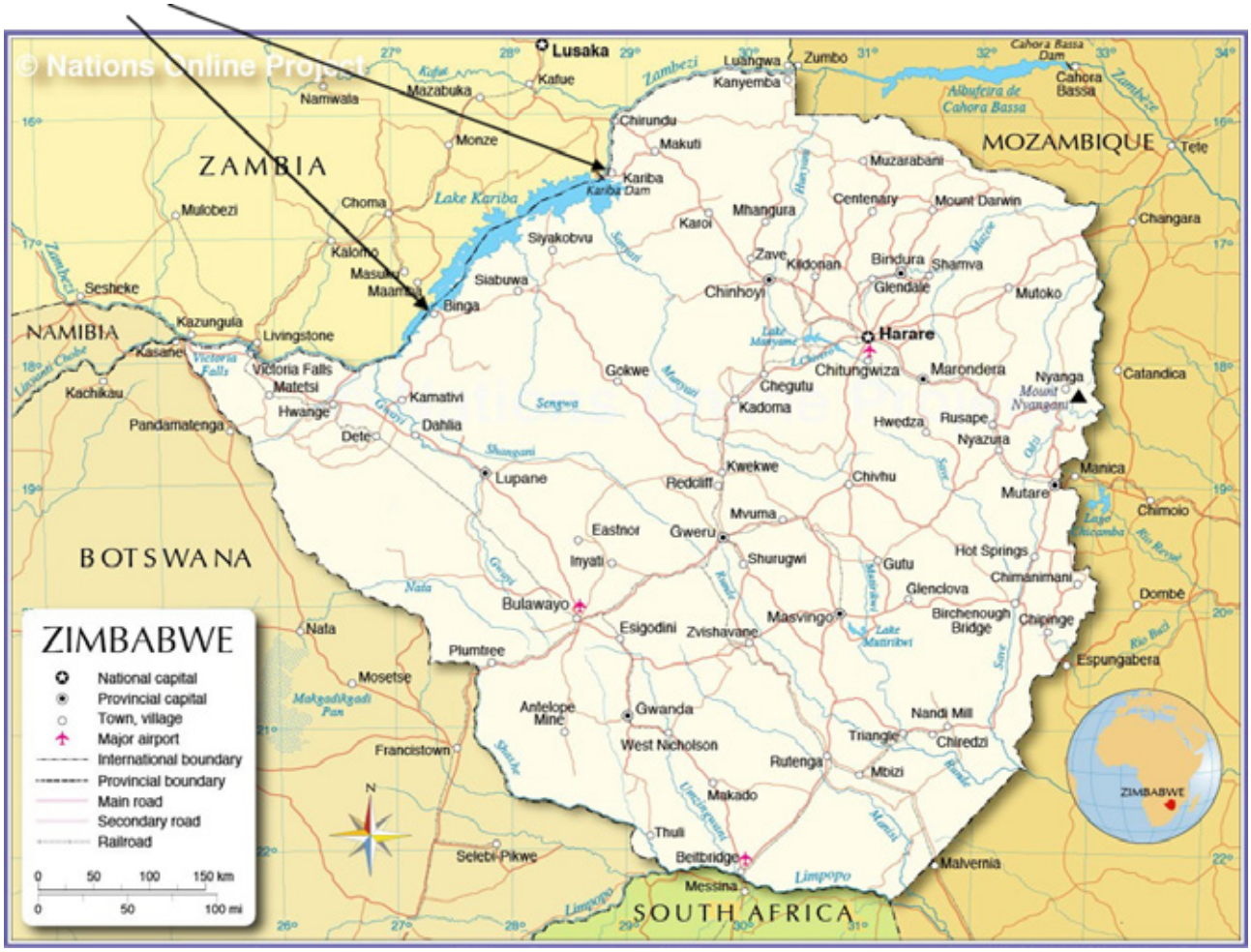
CARE seeks to achieve three interrelated outcomes:[12]

- The women's movement in Zimbabwe is more accountable to a diverse range of women and girls, and better equipped to collectively demand change and hold power holders to account.
- Women elected and those aspiring to formal leadership office have strengthened capacity through gaining skills and knowledge, to better lead, influence and be accountable to women.
- Women at community level have increased collective power to organise, influence and demand change.

11 ZIMVAC Urban and Rural Assessments 2019 and 2020, ZIMREF 2019, Zimbabwe Economic Report www.zimfa.gov.zw

12 The research areas fall into the Basilizwi region located in the Zambezi valley, north western part of Zimbabwe whose communities were historically displaced from the banks of the Zambezi River.

FPAR Sites



The FPAR was carried out in Makande, Ward 12 and Binga Centre in Kaani, Ward 24. Makande is situated in Nyaminyami Rural District Council in Mashonaland West Province and Binga Centre falls under Binga Rural District Council in Matabeleland North Province. These areas were selected because WiPSU and WCOZ agreed to reach out to new areas that had either not directly worked in before, or had not worked in for some time[13] in order to better understand the needs, interests and organising of women in these communities, in order to build their power and inform future programming and movement building work. There was also a need to have a regional balance which is why the sites were split between Mashonaland and Matabeleland provinces.

Makande in particular was of specific interest to WiPSU because the Ward is represented in the Local Council by a woman who is the only female in the 12-member Rural District Council. Binga was selected as an area that had been previously marginalised from formal WRO engagement due to it being a geographically hard to reach location but where there was a clear avenue to engage with women in the community because the main FPAR facilitator had an existing relationship of solidarity with the FPAR participants which is crucial for any FPAR process.

13 WiPSU had last worked directly in Binga in 2016, while WCoZ did not have direct interventions in Binga but though the WCoZ Hwange Chapter included interventions in Binga or women from the Binga communities.

While Makande is a community with rural villages engaged mainly in tobacco farming, Binga Centre is a complex rural site which drew women from different backgrounds namely rural, urban and fishing camps into one space. The common sources of livelihood for both districts are subsistence farming, fishing and sex work. The women that participated in the FPAR also included sex workers, whose livelihoods, include sex work or transactional sex. This was the case in both areas, but was initially only spoken about openly in Binga, with sex workers in Makande only opening up when they realised they would not be condemned by the other women. Both districts also have high levels of human-wildlife conflict.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study focused on three critical areas using an adapted FPAR approach[14] which supports marginalised women to reclaim their power and bring about structural change:

1. How are women in Zimbabwe adapting in the face of Covid-19 to ensure that there is momentum in the women's work and agenda?
2. How are women in Zimbabwe individually and collectively demanding accountability in the advent of Covid-19?
3. How can women collectively organise to bring about 50/50 Parliament and Local Government within the proposed legal reforms?

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To document strategies and interventions women in Zimbabwe are utilising in demanding accountability in the advent of Covid at different levels and the ways in which women are organising for change in this current crisis.
- To explore, develop and document strategies for the achievement of 50/50 in Parliament and Local Government.

Whilst the above objectives for the research were agreed by the CARE team from the outset, it is important to state that FPAR is a continuous process in that the women involved continue to build on their experiences and the findings in how they take action. It was also anticipated from the outset that the findings of the FPAR would influence the future work of the CARE partners, in a way which fosters accountability to the women involved in the research rather than extraction.

14 This FPAR was adapted because a standard FPAR required more time than was available for this process. Furthermore, in a 'true' FPAR process, the participants set their own objectives, in this case, the objectives were preset by the implementing organizations but built on the lessons learnt from the CARE project.

METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

FPAR is a research methodology that is committed to the liberation of women; respecting and honouring the lived experiences and knowledge of women, particularly women who are coming from oppressed groups; and committing to genuine collaboration in the research process. FPAR can be a qualitative or quantitative process, although a qualitative methodology was used for this FPAR. As a methodology FPAR seeks to bring about structural changes that women identify as critical to their enjoyment of their rights, aiming to shift power between traditional research institutions and researchers and those traditionally considered research subject.

In FPAR, the grassroots women, activists and oppressed groups are co-researchers, and collectively the gendered sources of personal, political and structural power are interrogated, and give voice to women who are the experts of their own lives. Importantly it also fosters movement building and collective action through the research process itself, which is collective and aims to strengthen solidarity and 'empower women to work collectively for long-term structural change'.[15]

Sampling

In this FPAR, we have aimed to ensure that the research process is democratic, equitable, liberating and life-enhancing since it breaks away from traditional research and forms alliances with women with the least social, cultural and economic power. The women involved in the research were identified and selected through and from existing groups in the communities where women are organised around their livelihoods, or their safety in the case of the LBTQIA+ and sex workers. Participants who were initially engaged by the research facilitators, such as women community mobilisers, reached out further to additional women in their communities to engage in the research.

Participants

A total of 25 women per research site (50 in total) were directly engaged by the FPAR facilitators in Story-telling Circles (STCs) and these were a combination of women leaders (leaders in different institutions such as politics, religion, business etc), aspirant women (women seeking political office), women living with disabilities, representatives of the Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LBTQIA+) community and sex workers. The rationale behind bringing in a diverse group of women who carry different identities allowed the FPAR process to give an analysis of how women are affected differently by the same phenomenon based on their intersecting identities. Through the FPAR process, women community mobilisers reached out to other women in their communities and held some report-back meetings in smaller groups thereby deepening their understanding of one another's realities, experiences and the challenges they are facing. These meetings included those who were part of the original group and new participants who were also interested in the process. Further to the process, women in Makande used their collective power to engage with duty bearers during the 16 Days of Activism celebrations (2022), an opportune time to meet duty bearers which reached out to a total of 556 women. Interviews were also held with staff from the CARE partner organisations WCoZ and WiPSU to provide insight into the work WROs have already been doing on the issues the research was examining. Interviews were held with WCoZ which represents at least 69 WRO members across Zimbabwe[16].

15 https://apwld.org/feminist-participatory-action-research-fpar/

16 The Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe is an umbrella body made up of at least 69 WROs and at least 2 345 individual women's rights activists throughout Zimbabwe. Through its thematic Cluster system, it coordinates different women's groups and activists for collective action and advocacy for the promotion of women's rights at local, national, regional and international levels

Data Generation

The data gathering team of 9 members consisted of research consultants and research assistants and coordinators from the CARE Project team . All the team members have experience in research and have different strengths such as facilitation, data gathering, analysis, report writing and coordination. This study explored the way in which the FPAR participants construct, perform and negotiate their gendered identities through storytelling as they recalled their experiences with political processes, and the Covid-19 regulations. The research took place in rural communities[17] making storytelling, body mapping[18], masters' house[19], the 24hr clock[20] and problem tree[21] relevant tools to use[22]. These FPAR tools were used based on the appreciation of what is culturally acceptable in the community in terms of generating the data and also which tools would interrogate deep structural gendered inequality internalised and embodied in women themselves and society. In using these tools, collective discussions were held with a group of women in each research area.

For example, storytelling was a key tool for this research as stories have been used for a long time to explain phenomena that people could not comprehend and to teach moral lessons about what is right and what is wrong. Feminist thinkers have also utilised and sculpted stories to explain shared ideologies and goals for the feminist movement. In this FPAR, story-telling was used to examine the extent to which dominant, patriarchal ideologies were created, reproduced, or resisted through the process of recounting women's experiences. Storytelling adds emotions and visual details to the conversation, and in that way, it becomes a way of interpreting the narrative into a convincing picture to which people can connect. This allows for an honest, clear and natural way of giving information. Story-telling is a crucial historical tool for understanding the past and the present. For the FPAR it was used in Story-telling Circles and combined with observation to generate rich data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was carried out collectively in Harare bringing together three participants from each research site respectively to conduct the data analysis with the research facilitators. The women who were a part of this data analysis process were also a part of the data generation process. The women in the communities were given the freedom to choose their own representatives to be a part of the collective analysis process using their criteria. The participants who participated in the data analysis process included young women, an elected Councillor, a representative of the LBTQIA+ community and sex workers.

17 The specific data generation tools used for this FPAR were all previously developed by the lead researcher, Melania Chiponda, who trained the research facilitators in their use.

18 **Body mapping** is a tool that gives women an opportunity to reflect on the challenges such as Covid-19 restrictions, abuse, discrimination and violence that they have faced and where on their bodies it has hurt them the most. Body mapping as a tool that also seeks to interrogate how women at times use their bodies to resist.

19 The **masters house** is a tool that seeks to identify who or what has power and how that power is used over women in their lives and how it influences who they are and how they do things. Using the masters' house, women can identify who and what structures, in their communities have visible and invisible power and as such, women can understand the structures that need to be dismantled and transformed as well as identify who they can use as a strategic ally to advocate for their rights and issues.

20 The **24-hour clock** is a tool that gives women the opportunity to reflect how they spend their time in a day and the activities that take most of their time. This tool gives women an opportunity to reflect on some of the barriers that they face to participating in governance processes and also steers discussion on how women can manage and balance their time such that they can also participate in governance activities at community level such as attending public hearings, participating in school development meetings etc and leading decision making structures.

21 The **problem tree** is a tool that interrogates problems being faced in communities, the root causes, the perpetrators and the effects of these problems. The tool gives women an opportunity to interrogate how women have been responding to problems and their ability to focus on the root of problems such as patriarchy and systems that promote discrimination and inequalities.

22 Just Associates (JASS) have previously conducted similar FPAR research and have relevant research tools similar to those used in this FPAR available online via the affiliated 'We Rise' Toolkit- including Heart, Mind, Body Mapping, Masters House, Problem Tree and Mapping Power

Validation

Once the report was drafted, the research facilitators held a validation meeting with the participants from both research sites to ensure that the women felt the analysis and findings included were representative of their own experiences and reflections of the research. These meetings were held in person in Binga and Makande with the women coming together collectively in person in their own community but engaging with the research facilitators and women from the other community via phone / zoom. Women engaged with the research outcomes and were able to confirm, critique and comment on the representation of their voice.

The team of research facilitators deliberately centred a feminist ethic of care in the FPAR process, whereby care for each other's bodies, wellbeing and safety were centred in all the engagements with the women involved. Similarly respect for each other's human dignity was a value that the women were committed to during the FPAR process, showing the utmost respect for one another regardless of age, ability or disability, gender and any other identity; This was illustrated by how they had been self-organising within and outside the Covid-19 period in their diversity and for common social goals. Among the women from the same communities, the women knew some of the struggles that each of them had faced in the past and what they were going through but they did not use that information against each other. The women belong to different religions and denominations and are of different social standing but that also did not stand in the way of respecting each other. They showed care and patience in explaining issues to each other and clarifying issues where others did not understand. These safe spaces were strengthened during the FPAR process.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS, MITIGATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Adaptation of the FPAR for CARE – In the original project design for CARE, the FPAR activity was planned as a necessary and valuable way of ensuring women in rural communities could hold Duty Bearers to account in real time with the support of CARE project partners, the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) and the Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU). The research was intended to document the immediate priorities and lived realities of rural women and work with them to co-create advocacy positions and deliver these to rural, national and international Duty Bearers. The use of FPAR as an activity was also chosen because the project has a deliberate focus on movement strengthening and FPAR is known as a tool to support this.

Movement strengthening work takes place in a variety of ways and with a range of actors. However, a significant proportion is done by WROs who are required to register with local authorities and structure their governance in specific ways in order to receive external funding. These processes can sometimes constrict the voice and agenda of WROs in favour of funding agendas and lead to a depoliticisation of feminist movements work – in other words an NGOisation of the women's movement.

Cognizant of these dynamics, Comic Relief, the funder of CARE, deliberately created a funding stream (Power Up!) for feminist movement building which could be adaptive to the realities of feminist movements and maintain a political agenda. Power Up! was ultimately created '*to prioritise women and girls having the power to identify their needs, organise around solutions and strategies and collectively make decisions on how to move forward*'.[23]

Even with this flexibility, Comic Relief had to provide funding to registered WROs, but choose partners carefully who could deliver political feminist movement building work.

23 Power Up – navigating the role of funding in feminist movements | Comic Relief

In the case of CARE, Womankind Worldwide, an international feminist organisation with over 30 years of experience working with WROs and feminist movements was chosen as the grant recipient in the UK to accompany WCoZ and WiPSU in Zimbabwe.

The initial intent of CARE was to implement FPAR throughout the full 3 years of the project to centre women as the experts and authors of their own lives and promote their voices directly into policy dialogue. As the process of FPAR is as important as the outcome, the intent was also to carry out a collective process over the course of the project to strengthen solidarity and capacity between women as a deliberate political act of movement building. Ultimately, the process was intended to shift power to women in rural communities so that their views directly inform advocacy.

In February 2020, mid-way through year one of the project and with support from Comic Relief, the project had to shift and adapt into emergency response. For at least 12 months, activities had to be stopped, re-planned or moved online to ensure all staff could remain safe. At the time, the FPAR was considered too risky an activity to do in person due to COVID-19 restrictions on social distancing and it could not be easily moved online due to the limited accessibility of rural women to digital technology. Advocacy to Duty Bearers did continue during COVID-19 within the existing mechanism available to the CARE partners, the COVID-19 Response Working Group drawn from members of the Women's Coalition spread across Zimbabwe. This working group collated data in real time about the needs of women and their lived realities during COVID-19 and co-created advocacy messaging to share with the Government of Zimbabwe. Whilst this Working Group was far reaching, it is acknowledged that this process didn't replicate the participatory approach intended within the FPAR process as time and access didn't allow for this.

When the COVID-19 restrictions were partially lifted in December 2021, the FPAR activity in CARE was revisited. However, at the time there was only 9 months of the project remaining[24][2] and the CARE team took the pragmatic decision to use the FPAR funds to conduct an **adapted** FPAR process; to carry out a piece of research drawing on the processes and methodologies of FPAR but responding to specific research questions. This was done together with rural women to inform future programming and advocacy. It is acknowledged that in a full FPAR design process, the women themselves would have set the agenda for enquiry and generated the research questions in person at the start of the research process based on the issues most significant to them to explore, but this was simply not possible due to access and travel limitations during the pandemic and time restrictions that followed. Instead, using the knowledge they had gained through the pandemic via the COVID-19 Working Group and the work of WCoZ and WiPSU with women in rural communities as part of the CARE project, CARE partners developed 3 research questions which would explore women's realities through COVID and participation in decision making and, given the framing of the Comic Relief funding, how women had been organising during this time.

However, even though the main research problem, research questions and objectives had been framed before arriving in the community, the women involved were able to determine the focus of the issues they explored within and linked to the main objectives and overarching research questions. The challenge of women's marginalisation during the Covid-19 pandemic and how it impacts women's participation in politics was problematised together with the affected women and, in this way the research questions came more fully alive to the participants.

Highly relevant FPAR tools such as storytelling were used to hear rural women's lived realities which covered topics much broader than the pre-defined research questions. Within this paper, women's stories take centre stage, but it has not been possible to include every aspect of the stories they shared.

This report therefore presents the stories and experiences most pertinent to the research questions, as developed by WCoZ and WiPSU in alignment with the issues arising from the CARE project, to showcase the extent of women's existing organising approaches given the purpose of the funding.

24 The original CARE project was due to be implemented between October 2019 and September 2022. The project was subsequently extended for 2 years until September 2024 in June 2022)

It is acknowledged that balancing up the multiple considerations at play for this research has not always been easy given the desire to be true to the intent of a full FPAR design process that aims to upend multiple layers of power and voice within organisations and funders locally and internationally based which can often block hearing grassroots women's voice in a meaningful way. However, despite the adapted approach, we feel this FPAR has still positively contributed to its original aims of shifting power, amplifying women's voices as experts of their own realities, strengthening solidarity and collective action amongst the women in the research communities and fostering movement building, all key principles which are inherent to any FPAR process. The process of co-learning and co-creation of knowledge with women in communities who participated in the FPAR and the WROs who commissioned the research was a central part of this process, and the WROs involved were able to learn a lot from the women involved.

We hope that a meaningful account of women's lived realities and the state of womanhood in rural Zimbabwe is seen in the report and the politics at play in feminist movement building have been closely considered in the process. The women involved strongly reflected that the study did achieve its aim of building women's collective strength and we were given a clear indication of how and where the feminist movement in Zimbabwe can do more to work with grassroots women in the future.

Positionality of the CARE team – It is acknowledged that FPAR researchers have often been criticised for advocating for the democratisation of knowledge but ending up taking control of the research and knowledge creation themselves similar to non-FPAR research processes. WiPSU and WCoZ work with women, advocating for women's participation in politics and decision-making processes implying that they have a relationship of solidarity with the FPAR participants. WCoZ acknowledges that as a coordinating body, whose mandate is to provide a focal point for activism on women and girls' rights in Zimbabwe, its role in this research was to coordinate and facilitate space for the affected constituency of women to express their voice, in their own words and spotlight their own lived experiences, challenges, gains and wins, in relation to the agenda for change emerging from the CARE project. WiPSU's mandate is to strengthen democracy and governance practices through the effective participation of women in political office and as political constituents.

Acknowledging their positionality, the CARE FPAR team avoided othering the rural women and avoided using patronising statements such as '*Oh I do not know how on earth you manage that*' and '*you are so resilient*' and other statements which give the idea they have privileges which the women in the research sites do not have. The team also made sure that participants understood how the methodology worked (with the majority already having some understanding of research as an investigation and some having experience of FPAR already in Binga), how the questions had been generated and the intended use of the research publication and outcomes to contribute to change. Overall, the CARE FPAR team made sure that the research process remained democratised to a larger extent possible. Local languages, namely Shona and Tonga[25], were mostly used and also English and Ndebele to enable understanding of different issues for all the women in their diversity.

Positionality of the main FPAR Facilitator – The main FPAR facilitator in this study is an African Ecofeminist who had previously worked with some of the women in the FPAR sites and identified with the struggles of women living in Zimbabwe's rural communities and largely identifies with the affected women.

25 The communities of the Basilizwi region in the research sites of this project utilize Tonga, Nambya, Shona and Ndebele; it is acknowledged that the region also has Nyanja and other languages in their midst.

Adaptable and flexible approach – as this FPAR was carried out in extremely marginalised areas of rural Zimbabwe, it was inevitable that women would raise a variety of pressing issues to the research facilitators which were beyond the scope of the study. The research study approach therefore remained adaptable and flexible to meet women where they were at and understand that success looks very different for different women. For example, whilst the research participants who are living in rural communities without meaningful participation in decision-making processes may consider success as the extent to which their lives have improved, the CARE FPAR team may view success against the extent to which the research can meet the set objectives.

Be that as it may, this report is not the end of the process, but the beginning, as the research participants continue to reflect on the findings and in return, challenge patriarchy and devise new strategies to navigate the obstacles that deter their participation in decision-making.

When the research facilitators first met the women and introduced FPAR it was done in a way that explained what we understand by research, who does research. Women have had people come to their communities in the past to extract information - but some of the women felt everyone is a researcher (e.g. a mother is a researcher) - this was explained to those who weren't familiar with everyone being seen as a valuable contributor as a researcher and as having their own power.

In the introductory dialogues the concepts of engaging in FPAR as being a living thing, and engaging in the research also meaning being involved in action that continues beyond the research (e.g being active in their own communities) were discussed. Between the first and second engagements in the research sites, some women had already begun their own independent and autonomous initiatives to bring women together in their communities to pool financial resources or put themselves forward for participation and leadership in community committees and also intentional actions in the home to address e.g. domestic abuse, with women learning from each other's experiences throughout.

Even after the FPAR research validation process, a participant reported an incident of child marriage to the local police but wanted to take further action, and so reached out to the research facilitators in an effort to engage in action as an extension of FPAR. The team responded to the requests by ensuring she was referred to the Referral Pathway by local organisations operating in the communities.

ANALYSIS OF FPAR AS A METHODOLOGY BY THE WOMEN TO BUILD POWER WITHIN AND WITH OTHERS FOR FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDING

Benefitting from the data generation tools - Storytelling circles and FGDs encouraged the women to participate. According to the participants, the data generation tools opened room for discussion with one person's narrative encouraging the next sister to share her story.

During the collective data analysis process, the research participants reviewed FPAR as a tool for movement building and, more particularly, as a methodology for co-creating knowledge. They showed understanding of its inclusive nature by appreciating that, '*any person can be a researcher*'. One woman stated, *"a woman is always a researcher in her home or community, she is always asking questions and finding answers."* Participants indicated that the way data generation was done enabled those who were not confident to participate in the process to feel free to make their contributions – it was an eye-opener for some.

In addition to FPAR being seen as a tool for movement building, women also reflected that they felt motivated by the FPAR approach and process to mobilise for change.

Benefitting from the safe spaces created - it was indicated that the participants felt that they were coming together in smaller and larger safe spaces for discussion. The participants stated that they shared their stories willingly and felt that they had finally got a space where they could share their life experiences, their hardships and challenges freely. The participants acknowledged that they ended up learning that they have the same struggles.

Participants also reflected that they did not need to worry about being judged, particularly those identifying as LBTQIA+ and sex workers. Their experiences with previous research processes had not allowed them to interrogate issues and answer the questions in the ways they wanted and even be part of defining and analysing the problem. Some commented on the challenges with engaging with researchers from cities such as Harare who would dominate the processes.

The feeling of not being judged and the discussions about confidentiality gave the participants the confidence that they needed to tell their stories without fear of reprisals. It was constantly emphasised that the FPAR process is based on trust amongst the participants so that they could fully participate.

The participants also commented on the benefits of doing collective data analysis, as participants from both sites were brought together in a common space for collective data analysis and for validation of the FPAR report, and the women built analysis collectively and developed a richer understanding of the sources of their oppression, their ideas about what needed to change became clearer.

Generating organising skills - The research process was highly participatory and taught women new skills and methods for organising. In all of this, the women involved reported that they developed greater confidence to assert their needs in their families, communities and wider society. Interviews were also held with WCoZ and WiPSU. Although not part of the original research design, these interviews were included so as to leverage on the lessons learnt from the CARE project which is being implemented. The interviewees were the women who sit in key decision-making structures of the organizations so that the process could include the views of a diverse group of women working on the research issues within the women's movement. The participants acknowledged that the FPAR processes made them appreciate 'why things are the way they are', as one of the women phrased it.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS DURING FPAR

The team of research facilitators ensured informed consent by providing participants with full explanations on the intended purpose of the research, how the research would be used, by which organisations and for how long. Participants were made aware that they could change their minds and withdraw their consent at any time during the process or after and were provided with the details of who to contact at WCoZ and WiPSU. The research facilitators also explained how women's identities would be kept anonymous in the research unless they wished to be identified. Although written consent was obtained where possible, verbal consent was documented by the research facilitators where women felt uncomfortable signing their real names on paper. The participants were also given the space to ask questions where they needed clarifications on the written consent forms and the forms were adjusted to suit their choices.

The participants indicated that the FPAR process confronts real-life issues, can sometimes reveal sad stories and bring up cases where people were abused. In response to what they would do in such cases, they stated that there was no one answer to what justice would mean to them. Some participants were comfortable with their issues being handled by the traditional leaders because they believe in the traditional justice system. This is because they get compensated through the judgements which may force the abusers to pay for violations with cattle or goats. Some of the participants stated that if a case is reported to the police the victim might not get any tangible benefits which is why they prefer reporting to the chief's court. However, some of the participants were of the opinion that it is important to report cases of women's rights violations to the police, even the ones that were unearthed during FPAR because the perpetrators may continue breaking the law as they have impunity.

There was a consensus that if there are cases of abuse of women that emerged during the work done during the FPAR and in women's organising, it is important to provide counselling support to victims, follow-ups, continued care and support. The women were also given phone numbers for WCoZ and WiPSU teams both in Harare and in areas closer to the research sites in Kariba (near Makande) and Hwange (near Binga) so that if there were any threats to them or manifestations of violence, they could quickly get hold of the CARE Team[26]. The participants also discussed the potential threats in their homes and their communities that involvement in the research might expose them to. They agreed on strategies for supporting one another in the event that any such threat became a reality and a quick response be needed, in recognition of the fact that WCoZ and WiPSU were not located in the research sites.

26 The WCoZ and member organisations offer connectivity to and access to, a range of services under the National GBV Referral Pathway

FPAR FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

FPAR FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The section below gives an overview of the thematic issues emerging from the FPAR research. It outlines the status of womanhood in Zimbabwe, based on the lived realities of rural women in their intersecting identities, and highlights the challenges and opportunities this presents for increasing women's political participation and leadership to bring about 50/50 representation in Parliament and Local Government. It then outlines the challenges which Covid-19 created for women and the women's agenda in Zimbabwe, followed by stories of how women have individually and collectively resisted, adapted and demanded accountability both in the face of Covid-19 realities and beyond.

As highlighted previously, the research directly targeted 25 women per site. In the analysis below, names are not given and the actual detail on size and scale is also not given to ensure anonymity. As such, by saying 'some women' or 'several women', WiPSU and WCoZ acknowledge that the issues documented were shared by at least 30% of women in both research sites.

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01. The Status of Womanhood in the Zimbabwe context

Unpaid care work and financial independence

Through the use of the 24-hour clock, women were asked to indicate how they spend their time on a typical day.

TIME	ACTIVITY
04:00 am – 07:00 am	Wake-up, sex with spouse, household chores, preparing children for school, preparing husband for work, going to the market, going to work in the fields.
07:00 am – 10:00 am	Working in the fields, working at the market.
10:00 am – 12 noon	Cleaning up after the children who would have gone to school and the husband who would have gone to work, preparing food for the spouse and the children who would be coming back from school, washing the dishes.
12 noon – 03:00 pm	Have lunch, carry some household work such as fetching water from the borehole, fetching firewood, mending clothes, preparing for the evening meals, working in the fields, working at the markets
03:00 pm – 07:00 pm	Gardening, working in the fields, cooking supper, bathing the children and helping them with homework, working at the market.
07:00 pm – 09:00 pm	Having supper and cleaning up, locking up the chicken run and the livestock pens, preparing for bed, closing the market and preparing supper, sleeping, having sex with spouses.
09:00 pm – 10:00 pm	Having supper, cleaning up, sleeping, having sex.

As shown in the table, some women work longer hours than others but generally their time is occupied with various tasks and there is hardly any resting time for the women. The FPAR participants also stated that they work in the fields with their husband and in most cases the women do more work. When the produce is sold, the women often do not get the money. Most men are said to take all the money and spend it with their girlfriends.

The women are then forced to look for additional casual work, referred in some cases as 'food for work', so that they can be able to feed the family, including the same husbands who took away their money. Women said that some men do not even care whether the family is well fed and this emotionally and mentally drained them. When women do earn their own money it isn't seen as the woman's property, as one women recounted:

> ***"My husband steals money from me because he thinks that he owns me."***

This attitude seemed to be held by several men in the communities as one of the male participants who attended the stakeholder meeting stated that:

> ***"My wife is one of the properties that I own. She is just like my cow or any other property."***

Women are also the ones who volunteer to do all the unpaid community work which includes being community health care workers, girl champions to ensure that girls do not drop out of school, and other community work that is not paid for.

The effects of historical injustices on culture and women's position

The effects of colonialism, religion, and culture continue to negatively impact women's lives and their participation in politics. It is important to note that Zimbabwe functions under both customary and common law, which often brings about tensions. Legally protected participatory rights often clash with a patriarchal socio-political culture, whose inequitable division of household labour together with strong gendered notions of women's roles within families and communities subjugate women and serve to limit their participation and representation in male dominated public life. This tension hinders women's public journey's to compete for political office and be considered on par with their male colleagues due to socio--political prejudices upon women's competences and capacities. Women walk a fine line of being considered inherently sexually immoral or inherently incompetent to lead.

In response to a question on whether traditional culture does not allow women to participate in politics or take up leadership positions, women in the research sites resisted the cultural narrative that women do not lead or participate in politics. It was agreed that the cultures of the people of Zimbabwe do not discourage women from taking up leadership positions[27] or participating in politics[28]. However, the major challenge is that most of the local culture is not documented, and where it is documented, it was written from a Eurocentric perspective that presented local cultures in negative ways. People no longer have much knowledge about their culture because colonialism imposed European values and beliefs on the African people that erased the local traditional beliefs.

27 Women drew upon anti-colonial history that included strong women's participation and leadership including in the wars for Independence.

28 Culture is not static and in this instance speaks to the culture as understood, experienced and perceived by the women in the research sites. WiPSU and WCoZ acknowledge that within the contemporary public culture and within various communities in which they operate, women's experiences and perceptions of culture and tradition have negatively impacted women's abilities to participate in various social, political and economic public spaces and processes forming and informing the marginalizations experienced by women.

Some of the documented histories, however, highlight that women were allowed to take up leadership roles taking the example of the spirit mediums who were largely women, and in the case that they were male, they were considered '*samukadzi*' meaning a male who is a woman, or a male who is taking up the role of a woman. This also points to the fluidity of gender in some African cultures. In the original Tonga culture of Zimbabwe, before colonisation and the Christian religion, women were traditional leaders and were allowed to take up leadership positions. During colonial rule, women's power was taken away from them because they wanted women to concentrate on unpaid household chores and taking care of children while men worked for the colonial system.

The Christian religion based on the Bible was used to control people, to make them abandon their strong culture and to hate their religion in favour of the colonial religion. *Masvikiro,* (the Spirit mediums) who were largely women, were equated to demons and unclean. This shaped societal attitudes towards women because the Spirit mediums were the traditional religious leaders and labelling them demons tends to mean that women cannot take up leadership positions otherwise it would be considered they are possessed by evil spirits. For those who are following Christian tradition, even the Bible talks about some brave women and we have to follow after them. Similarly, there is vast evidence that LBTQIA+ people have always existed throughout history, even in Zimbabwe where some of the homophobic/transphobic political leaders have publicly condemned LBTQIA+ people. Colonialism and the patriarchal capitalist system has created rigid gender roles that are required by the nuclear family and destroyed the traditional belief systems and imposed laws that criminalised both sex workers and LBTQIA+ people.

The women indicated that though there are harmful cultural practices, there are many good elements of their culture[29] that they should preserve because they are essential to them as a community. They explained that culture defines them as a people and acknowledged that though it is dynamic, there are core values that they respect. They value the respect that women are given as mothers, aunts and grandmothers in their culture and the fact that there are some decisions which cannot be made in families until their voices are heard. If such recognition is done at community and national level, women's voice and representation will be stronger.

Women's land rights

Lack of control and ownership of land are one of the issues that kept coming out in the FPAR data generation process. Most women do not own the land that they are working on but rather have access to land that is owned or rented by their husbands, fathers or brothers. They also do not have any control within their marriages over what is produced on the land they have access to but they do have control over how they produce. Though some of the women mentioned that they did have control over the land that their families have, most do not. For those who mentioned that they do have control, it is interesting to note that they started to gain this after protesting their husbands' abuse or violent behaviours.

> ***"My husband used to take everything after we harvest on the land and I would be left to suffer on my own with children after all the hard work that I would have put into the land. I decided that enough was enough. I finally told him off and we fought, and I told him that I was now going to the traditional leader to tell him that I wanted to have my own piece of land so that I could produce food for myself and my children. I told him that I would also take away our cattle since I worked to buy the cattle that we had. He then relented and from that day, he has never been abusive and no longer takes our products to sell without my consent."***

29 Culture as it has been experienced and perceived by the women of Binga and Makonde in the research sites.

The land issue continues to marginalise women living in rural communities, women's access to land remains constrained by norms and forms of ownership through both customary law and administrative measures, yet despite the government going through a land audit and making commitments to set aside land for the youths, but there was no mention of the land for women's allocation. Women stated the need to have control over land and have the land registered in their names for them to be fully independent and to be able to have adequate resources that enable them to fully participate in politics and decision-making processes. Participants spoke about their disappointment with the women parliamentarians, particularly those that went into parliament through proportional representation. Participants feel that their role is to represent them but their silence in parliament is letting them down, particularly on the land issue.

Women's limited knowledge of the gender agenda

As part of understanding how women collectively organise for political participation and leadership, there was a need to find out the nature of participation, their motivation and the spaces they participate in. It was realised that women are more informed about local level political processes and have limited connection with legal and policy issues at national level.

During the FPAR process, it was apparent that women had very limited knowledge on issues of equality and the different methods such as the quota systems being adopted by the Government to enhance women's participation in politics. In Binga for example, out of a total of 25 participants who participated in the data generation process, only two had seen the constitution and had a level of constitutional literacy. The women admitted that they had heard of the 50/50 campaign but could not articulate what exactly it means.

> *"we just hear about the 50/50 agenda but we do not even know what that is all about. We are happy that you have given us an opportunity to see and touch the constitution, something we have never done."*

said one woman.

Another participant also added her sentiment by saying.

> *"Yes, I have heard about the 50/50 agenda but I have not invested any time in it because here in Binga, we have more pressing issues such as the human and wildlife conflict that we are advocating for. Before advocating for women to get into leadership, we want those in leadership currently to resolve this challenge because people are dying, and we are now living in fear."*

During interviews with WROs, it was brought to light that women's organisations have been enhancing women's constitutional literacy across the country but due to lack of resources, some areas are yet to be reached. As such, some women remain unknowledgeable on for example the women's quotas and requirements for candidature. In Makande, women had a basic understanding of the constitution as well as knowledge on the gender agenda and this is heavily attributed to how the Councillor had previously participated in activities such as constitutional

literacy trainings organised by WiPSU and WCoZ. Be that as it may, in areas where the CARE project has been implemented,[30] the elected and aspirant women have a solid understanding of the Constitution, specifically provisions that speak to women's rights. This is as a result of the plethora of engagements conducted as well as the transformational feminist leadership training which was rolled out by WiPSU with aspirant and elected women.

Patriarchy and women in leadership

The FPAR participants stated that due to what is considered 'culture', female village heads are not taken seriously because the men say that they became village heads only because of the 50/50 agenda otherwise they were not worthy of the post. Society keeps saying that there's no respect in the homes because women think that they are equal to men, so much that even if a woman is the village head, the husband is the one that tells the woman how to preside over cases in the traditional courts.

When a woman takes up a leadership position, the men often marry another woman with the justification that his wife is no longer obedient to him since she now holds power in the community. One of the women said that "*culture needs to be cancelled*". This woman shared views on how women are labelled 'prostitutes' if they go into politics and take up leadership positions. It is labelled 'uncultured' for women to lead.

FPAR participants encouraged each other to participate in change and they illuminated how women face resistance from men in the community as a form of strongly rooted patriarchy[31]. They also highlighted how female leaders were not taken seriously and how they were puppet leaders to their husbands who would give them instructions on what to say and do claiming this leadership role indirectly through 'marital rights'. Lack of support from fellow women was also a challenge that led to low participation among women.

Women accept being abused by their husbands without reporting them because reporting one's husband is considered uncultured. Even where women's husbands and families are supportive of their taking up leadership positions, they face discrimination from other male leaders:

> ***"As a councillor I had support from my husband and mother-in-law. Some men I worked with made bets that I was going to be one of those who would indulge into sex for favours and as a ladder to the top. All I thrived for was to serve the community, to make sure women's lives and that of the community improves."***

The lived reality of LBTQIA+ women in Zimbabwe.

LBTQIA+ women face stigma in Zimbabwe and there is widespread discrimination against them. Zimbabwean society expects women to 'discipline' their bodies through such narratives as '*kuzvibata*' meaning discipline or self-control in Shona. This narrative implies that women and men should not divulge their sexual identities and/or come out in the open if they do not conform to the gender identities and commonly held notions around sexuality in society. This socially imposed 'discipline' attracts social sanctions in the form of violence if it is not adhered to. While this 'discipline' applies to all women whose identity or behaviour does not match up to 'idealised' notions of womanhood, it's repercussions are more extreme for those considered to be stepping

30 CARE has been implemented at different levels in the communities of Midlands, Manicaland, Masvingo, Mashonaland West, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central, Matebeleland North, Matebeleland East, Bulawayo and Harare

31 Women in the FPAR research sites found value in the solidarity of encouraging each other and challenging community notions of leadership. The FPAR research process was valuable to them as a collective as it provided an opportunity to connect and raise these challenges they collectively face.

the furthest from conservative norms around gender and sexuality; primarily LBTQIA+ woman and sex workers. For fear of the negative repercussions, women often have to internalise the feminine ideal and fail to contest it. Whereas women, particularly LBTQIA+ women but also sex workers, who reject the subjugation of their bodies and identities face increased violence.

Some of the FPAR participants emphasised that being LBTQIA+ is not something new and that it is not alien to Africa. Men were encouraged to sleep with other men before going to war traditionally, to gain power. The question that is supposed to be asked according to the participants is why LBTQIA+ people are not being officially recognised by law in Zimbabwe and given their rights? It was noted that LBTQIA+ people are recognised, since there are organisations and clinics that support and assist LBTQIA+ people with accessing their sexual and reproductive healthcare rights[32].

The challenge that was noted by the participants is that the government is not sincere[33]. They do not want to admit in public that they have accepted the LBTQIA+ community. Some of the officials belong to this community but continue to allow their community to be discriminated against by society because they want votes.

The security of LBTQIA+ people is 'hazy'. The government is comfortable with what is currently happening and pretending that it cannot see the need to legislate LBTQIA+ rights. The combination of poverty and being black women in rural communities in Africa also has a crippling effect on LBTQIA+ women as the few rights and privileges that have been won at the global level have not drawn them any closer to liberation in Zimbabwe. The oppression of LBTQIA+ people will remain unshakable and inscribed in society unless the broader patriarchal capitalist system is challenged and crushed.

Sex work in Zimbabwe

Selling and/or buying sex is partially and sometimes fully criminalised in Zimbabwe. Sometimes general criminal law is applied to criminalise sex work, for example, loitering and vagrancy. Sex work also carries with it a lot of stigma and most people would rather pretend it doesn't exist even if they use the services of sex workers. Sex workers themselves also do not want to be known for the work so carry it out secretly. Some FPAR recipients also acknowledged conflating sex work with being an LBTQIA+ identifying person and hadn't understood that the two can exist separately.

Sex work is still not generally accepted in the FPAR communities and sex workers face discrimination as a result. In Shona culture, the label "*hure*" (prostitute) was never there, not because there were no women who participated in transactional sex, but because it was viewed less negatively. A sex worker largely has bodily autonomy, but an independent woman is considered a threat to respectability and is therefore labelled. If a woman does not have a man controlling them, they are labelled as "*hure*." It sometimes has nothing to do with having several sex partners. In one of the sites, the participants revealed that there are no sex workers who are seen in the bars, but that does not mean that they do not exist. However, there was agreement that married women who engage in sex work are not labelled sex workers because they are married and are under the control of their husbands. In one of the sites, it is indicated that it is not acceptable to come out in the open that one is a sex worker, whether married or unmarried as you would lose respectability. However, on one of the sites women are not labelled for engaging in sex work. A person can come out in the open that they are a sex worker. Sex work was referred to as 'hustling' and a source of income that should not be discriminated against.

Participants mentioned that sex work is one of the hardest professions in that they are like soldiers and have to fight many wars so that they can get money and have to be brave to be a sex worker[34]. Sex workers involved in the research are not controlled by men. They are independent,

32 The LBTQIA+ community is confronted with inequalities in health and access to healthcare see https://frontlineaids.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Annex-10i-PITCH-Story-of-Change-Zimbabwe.pdf

33 The pandemic widened the gap of *access to health* and psycho-social *services* between community groups and especially the LBTQIA+ community https://zimbabwe.unfpa.org/en/news/helpline-timely-intervention-key-populations-during-covid-19

34 Women do not choose entering into sex work lightly. As they undertake sex work, they face various challenges including; that they have to move at night in communities that are subject to high levels of robberies and wildlife attacks, they have many clients who do not want to use protection during intercourse because the client has a right to demand what they want since they

and they have the potential to be influential leaders. Women in the research sites navigate a control schism in that their day-to-day experiences reveal the control men in general have over women, the women perceived themselves to hold higher degrees of control in their individual actions, however when these are exercised they may be stifled by the collective control of the community.

There was general agreement amongst FPAR interviewees that it will take time for sex work to be accepted as work because of religion and culture which has stigmatised the profession even though religious books, like the Bible, carry different messages about women marginalised by society. The stigma attached to sex work and subsequent lack of protections for this group leaves them open to abuse, exploitation and violence and this was more acutely felt during the pandemic.

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02. Challenges and opportunities for increasing women's political participation and leadership

The burden of unpaid care work and challenges of securing financial independence as a barrier to women's political participation

It was noted that women's lack of financial stability is a barrier to their political participation:

> *"It's difficult to participate in politics if you are not financially stable. People prefer to vote in power people who are financially stable. So women also need to be financially stable. Most times women work very hard but get nothing in return for example when they grow tobacco together as a family but the proceeds from sales are not shared. Men keep the money. Support from family is very important."*

One Councillor also alluded to how the burden of care and domestic work makes it very difficult to be a woman, let alone one in power as society expects you to lead and also expect you to be a caregiver, even outside of your home:

> *"I need to wake up every day and do the household work before I can attend any Council meeting. The Council offices are very far and the distances that I have to walk for me to get there are very long. After the meetings, I still have to come back home to make sure that my husband is happy and my family is comfortable. I have to be involved in a lot of community work as well, otherwise, I may end up not having legitimacy as a leader amongst the people that I am leading. Being a woman leader is very difficult."*

pay for it, some clients refuse to pay for the service or do not pay what was agreed, the judgement they face in communities and so, doing sex work, in the face of all these challenges, the women feel like they are soldiers. You have to be brave if you are going to be a sex worker.

Another of the barriers to participation that women shared, was poverty and the appropriation of their labour by the community and their spouses as mentioned above, further highlighting the need for the redistribution of the unpaid care work so that women can take up leadership positions at all levels.

This includes a need to shift societal attitudes towards care work, household work, as well as women's leadership. The change needed is not short-term reforms but long term structural transformation so that the country can achieve the 50/50 representation in all decision-making processes. Public policies should position care as a social and collective responsibility and treat unpaid caregivers and those they care for as rights holders. A human rights-based approach to care envisions women as human beings with equal rights and inherent dignity while recognising the societal value of their reproductive roles and care work. The exclusion of care work from economic policy frameworks is neither accidental nor justifiable. It is a profound design flaw rooted in discriminatory gender stereotypes and unequal power relations that has cost women dearly. The disparate feminisation of unpaid care responsibilities provides a structural barrier to women's economic security and well-being and is a notable impact on women and girls throughout their life cycle.

For women to be able to adequately participate in political processes, and achieve the 50/50 representation in parliament, council, executive, there needs to be notable progress in the development of alternative paradigms that more centrally position care within macroeconomic policy frameworks and clear calls for the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of women's unpaid care work. [35]

The WROs within the Women's Movement in Zimbabwe have collectively pursued various influencing strategies for the recognition, reduction and redistribution of domestic work and unpaid care-work. In 2022, under the coordination of WCoZ, the movement petitioned the Parliament of Zimbabwe to commission an inquiry on the recognition of the care economy as a public policy issue and also for the promotion of systematic use of Gender Responsive Budgeting as a measure for reducing the unpaid care-burden. At the time of this study, the Parliament of Zimbabwe was still considering the issue. Women's organising through community based spaces for women only, safe spaces created by women's rights collaborating with women organisations in part called for provision of social services such as water and energy sources closer to their homes so that they can spend less time in accessing them and have more time for other roles.

Culture and women's position

The participants also indicated that the historical injustices were part of what continues to make it difficult for women to participate in politics. There is a need to break away from colonisation, oppressive cultures and religion so that the system can accept and encourage women to participate in politics as well as take up leadership positions. To support positive attitudes towards women in leadership societal mindsets have to be decolonised.

Most stated that the system does not change however because even in communities some males feel that they have a responsibility to control women's lives and do not feel that women should take up leadership positions. Cultural institutions were also viewed as repressive and not safe spaces for women to take up leadership positions. However, it was stated that there are some initiatives towards creating opportunities in these institutions for women to take up leadership positions. Women mentioned that religious groupings are some of the spaces that suppress women from taking up leadership positions through texts from religious books and writings.

Women recognised that the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the community including men could be challenged and spaces created for women's leadership.

35 Ibid17

Strengthening women's land rights

Some of the WRO representatives stated that they are encouraging female legislators to present and advocate for women's issues in Parliament and gave the example of land rights. They are hoping that through supporting the female legislators, women are going to get their land allocation in the land redistribution processes. The relationship between WROs in Zimbabwe and the female legislators, in particular, the Women's Caucus, is 2-dimensional. On one hand, it is an alliance, where WROs provide support, capacity-building, information-sharing to the legislators, and in other instances, even opportunities to participate in key regional and international processes. On the other hand, it is an accountability relationship, where WROs hold the Women's Caucus[36] to account on pushing women empowerment agenda in Parliament, at local, national, regional and international levels. The women's movement appears to know how to navigate this relationship, adjusting to the prevailing context at the time and to get the best outcomes out of it.

Strengthening women's knowledge of the gender agenda

While the Constitution of Zimbabwe, in section 7 mandates the State "to *promote public awareness of the Constitution by disseminating it as widely as possible*", piecemeal efforts have been made by the State in ensuring the public awareness initiatives reach the most marginalised communities and hard to reach areas such as Binga. Against this background, CSOs, particularly WROs such as WCoZ, through the support of the CARE project and other development partners, have acted swiftly to fill in the gap through dissemination of abridged versions of the Constitution, translated fact-sheets of the Constitution, women's constitution literacy rallies, and young women empowerment days. However, the majority of the initiatives have been largely urban/semi-urban focused and did not deliberately target the most marginalised communities such as indigenous minorities, women in disaster-prone areas and women in rural communities.

The FPAR findings therefore re-affirm the existence of this gap and as such present an opportunity for the women's movement and other stakeholders at large, to collectively organise deliberate targeting of the highlighted groups through mass mobilisation and constitution education programmes in these areas.

Challenging patriarchy and attitudes towards women leaders

The FPAR participants stated that women need to build their power within themselves and build power with other women so that they can confidently take leadership positions in their communities. The participants mentioned that the only way that they see women taking back their power is together with others and through building movements. Even if women have the inner strength, they are unable to mobilise for political office without harnessing their collective power as groups in communities.

It is important to acknowledge the strides that have been made by the Government and WROs to challenge patriarchal attitudes towards women's leadership and ensure that men accept women as leaders. Key interventions pursued by WROs in Zimbabwe include organising and influencing the Constitution Amendment process in 2013, which resulted in the inclusion of key Constitution provisions[37] on gender equality, parity in leadership and the introduction of the women's quota in the National Assembly. In addition, WROs have been relentlessly introducing capacity-building programmes targeting traditional leaders, church leaders, community gatekeepers on women's leadership.

Male engagement initiatives pursued by various WROs have also served as mutual platforms for dialoguing between men and women, and reminding each other that gender equality and women leadership are not women's issues but rather democracy and developmental issues. To this end, Zimbabwe is beginning to see women rising in traditionally male dominated positions such as Village Heads.

36 The Zimbabwe Women's Parliamentary Caucus (ZWPC) consists of all women elected to Parliament and is the lead advocacy body within Parliament for advocacy on women and girls rights as well as being an key aspect of the National Gender Machinery.

37 Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) Section 17, 56, 124(b)

The double barrier LBTQIA+ women face to participating in political leadership.

Within the context outlined above, LBTQIA+ women cannot participate in politics because they are being judged by their communities and they do not feel protected. In any election process, people will choose an outwardly straight person over the LBTQIA+ candidate due to stigma. For the LBTQIA+ community to participate in politics, they must be given their rights first, be recognised by the government and be accepted within their society. Some LBTQIA+ people are abused and forced by their families and churches to marry the opposite sex against their will as well as forced to maintain a certain reputation. This leaves them mentally distressed such that they cannot participate in politics.

WThere is a need for the women's movement to actively include LBTQIA+ women in collective organising and create intersectional cross movement synergies with LBTQIA+ movements to strengthen the visibility and the leadership of LBTQIA+ women in their communities and into official leadership positions. They can also stand in solidarity with their issues and advocate for inclusive policies and programmes.

Barriers to participation in politics for sex workers

There is no legal framework specific to sex workers in Zimbabwe that ensures their security, which also makes it difficult for them to participate fully in politics. The communities have not yet accepted sex workers and may not accept their leadership. However, it was noted that sex workers can get married, and continue with their sex work and successfully participate in politics. Some women also end up positioning themselves strategically such that the community does not notice that they are sex workers so that they can participate in politics.

From the research it was clear that women want to control their own bodies. Rape, domestic drudgery, and physical abuse are all seen as undermining the good health and control over their bodies; Women realised that the abuse and exploitation that they experience have an effect on their physical bodies which manifest through signs and symptoms of ill health both physically and emotionally. They resolved to stop abuse in all its forms of them or children through various means such as speaking out and seeking legal and social assistance. They also discussed the constraints of challenging abuse in various contexts such as the traditional courts or by reporting to police who may protect the perpetrators.

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03. Challenges for women and the women's agenda resulting from Covid-19

Impact of Covid-19 restrictions on women's work

The FPAR participants in all the sites explained that the Covid-19 regulations put in place by the Zimbabwe government were too restrictive, unjust, classist, and specifically disadvantaged rural women and it was largely impossible for poor people to adhere to the regulations as many of their ways of earning a living and survival were criminalised.

Domestic work and violence

Due to the restrictions on movement outside of the home, women were not allowed to go to their gardens to gather the food they had grown to feed their families. Women were often left with little option but to disobey the regulations otherwise there would have been no food to eat. One of the stipulated regulations to prevent the spread of Covid-19, was washing hands with running water and soap. However, some of the women stated that they did not have money to buy soap because their streams of income were closed due to the lockdown measures. To adapt to this reality, some of the women used ashes to wash their hands instead of soap, some confessed that

they had to pretend to be washing their hands with running water when village health workers were present, to present a picture of compliance with the regulations.

In addition to the continuous need to grow food and fetch water in the pandemic, women faced the ongoing burden of shouldering all the household work even though men and women often remained together in the home due to movement restrictions. One of the male stakeholders in the FPAR said:

> ***"I do not do housework because it is women's work. I do not even cook because it is supposed to be her job."***

The increased stress caused by the lockdown led to a sharp increase in domestic violence but women found various ways of resisting men's control and violence in the home. FPAR participants stated that they had learnt, through collective organising, how to stand up to a person and say 'enough is enough'. Women said that they confronted their domestic situation directly with their partners using various approaches.

Some women said they refused to do any housework even under the threat of violence with some refusing to cook for the person who made them angry. One woman shared:

> ***"I cook for everyone else except my husband. I refuse to give him food."***

Some women said they used crying as they assumed the abuser would feel sorry for them but this did not have the desired effect as abusers ignored this. Some women confronted their abusive partners with suggestions on how to end the violence and also threatened them with counter violence.

Some of the women said that they gave their abusers the silent treatment until they were satisfied that the person would not repeat the same behaviour. Some women refused to have sex with their partners or had revenge sex with other partners.

The research participants did not feel that there is a difference between the violence that they experience at home and the violence that they experience in their communities and society more broadly. There are many considerations that women think through when they are taking action to resist a particular injustice. The steps taken are often guided by considering *"who would get hurt if I take these actions"*; women showed that they chose 'peace' or non-violent resistance in most instances. Women avoid physical confrontations which may cause bodily harm to them or their household members. However, this did not stop them from being physically harmed.

They also explained that from suffering in silence they got courage to speak out and engaged in conversations with their abusers, especially husbands and close partners, which often paid off as they informed that violence had ceased in their homes.

The women also highlighted economic abuse whereby the men abandoned their families and never supported them financially, yet when the girl child reached marriageable age they would then want to lead in marrying off a child they never raised based on claiming their fatherhood to receive lobola (bride price). Despite this, men keep on demanding that their spouses/partners have more children yet sometimes they cannot even take care of them.

Livelihoods

Women in the informal sector in particular said that they could not sell their products during Covid-19 because they needed to obtain letters of authorisation from the police or traditiona leaders[38] to move from one place to the other[39]. Some of the women were also cross-border traders who could not travel outside of Zimbabwe to buy goods for resale. As most work in public spaces was criminalised, women struggled to feed their families and many did disobey the regulations. This led to cases where women were arrested, placed in jail, and charged by the police and courts. Harassment of women trying to earn a living was heightened in the first lockdown in 2020 but in subsequent periods of lockdown women learnt how to negotiate their way out of arrest.

Government restrictions on business operations were also not fully communicated and there was a lack of concession from the local authority about the negative impact this had on women's livelihoods.

> ***"There was no explanation on what was transpiring, our council just banned us from doing our day-to-day business. And when the regulations were loosened and business operated between 8 and 3pm the council expected us to pay a full fee for operating markets yet we had no profit, business was very low and things were very expensive."***

Despite the women highlighting how they approached the council to negotiate to pay at least half the market fees, nothing changed.

FPAR participants highlighted the multiple challenges rural Zimbabwean women faced during the Covid-19 pandemic and how they navigated the restrictions. As one said:

> ***"How could we stay at home when we needed to eat? At first, we were not allowed to go to the garden, but we would wake up very early in the morning before the police started work then we would also do our work. Sometimes we would need to go to town but the drivers would leave us far from the police checkpoint which was near the town centre. We had to walk to get to the town centre. The distance was long but what would we do if we needed to buy some essential foodstuff for the family? Going back home was a challenge, but we would always manage to get back home."***

38 Zimbabwe has a dual legal system consisting of general law (statute), common law(non-statute law or unwritten Anglo Roman Dutch Law) and African customary law. Accordingly, Traditional leaders and civilian forces have powers to provide formal authorisations and other administrative and judicial powers in communities.

39 Covid-19 regulations set particular criteria and exemptions for access to public spaces and services. The exemption had to be reduced to writing to demonstrate applicability to individuals who may encounter enforcement officers. The document was therefore considered an authorisation and difficulties in obtaining one severely impacted on an individual's mobility and access to public services and spaces.

Another reflected that:

> *"We attended a funeral that happened in our village. The person was suspected to have died with COVID-19. We were told to quarantine ourselves, for two weeks. We could not even go to the borehole40 and that was very difficult."*

The perspectives above demonstrate the restrictions on women in navigating the challenges created by Covid-19 and Covid-19 lockdowns and in particular the unresponsiveness of duty bearers and state institutions to the conditions of women.

Some women experienced a fall in their incomes and a correlating fall in their food security. In response to this, women talked about how they used the remaining capital for their small businesses to buy food. However this also led to the collapse of their businesses.

In order to revive collapsed incomes some women tried to venture into unfamiliar business opportunities because of the critical need for food. In one of the discussions in Binga, a young woman explained her attempt to diversify her income:

> *"I tried fishing but I could not make it in that business because I have no idea how the fishing business works, so I found it too risky."*

Women also reorganised themselves and opened Shebeens[41] as a form of resistance to the Covid-19 regulations which saw the shutting down of beer halls where some of them made a living. Women successfully smuggled in alcohol from Zambia and other illegal substances such as 17-hour sex pills and sold them in the Shebeens to generate income.

Even though many rural women had negotiated their way out of the restrictions to earn some income, sometimes the income they brought in was taken by their husbands demonstrating the multilayered difficulties faced by women in seeking to secure their lives and livelihoods.

In one of the research sites human wildlife conflict further exacerbated the strain of covid on their livelihoods.

> *"Our gardens42 are being destroyed by these elephants and this is where we get our livelihoods and food to feed our families."*

Women also highlighted how they have to go home early from the market as a way of avoiding crossing paths with elephants as there are no street lights[43].

40 Boreholes are community water points.
41 An unlicensed private house or establishment selling alcohol or running a bar, usually in a township.
42 Community Gardens provide critical food and nutrition support especially to communities in food/nutrition deficit regions.
43 Zimbabwe has one of the highest Human Wildlife Conflicts in the world in 2020, the year of the pandemic, the country experienced a 50% increase in Human Wildlife Conflicts, 50 Injuries and 60 deaths https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/5/6/in-zimbabwe-conflict-escalates-between-elephants-and-humans

Anger and violence against sex workers and the LBTQIA+ women

For rural women with marginalised identities, especially sex workers and LBTQIA+ persons, the Covid-19 pandemic deepened existing injustices and stigma they face and they experienced multiple human rights violations. The FPAR discussions were able to surface these injustices through the sharing of live testimonies and there was general agreement that sex workers and LBTQIA+ persons carried the disproportionate burden of the lockdowns and restriction of movement during the pandemic because of societal attitudes against them and the way these attitudes informed how they were targeted as a result of breaking lockdowns. This was particularly apparent in the reported sexual violence women of both identities experienced at the hands of police as a result of breaking lockdown measures, highlighting their targetted discrimination and how this informs the struggles that these women in particular face as a result of their intersecting identities[44].

As the country put in place mechanisms to protect women and girls against violence, the same did not apply to the sex workers and LBTQIA+ women when they were violated as the government did not put in place shelters to meet their specific needs. Sex workers also were candid about the reality that the spouses of women and men who are considered 'respectable' in political, religious, economic and other institutions are part of their sex networks. In this way women realised they were more connected with each other than at first appears and should fight for one another's rights.

This increased awareness demonstrates how powerful a tool FPAR can be in building intersectional solidarity amongst women through knowledge creation centred on feminist popular education and learning methods such as storytelling.

Sex workers

Sex workers interviewed as part of the FPAR mentioned that they were not allowed to work at all during the lockdowns because they meet most of their clients in bars, hotels and other places that were not operating during this time. Some of the more privileged sex workers who had access to smartphones and the internet, could use dating sites to meet some clients who would pay them, although many clients were also not working and struggled to pay for services at all or at the same rate with some clients abusing women by using their services and then not paying afterwards.

Some sex workers also reported that they were abused by their communities during the lockdowns and the Police also who took advantage of the Covid-19 restrictions to rape some women who were sex workers, often without protection. Cases of rape were rarely reported because of the stigma towards sex workers which also compounds their ability to access Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services.

Some of the married women interviewed confessed that they perpetuated violence towards sex workers during the pandemic because they saw them as contributing to the increasing poverty of their households. Some women in Makande said:

> ***"We believed our husbands were taking our household savings to pay the sex workers and therefore we would feel very angry at the sex workers but now we realise that it is actually our husbands that we are supposed to be angry with."***

Through the FPAR discussion, these women realised that it wasn't the sex workers they should be angry with but their husbands.

44 WCoZ, Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation (SAFE) Technical Assistance Facility Report, 2021, https://www.wcoz.org/download/safe-zimbabwe/ and https://www.sddirect.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-03/safe-zimbabwe-evidence-synthesis-on-covid19-10122020-for-publication-v2.pdf

It was also shared that widows commonly face abuse by being labelled as 'prostitutes' (sex workers) by others in their community, mainly women. There is an expectation from their husband's families that they would marry their deceased husband's sibling, and if you do not agree you are neglected, left with nothing, and labelled as prostitutes leading to isolation.

LBTQIA+ women

During the pandemic, LBTQIA+ women were also at increased risk of abuse and violence because of their intersecting identities. LBTQIA+ women reported being raped by the Police who would demand money or sex from the women in exchange for their freedom when found breaking the lockdown regulations.

When they were raped, many LBTQIA+ women reported contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs). When seeking healthcare for STIs, LBTQIA+ women faced further barriers as access to healthcare services was constrained for all citizens in the pandemic including specialist sexual health care clinics and NGOs supporting these women. As a result of poor access to appropriate healthcare, LBTQIA+ women often had multiple cases of untreated STIs and or contracted HIV/AIDS. Those services that were able to operate distributed condoms, post-exposure prophylaxes (PEP), pre-exposure prophylaxes (PReP) and lubricants. A number of the FPAR participants were not aware of what PReP and PEP means but were educated on this by women accessing the services.

LBTQIA+ women adapted to this reality by forming solidarity groups on WhatsApp to offer psychosocial support to each other and also link women to the limited services that were available at the time.

Early pregnancy during the Covid-19 lockdowns

A high rate of child marriages was a challenge that the participants associated with the Covid-19 pandemic lock down period and some of the girls were said to have experimented with sex during that time as they were not going to school, and access to SRH services was limited by the pandemic. One of the research areas had the highest level of female school drop out in the province following Covid, as a result of the high number of teen pregnancies. Teenage pregnancies have also increased the rate of child marriage as girls who became pregnant were also more likely to be married early. In addition to girls experimenting with sex some also sold sex for food or money during the pandemic, for example going to mining areas as the sector was not affected by the hard lockdowns. Parents would also marry their children to get money, food or cattle.

Whilst commonplace, it is difficult to note that many women did not blame the boys for experimenting with sex or indulging in sexual activities. Girls were largely blamed for pregnancy and some of the participants apportioned the responsibility of being careful to the girls since they are the ones that carry the pregnancy. Some of the participants felt that girls should be allowed to take control of her life through being exposed to contraceptives such as Depo-Provera and having access to post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), pre-exposure prophylaxis (PReP), safe abortion services and condoms.

However, some women felt uncomfortable with telling their daughters about sexual reproductive healthcare, but there was agreement that when girls fall pregnant, their chances of succeeding in life are reduced. In the discussions held on the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown period, the women saw early pregnancy as one of the barriers that prohibited young women and girls to participate in community based decision-making processes as some have taken the responsibility of motherhood at a young age which often results in an inability to continue with schooling. Their mothers or female guardians have also been negatively affected as they assist the teenage mothers with childcare and fail to participate in decision-making processes as well. Boys often do not carry the responsibility of fatherhood even if they become fathers at a young age. Some of the participants insisted that young women and girls need to have spaces to organise amongst themselves so that they can freely talk about sexual reproductive health, including issues of abortion and sexually transmitted infections, in safe spaces at home, schools and in the community.

The challenge of early pregnancies is also being experienced in some of the CARE project areas. In Midlands Province for example, elected women Councillors in different wards have taken it upon themselves to move around in schools and teach the young girls about abstinence and the consequences of early pregnancy. In addition, the women have also started engaging the traditional leadership in a dialogue about this and request that men who engage in sexual activities with minors be given stiffer penalties.

Access to Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) and other health services in the midst of Covid-19

FPAR participants talked about how they faced difficulties in accessing reproductive healthcare services, anti-retroviral drugs and medications for other health conditions during Covid-19 pandemic. Though the figures could not be ascertained by the participants, there were suspected increases in HIV/AIDS transmission during the period as there was more focus on preventing the spread of Covid-19 pandemic than preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections. People did not entirely stay at home and they did not stop having sex.

Even though access to health services was highly restricted during the pandemic, some SRH services were available including access to safe abortion. Through FPAR dialogues, it became clear that the limited SRH services that were available were mostly known to sex workers and the LBTQIA+ community in the groups.

In addition, SRHR knowledge, such as timeframes for safe terminations, were not known to many women in the group except the sex workers and LBTQIA+ identifying women[45].

According to the women, the reasons for not being able to access primary healthcare services during the pandemic were multi-pronged. First, due to the lockdown measures imposed by the government, the women had to seek clearance from the police and traditional leaders by getting a letter of approval that they have a health problem that needs attention. The women, including LBTQIA+ women, indicated that the police and some traditional leaders often demanded bribes to write travel authorisation letters for the women. In some cases, the traditional leaders and the police did not have the stationery needed to write the letters in which cases, the women had to provide the resources which gave the women another hurdle in getting the travel authorisation. Women had to end up paying for the stationery or going back home.

> ***"When I went to the police charge office to get travel authorisation to get my anti-retroviral drugs, I was told that the officer-in-charge was at his house, and I needed to get him transport to get to the charge office since there is no police vehicle at the charge-office. So, I had to pay for the police officer to get to their charge office. It was a very expensive feat for a person like me."***

Apart from the extra money that the women had to part with in order for them to get to clinics, some of the drugs that the women required were not available and they were told that the government was unable to source the drugs because of the closure of borders. This was despite the healthcare services being classified as essential services during the pandemic.

45 LBTQIA+ identifying women and Sex Workers demonstrated higher levels of SRHR knowledge and awareness however accessed the least of the SRHR services during the pandemic, in contrast to women in the groups whose SRHR knowledge and awareness was lower and their access to services although restricted remained higher than that of Sex Workers and LBTQIA+ identifying women.

One of the women village healthcare workers stated that at some point during the lockdown period, they were left with only anti-malarial drugs and painkillers. These frontline workers said that they could not even access basic personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks and sanitisers and they feared for their health and the health of their families as they felt exposed without the PPE. However, the women healthcare workers stated that they would always improvise to ensure that they provide the services required by their communities.

Women also raised concerns over the imposition and enforcement of the Covid-19 vaccines on them, stating that they could not access any services at their local primary healthcare service providers if they were not vaccinated.

> ***"We were not allowed to enter the clinic without a Covid-19 'vaccine card. Sometimes one would have travelled long distances to the clinic and we failed to get medical attention", stated one of the research participants."***

Some of the women stated that some of the people that died during the pandemic, would not have died if the healthcare system had been functional. Some of the women blamed the lockdown measures that were imposed by the government for the death of some of the people. Some were said to have died from defaulting on their Anti-retroviral Treatment (ART) drugs and other avoidable conditions such as high blood sugar and high blood pressure as they could not access their drugs. The women felt that this gave an extra burden on the women as they had to leave their work at home to work at funerals and other unpaid community work.

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing vulnerabilities of women in rural Zimbabwe, and this became more acute for women with marginalised identities. However, despite the challenges, women demonstrated their power within (agency), courage, creativity and collective strength (power with) in the ways they navigated family and domestic constraints, sought out livelihood opportunities, engaged duty bearers, demanded responsiveness and collectively worked together to address pressing needs in the face of covid-19 restrictions, regressive social and cultural norms and practices amplified by the realities of the pandemic.

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04. Stories of women's individual and collective resistance, adaptability and demanding accountability.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, women at all levels in rural Zimbabwe continued to hold duty bearers to account to fulfil their rights. However, the challenges of the pandemic at a time when Zimbabwe was already facing multiple crises, meant that governance systems and social services had to adapt quickly to respond often with limited resources.

Representatives from the WROs interviewed as part of FPAR worked with women in Local Government, Parliament[46] and at all other leadership levels during the pandemic[47]. WRO representatives shared that it was women who were directly involved in managing and controlling the spread of Covid-19, particularly at the local government levels, especially amongst councillors.

Covid-19 was regarded as a medical crisis, and there was a biomedical response but it was noted that the pandemic had social, economic and political impacts for the country which also needed urgent responses.

46 Representatives from both Houses of Zimbabwe's Parliament the National Assembly and the Senate
47 Community Decision Making Structures and Civil Society

The Government of Zimbabwe announced that it had secured funds to support vulnerable groups, yet these did not reach the women in the communities in which the FPAR was conducted.

One representative of the WROs noted that there was reliance on the existing governance structures to respond to the pandemic. This meant that the women who were elected into leadership positions were suddenly put onto the frontline, not just health workers. She gave an example of such heroism by a newly elected Councillor Lillian in one of the communities who was seen standing in a supermarket using a loud hailer telling people to keep social distance, trying to enforce the regulations single-handedly.

Resistance as a way of demanding accountability

In the interviews, women reflected on how the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions that were heavily enforced, significantly affected their abilities to organise to demand accountability, but still, women continued to plan their campaigns during the lockdown.

> ***"We wanted to hold a demonstration against the authorities over the human and wildlife conflict where people are being killed by elephants. We also wanted to address the issue of residential stands but we were told that we could not do that because we would be arrested since public gatherings were prohibited, one woman shared."***

The woman however highlighted that they continued to have their spaces where they meet regularly and discuss a plethora of issues and also offer solidarity to one another. These spaces include churches, water points and rivers (were women do their laundry). However, due to the restrictions, women could not meet and organise more formally and visibly, which took less toll on them mentally and emotionally despite being "trapped" with their spouses.

The breaking of the Covid-19 regulations formed part of the resistance that was needed for women to continue to organise against the injustices that they were facing. Women disobeying government regulations were not seen as criminal by all the participants, but it was normalised that women needed to meet in one way or the other even during the lockdown. Therefore, silently disobeying the regulations is what allowed women to continue to claim their power back. It was generally agreed that disobedience to government regulations, cultural norms, religious beliefs and expectations, and men, is what every woman, regardless of their sexual orientation or livelihood, does. The women reiterated that non-violent protests through disobedience are some of the ways that women should continue to resist if they are to be fully emancipated.

Women also had physical, political, and spiritual safe spaces that they would retreat to deal with some crisis or gain strength; In the different communities, women already had their spaces and support networks that they made use of and this continued during the pandemic. These included friends and relatives who they would meet in the home and outside in women only spaces, as well as church and social clubs that enabled them to let out issues affecting their lives without being judged. Peers provided both safe spaces and services including safe houses from domestic violence in the form of refuge provided by friends, counselling provided by church leaders, while some got material support during times of lack such as food, medication and funds from their friends and family members. These safe spaces were celebrated and encouraged during the FPAR process by both the women and the researchers.

Women's solidarity and collective care

Women showed solidarity when someone was not well, going through some life crisis, even pregnancy and birth, to share advice and show love. As explained above they made use of their common chores to organise and agree on when to carry out the solidarity actions. Mobile communication was also useful in sending information faster and when they were restricted during Covid. Solidarity was also shown in how the women care for each other, with care being centred in all the engagements with the women as part of the research, caring for each other's bodies, wellbeing and safety. There is an unwritten law to look out for each other and this applied during the Covid-19 period when there was harassment and intimidation from their partners and the security forces. They bailed each other out of jail, or paid bribes to have others released. The women's response to one another's needs through collective care can be seen as a way in which they continue to adapt during the challenges of life during the pandemic, but also outside of this period.

The women also shared their harvest and even the food that they received from the government as drought relief and Covid-19 vulnerability assistance. Gifting was seen as a strong practice in the communities, particularly around food. Women also demanded accountability and displayed their solidarity and care for each other by speaking out on behalf of those who failed to receive their food handout due to various reasons.

Women's sisterhood and grassroots re-organising

Despite the Covid-19 restrictions and their effect on women's ability to organise, the women highlighted that post the first round of the FPAR data generation process and the subsequent lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, women have created other mechanisms for informal organising. In Binga for example, the women formed a netball team composed of women from different backgrounds,

> ***"We formed a netball team and any woman interested is welcome to the team. This group has created a platform for women, where we can meet socialise and stress relief. We meet at least twice a week from 2pm to 5pm but when there is an upcoming match, we meet daily."***

said one of the women.

The team leader highlighted that women really enjoy the training sessions and sometimes want to spend more time but due to their responsibilities as women they have to go back home and do their duties,

Women also need time to play and socialise and given an opportunity, we might even want to spend more time in recreation, enjoying till late like what men do but we are limited. We have to go back home to do their duties, added another woman.

Women are also self-organising around sharing seeds, going to fetch firewood and other household duties. Since their time is preoccupied with other tasks women use those daily or regular household chores to organise collectively, combining the tasks to meet others and share ideas and plans, and also carry those tasks out collectively. Women are also organising collectively around other social community activities such as funerals and saving clubs.

After the lifting of the Covid-19 restrictive regulations, women in Makande re-organised themselves and formed a savings group with other women who are into market gardening, and this has empowered them financially. The women highlighted when they meet for their meetings, they are able to share ideas and let out their troubles and assist one other. This group has also helped the women influence one another positively and identify each other's strengths and potential. Most importantly, the women highlighted that they have been able to build each other's confidence.

There are invaluable lessons to be drawn by WROs from the strategies that grassroots women have been utilising in re-organising and how these can be harnessed to support collective organising for 50/50. For example, the women's movement could build on existing formal, informal and social community structures such as *"mukando"*, widely known as "women rotating savings clubs", readers clubs, Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) and Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) to further strengthen women's organising capacity and leadership at a grassroots level and build further awareness of the 50/50 agenda. This could be done through strengthened communication and development of relationships between local chapters of the Women's coalition and other WROs, and existing community structures, to foster co-creation of opportunities for greater collective organising across new geographical areas and harder to reach communities.

Women in leadership and accountability to women in their communities

Most participants agreed that women leaders are generally less corrupt as most of the women leaders in the community were not involved in sex-for-service arrangements. It was interesting to note that the women felt that when a woman assumes leadership, she should be sensitive to their plight. They expect the woman leader to act differently and 'remember' them. In one site, the female Councillor was praised for adequately representing them.

> ***"She used to walk all around on foot, to give support to our girls when they are raped or when they are pregnant. She would assist with reporting and assisting with ensuring that they get the proper care. She never received any payment for that and we appreciate our Councillor."***

These were some of the words that came from one of the women, and all women present agreed with her. They promised that they would never vote for a male candidate again as they had never before seen the development projects that they are now witnessing. The projects largely involve improved social services which is unlike what they experienced under the leadership of a male Councillor.

In the other research site, the women were disgruntled about the attitude of their woman Councillor which they felt was against the plight of women as she defended the male dominated council's decisions at the women's cost. In this site, the women had a number of complaints against their female Councillor, even questioning who she was representing as they stated that the healthcare facilities were non-functional, the electricity infrastructure is so broken down that it is now dangerous for the people and animals, the local mortuary is not working and the roads are not named therefore making it difficult for people to receive mail. The woman leader was accused of siding with the men and forgetting about how the women voted for her to represent their interests. The woman Councillor however did not have any regrets as she felt that she was just doing her job. The women felt that the Councillor was behaving worse than other men because she had facilitated the repossession of their land by the Town Council during the Covid-19 time when the government had given instruction for all repossessions to be stopped. Some of the women made promises that they will not vote for the same Councillor again.

This magnified the lessons learnt from the wider CARE project that in some instances, elected leaders fail to be accountable to the communities and, once elected, do not prioritise the needs of women and girls. Instead, elected representatives advance the political agenda which, in most cases is not pro-women. This amplifies the importance of the CARE project and the transformational leadership training for elected and aspirant women which has a focus on dynamic accountability and enables women to set targets against which they will transform the lives of women they serve. Whilst elected women continue to be subjected to the rules and priorities of political parties, the transformational feminist leadership training has equipped women with skills and strategies to influence the broader political party agenda and to interrogate power.

Most of the members of the LBTQIA+ community also felt betrayed by their counterparts who are in politics but fail to put in place laws that protect their rights and decriminalise same-sex relationships. It was indicated that some politicians and high-ranking officials are part of their community but they do not want to come out in the open for fear of losing political office. There was general agreement that before they can try to go into active politics and take political office, the LBTQIA+ community must be proud of who they are and be accepted by society for their identities and the choices they make about their bodies. They argued that the mainstream political spaces are very violent to them and need transformation.

Collective action by female residents

In one of the FPAR sites, the issue of residential stands[48] was brought out from the onset of the FPAR process, in that their Rural District Council had allocated them residential stands for which they struggled to pay and to build permanent structures on. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the women did not have any source of income and some of them defaulted on payments. The government announced that institutions should not act on the defaulter during the pandemic across the country but the local council repossessed some of the residential stands which the women had struggled to pay for, despite the call and left some homeless. The women collectively helped each other explain the crisis saying that at the council they do not have anyone to stand for their issues as the focal person they had been initially working with was transferred to another department. This is despite having a woman elected councillor whom they feel was supposed to represent them. Some of the women noted that they wanted to appeal to the Council's Chief Executive Officer but the protocol involved in meeting with him is so cumbersome and bureaucratic making it almost impossible for women to appeal against the Council's decision to repossess their residential stands. The women tried to demand accountability on these stands by attempting to hold a demonstration but were barred by the authorities as this was said to "be going against the Covid-19 regulations". The women managed to write a letter to the Council but never got a response. The FPAR participants resolved that they are going to consider what they look for when voting women into office so that they have women who are empowered and have awareness of women's issues.

Instead of being loyal to political outfits the women stated that they are going to be loyal to their struggles and choose leaders who are part of their struggle and who can adequately represent their issues.

Collective action against poor service delivery and access to social protection

WROs stated that several women were assisted by WROs to engage, negotiate and advocate for assistance and social protection measures as well as some grants that could assist in their livelihoods during the pandemic. However, it should be noted that while the WROs were making these efforts to ensure that women receive some support in the form of grants, the women in the FPAR sites mentioned that they never received any grants that were specifically intended for them.

48 Local Authorities provide access to housing through access to residential stands which residents may apply and purchase for the purposes of home building.

The donations of money and food packages that came through the government and other organisations were distributed through predominately male community leaders and given to men as the household heads who would spend the money recklessly or sell the donations for cash. Most of these packages did not reach women at home.

Men were reported to have used this money on beer or other non-essential luxuries for their satisfaction while the women and children continued to suffer. Even when WROs mentioned that they went to the extent of engaging with the Chairperson of the Covid-19 Taskforce,

who was also a woman, the FPAR participants in the sites did not talk about any improvement in their lives and things continued to deteriorate in terms of their welfare and wellbeing. The Covid-19 Response Working Group created in 2020 also aimed to respond to all the issues being raised by women from the grassroots through the mechanisms in place during the pandemic. However, it is acknowledged the women interviewed in this study did not feel the group directly supported them in their day to day lives at this time.

The WROs who were interviewed stated that their engagement efforts with the government paid off during the pandemic as the government ended up including the organisations working on GBV as essential services[49]. One of the WROs' representatives said that it was their first time seeing health centres being prioritised for rehabilitation. She explained the following:

> ***"I would say that women have been demanding and continued demanding, but during the Covid-19 they were given the attention that they had never been given before. If you think about maternal health, in Zimbabwe we have had a maternal crisis for almost 20 years. If you look at what Covid-19 did it said, health is a priority, there will be nothing happening except health. At one point, the ministry of health was probably the main decision maker in the cabinet. When councillors were meeting, when local governments were meeting, they were talking about health."***

However, the FPAR participants in the sites did not seem to see the alleged improvements and instead they talked about the deterioration of the healthcare system in their communities during the pandemic. This may be explained by the fact that the WROs interviewed are based in Harare while the FPAR participants live in rural communities.

The FPAR participants shared stories of some of the challenges that they are facing with regard to access to water. Some of the areas in the FPAR sites have no access to water, including some of the secondary schools, and this poses a huge health risk for the community. In one of the sites, the women who are members of the local residents association asked the leadership to take the matter up. In 2020, the Residents Association and the local Councillor approached the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) about the situation and new water pipes were put in place but there is a lack of funding for the work to be completed.

Electricity challenges were also mentioned as one of the issues faced by residents that the authorities were not able to address even though they were engaged by the same Residents Association leadership as a request by the members. However, participants mentioned that they continue to live without access to water and clean and affordable energy.

49 [1] During the Covid 19 pandemic, the Government of Zimbabwe gave exemptions/waivers to Organisations, companies and individuals who were classified as providing "essential services". They could carry on with activities despite the lockdown restrictions. They included all medical staff and security personnel to mention a few.

Fetching water and firewood consumes a lot of their time because of the distances that they have to walk. This makes it difficult for women to participate in decision making processes and politics.

In another area within the same research site, women narrated how as a result of water poverty, they engaged the Local Authority and Residents Association, which is male dominated, on the issue of lack of access to water. After failing to get a response from the authorities, the women organised themselves and took the matter into their own hands. They mobilised each other and went to the council offices in their numbers with empty buckets to ask for water. They were subsequently arrested for staging a demonstration without seeking police clearance. They quickly raised money among themselves to pay fines for all of them to be released from prison. Despite their arrests, the water issue in their area was successfully addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

The FPAR process showed gaps that exist in different spaces and at different social and political levels. Tabulated below are recommendations targeting different stakeholders. These recommendations seek to:

- Support women's collective organising and the strengthening of the women's movement in Zimbabwe
- Enhance women's participation in decision making and politics
- Strengthen the work of WiPSU and WCoZ to ensure the gains of the CARE project are not lost.

Individuals

- It is important for women in their diversity and in different capacities to stand up and use their voice to challenge patriarchy and support women's participation and take-up leadership positions in decision making and governance. This can be done through supporting 50/50 campaigns, vote for a women campaigns etc
- To take a stand, speak out and challenge all forms of gender based violence in families, in communities and in the public domain. To support expanded support and solidarity for women who have suffered abuse regardless of their diverse identities.

Government of Zimbabwe

- Zimbabwe is a signatory to a plethora of Regional and International instruments. These include CEDAW, UNSRC 1325, SDGs etc. The Government of Zimbabwe must expedite the domestication and full implementation of these laws.
- To actively support the implementation of Section 7 of the Constitution to provide public awareness of the Constitution.
- To strengthen the reach of the National GBV Referral Pathway and make necessary legal reforms to strengthen the costs of perpetrating all forms of gender based violence.
- Strengthen the capacity of Local Authorities in particular Rural Local Authorities in marginalised communities with increased central government support for social services.
- Expand the reach of healthcare services and strengthen the capacity of Village Health Care workers who remain the primary point of care for communities.

Funding Partners, donors and the International Community

- WROs have, over the years, remained an underfunded sector within CSOs. As such, there is a need for funding partners / donors to deliberately channel long term flexible and core funding to WROs so that they can support women across the country.
- Supporting WRO's directly to undertake Key Research that speaks to their contemporary practices and the lives of women and girls.
- To expand flexibility in institutional and other types of funding as demonstrated by Comic Relief in this project approach.
- To integrate programme adaptiveness and flexibility into program and grant management.

- To provide support directly to WRO's and women's movements specifically to deepen impact in transforming the lives of women and girls

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Women in Communities

- Feminist Solidarity: The FPAR participants are practising feminist solidarity through showing up when someone was not well, going through life crisis, even pregnancy and birth, to share advice and show love. Therefore, this solidarity should be built on through actions that envisage a shared responsibility for the lives of marginalised groups such as the LBTQIA+ women and sex workers, working with them in ways that centre care, towards transformation through ways that are guided by democratic engagements so that the work done does not reproduce the same system of exclusion and exploitation that we are challenging;
- To collectively support women willing to stand up and compete for political elected leadership regardless of their political parties with a view to expanding the number of women in elected leadership.
- To continue to call upon women in communities to demand increased representation in Village heads and other key Community Decision Making Structures.
- To continue to rally on key issues affecting women and demanding accountability for transformational development in communities.
- Women organising against abuse of women or children in all its forms through actively speaking out and seeking legal and social assistance.

WCoZ and WiPSU

- Deepen and scale up the CARE project, deliberately targeting excluded and minority groups such as the Tonga so as to improve constitutional literacy and transformational leadership amongst other things.
- Continue to offer counselling and have a relationship of solidarity with women in the communities in which the FPAR was carried out. In most cases, organisations extract data from communities and disappear. It is therefore important that WiPSU and WCoZ continue to interact with these women, remaining alive to the fact that women's lives are not projects.
- To support and expand the Working Group methodology as a good practice in other Humanitarian Crises and national processes.
- Supporting intersectional Women's organising: This FPAR had shown that women are already organised around sharing seeds, going to fetch firewood and other household duties, therefore if WiPSU and WCoZ commit to support these groups through strengthening them through use of Feminist Popular Education to raise political consciousness in ways that shift power, more women would feel confident to fully participate in Council and Parliamentary elections.
- Feminist Movement Building: feminist popular education, Feminist leadership, and Care and Security should be guided by tools that can be developed collectively with women so that the women's movement can build on the knowledge that women already have, and so that the tools are usable to the women who would have been actively involved in developing them, and informing them.
- There is need for feminist movements to move away from short term reformism and focus on long-term structural change through using feminist methodologies that centre care in all engagements with the women, caring for each other's bodies, wellbeing and safety.

Women's Rights Organisations (WROs)

- To continue and expand constitutional literacy and mass mobilisation and constitution education programmes in communities.
- Supporting women's organising should be done in inclusive ways that breaks the tradition of exclusion of the LBTQIA+ community and sex workers. WRO should make a deliberate political decision to include all women in all their intersecting identities when they support women's organising.
- There is a need to create spaces for women, LBTQIA+ women, and Sex workers to tell their stories, raise their voices and make demands for the changes that they want to see. There is a need to build and advocate from below at the level of the grassroots, and above at the level of policy and lawmakers.
- WROs should conduct Constitutional Literacy and leadership training that deliberately targets minority groups.
- While it is good for WROs to work at national policy level and regional level to push for policies that enable women's full participation in politics, often, very good policies fail to effect the desired change because they will be divorced from women's realities. WROs should build the capacity of communities to carry out advocacy for the issues affecting them.

CONCLUSION

Poverty, violence, and the burden of care and domestic work within the context of historical injustice and the continued cultural impacts of colonialism, patriarchy and intersectional discrimination are some of the aspects that both impact the status of womanhood in Zimbabwe, and constraints that women consider as barriers to their effective participation and leadership in political and decision making processes. The humanitarian crisis of Covid-19 saw women on the front lines and exposed a problem of accountability, with social services breaking down, lack of access to livelihoods, increased violence against women in their homes and from duty bearers in communities- particularly for those most marginalised, and women carrying the disproportionate burden of the pandemic as caregivers and workers in various capacities; creating challenges for women in their day to day lives and for the women's agenda more broadly, as well as making it difficult for women to participate in decision making processes and/or hold political office.

However, during the pandemic, women adapted and resisted power and toxic masculinity in their homes and in their communities in various ways which included deliberately disobeying unjust laws and regulations to ensure their survival, and as well resisting power even in their marriages. More broadly these women are engaging in resistance through solidarity and collective care as acts of sisterhood to one another, and engaging in grassroots reorganising and collective action to demand accountability from women leaders and against poor service delivery and social protection more broadly.

FPAR offered the space for women to interrogate power, co-create, share knowledge in ways that do not marginalise other groups of women and strategise how they can effectively participate in political and decision-making processes, in their communities, in their districts and at national level. The way that the women live their lives, the way they relate to each other and the way that women resist power and injustice all point to existing feminist principles throughout the research process.

The FPAR brought together women political leaders, religious leaders, sex workers, LBTQIA+ women, women living with disabilities and young women with a commitment to transforming their lives and the lives of their communities by leading differently. The FPAR highlighted women's desire for self-determination. Women want to make choices about their lives as individuals and collectives and determine their future, particularly their future in politics.

During the FPAR process women realised and agreed that, intrinsically as women, they have the power and the ability to lead and select the leaders they want. They also identified and came up with strategies on how to dismantle the powers and other obstacles that hinder them from reaching their full potential. Women agreed to volunteer and vote for and support each other especially to gain leadership positions in political structures that have a strong impact on them, namely social service delivery e.g. water point committees, local health and education committees and all the other decision-making structures.

The research also revealed how women are organising in their own right at a grassroots level, even on a smaller scale and in creative ways, and how WROs can co-create with women to build on what is already happening at a grassroots level to strengthen women's participation and leadership. The women also committed to further strengthen solidarity amongst themselves, continue with actions they formed during the FPAR process and reach out to more women to share knowledge with.

AFTERWORD

Since this research was conducted, the WROs involved in CARE have made concerted efforts to respond to some critical issues and gaps highlighted by the research, partially facilitated by a further 2 years of extension funding for the CARE Programme.

1. The Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe expanded its work to Binga by launching the Binga Chapter in October 2023, in support of local women and the local movement as a coordination mechanism for bringing together women in Binga to collectively organise and strategise on key advocacy areas to build women's agency, demand leadership and equal participation in all spheres of society, in their community and at national level.

2. Furthermore, informed by the research findings, the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, designed a pilot women's empowerment and leadership programme in Binga which commenced in 2022. The programme builds leadership capacity of local women through mentorship, supports entrepreneurship skills of local women through training and provision of business-start-up kits and co-operative registration. Responding to the gender-digital divide gap highlighted by the research, the intervention by the WCoZ has also trained local women on digital literacy and provided smart mobile phones to the targeted women under the pilot programme.

3. Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU) has prioritised and expanded the targeting and reach of Political Education Forums which are central to building and enhancing the independence and autonomy of women. Through a deliberate expansion of women who access Feminist Political Education Forums WiPSU is able to ensure women in all their diverse and intersectional identities have an opportunity to connect to Feminist Transformational Leadership tools and spaces.

4. WiPSU has further undertaken a document assessment and review of training, information and education materials to revise these and deepen the diversity and inclusion of the material to service a wider reach of women.

Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU)

Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU), established in 2001, is a vibrant, feminist, non-partisan, organisation working to support women's qualitative and quantitative influence and participation in policy and decision-making processes in Zimbabwe. WiPSU serves as a technical resource base for women to realise "*A society in which women exercise and enjoy their human rights and participate as equals in all political processes with full citizenship rights*" and support *strengthened democracy and governance practices through the effective participation of women in political office and as political constituents.*"

Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoz)

Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) is a national membership-based network of women's organisations and individual women's rights activists. It is a forum where women meet to engage in collective activism on issues affecting women and girls in Zimbabwe. Established in 1999, WCoZ vision is "*A Zimbabwean society where women and girls fully enjoy all their rights.*" WCoZ's central role is to coordinate and provide a focal point for advocacy, influencing and activism on women and girl's rights. WCoZ's individual and organisational members throughout the 10 Provinces of Zimbabwe, organise in diverse fields and are grouped into ten thematic clusters. These are: Health, Legal and Constitutional Rights, Education, Gender Based Violence, Economic Empowerment, Peace Building, Environment, Media and ICT, Humanitarian and Politics and Decision Making.

Womankind Worldwide

Womankind Worldwide is a global women's rights organisation working with feminist movements to transform the lives of women and girls. Womankind supports feminist movements to strengthen and grow by carrying out diverse joint activities, including advocacy and communications work, women's rights programming rather than service delivery, awareness-raising, knowledge-sharing, research, capacity development and fundraising.

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