

Youth Empowerment, a Requisite for Rural Development: Case of the Chimanimani District of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The need for empowering youth is gaining prominence in rural development practice. This is so because it is a viable vehicle for poverty reduction, and sustainable peace, security and improvement in people's livelihoods. In Zimbabwe, the youth constitute 35% of the total population. This paper is a product of an exploratory case study that was designed to examine youth empowerment in mainly rural areas of the Chimanimani District in eastern Zimbabwe. A semi-structured interview guide was administered to 34 conveniently sampled male and female youth. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered. The youth felt disempowered and were frustrated because their potential contribution to economic, social and political development was underestimated and not fully exploited. They lamented the fact that their inputs rarely influenced policy and development practice. The youth detested corruption and nepotism in the allocation of land and funding for businesses, especially involving ministry officials who they alleged were openly pro-ruling party. Nor did the youth find it easy to assume leadership positions in their communities where elderly men dominated decision making and development space. It was concluded that if the local society recognised and embraced youth involvement in decision making and leadership processes, the implementation of initiatives meant to stimulate rural socio-economic development would be more sustainable.

Keywords: policy; resources; participatory governance; patriarchy; youth



Introduction

Empowerment is a constitutional and moral issue, especially considering its importance in promoting good governance. Governance refers to the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources in order to yield development (Cain 2016; Gisselquist 1997; Keping 2018; Ysa, Albareda, and Forbeger 2014). Apart from this understanding of governance, Huebner (1998) posits that empowerment extends authority or power to enable or promote self-actualisation and influence. In Zimbabwe, for example, Section 14 of the country's Constitution Amendment (No. 20) Sub-section 1 of 2013 provides insights and a template for actualising empowerment. The latter states that:

All institutions and agencies of government at every level must endeavour to facilitate and take appropriate measures to empower through appropriate, transparent, fair and just affirmative action, all marginalized persons, groups and communities in Zimbabwe.

In Section 9, the Zimbabwe Constitution further emphasises that good governance is a pillar of the welfare of its citizens. It is evident from the preceding imperatives that the core tenets of good governance include transparency, accountability, and eradicating corruption and abuse of power. As Francis et al. (2010) and Ndoma and Kokera (2016) assert, civic participation is crucial to the realisation of these principles or tenets of good governance. In this regard, civic participation entails mobilising and ensuring meaningful participation of individuals and communities in decision making throughout the development process. However, there is a need to caution that although these are noble ideals, empowerment is attractive on paper but difficult to realise in the real world (Huebner 1998). Seemingly, the main challenge is that those who are entrusted with managing or leading organisations and institutions rarely commit to letting go part of their decision-making power to those they lead. Empowering communities to play leading roles in ensuring there is good governance, facilitates the attainment of the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals, especially the first one which seeks "to end poverty in all its forms everywhere" (Aliero and Ibrahim 2013.). Taking these facts into account, the current study was conducted in the Chimanimani District of Zimbabwe with the aim of exploring youth empowerment issues.

Youth empowerment is a contemporary issue in international human rights and affirmative action discourses. The United Nations (2012) reveals that people younger than 30 years old make up about 70% of Africa's total population. This implies that there is a need to focus on tailoring development such that it strengthens the aspirations of the young people. For development initiatives to be sustainable, their empowerment is non-negotiable. Although empowerment has been explained above, what it entails with respect to the African Youth Decade 2009-2018 Plan of Action (African Union AU, 2011) the youth vary from one geographical area to another (Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi 2013). This is what makes it difficult to measure youth empowerment and compare related data across countries.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2009) defines a youth as any person who is transitioning from childhood to adulthood. Various organisations and countries have adopted different age groups to classify youth. For the United Nations (1995) and Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi (2013), youth refers to persons whose ages range from 15–24 years. The Commonwealth regards a youth as someone about 15–29 years of age. This definition falls within the less than 35 years age range that the African Youth Decade 2009–2018 Plan of Action adopted. The Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013, African Youth Charter (African Union 2006) that was reconfirmed in June 2019, and the South African National Youth Policy, 2015–2020 define a youth as any individual who is 15–35 years old. This is the definition that was adopted in the current study.

The African Youth Decade 2009-2018 Plan of Action (AU, 2011) articulates empowerment of youth as the ability to promote conducive conditions under which they act rather than being guided. Included in the portfolio of enabling conditions are their participation in socio-economic spheres, political will, and access to knowledge, information and skills (Commonwealth 2008). Resource allocation, supportive legal and administrative frameworks, peace, democracy and positive value systems are also part of the set of conducive conditions for youth empowerment. Based on this information, the enhancement of accessibility to various life opportunities is integral to youth empowerment. In the course of youth empowerment processes, adults are expected to demonstrate that they realise and share responsibility and power with young members of their society. Youths are embraced as key role players as opposed to mere spectators in development practice. In turn, the youth should account for and take responsibility for their choices and actions, irrespective of the results arising from this.

It is clear from the preceding paragraph that decent conditions of living for the youth must be created so that a springboard for their empowerment is created. Their integration into economic development spheres should be included as part of the empowerment menu. The literature reveals that high unemployment, poor health and lack of meaningful participation in politics of youth in Africa often betray a failure to empower them (Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi 2013; Landa and Fushai 2018; Machingo 2018). Therefore, harnessing the potential of the youth and translating it into tangible outcomes must anchor empowerment initiatives.

Available literature shows a deficit of evidence of successful youth empowerment initiatives. This narrative finds support from Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi (2013), who believe that providing opportunities for more than 200 million youths in Africa is the biggest challenge facing governments and policymakers in the continent. Yet, regardless of this increased awareness of youth empowerment challenges, well-developed, comprehensive and effective statutes dealing with it are still non-existent.

There is evidence in the literature that entrenches the narrative that youth empowerment initiatives implemented in African communities so far have often ignored local realities,

particularly the people's culture. In the past, formal and informal processes of customary or indigenous education methods were used to transmit knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and patterns of behaviour from one generation to another (Adeyemi and Adeyinka 2002). In order to achieve stability, peace, progress, educational, socio-economic and political development, Africans must revisit and reactivate their indigenous thoughts and knowledge systems. This is the centre-piece of the African philosophy of *Sankofaism*, which Quan-Baffour (2012) and Marango, Francis, and Adjibolosso (2016) visualise as gazing or going back to indigenous knowledge and skills.

There are calls for ensuring that the youth play an integral role in Africa's economic growth and development (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). The latter scholars contend that in general, youths are more educated, and are better able to adopt new technologies and ideas than adults. Moreover, youths take risks more readily and thus are likely to challenge traditional socio-political norms and processes (Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi 2013) that are retarding the pace of economic development in Africa. Yet, these facts are rarely taken into serious account during economic development programming.

Youth empowerment improves competence and self-esteem among young people (Harter 1993; Commonwealth, 2008). DiBenedetto (1992), Francis et al. (2010) and Ndhlovu (2012) list the main factors that promote youth empowerment as: non-authoritarian adult leadership; experiencing and exercising power; receiving relevant education and training; participatory governance; experiencing a safe and secure environment; social inclusion and appreciation from society; creation of an environment that enables them to express their opinions and emotions; accepting diversity; developing a voice; and having a sense of being able to take lawful action when necessary. An earlier study (Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph 1996), affirmed that sharing information, creating autonomy and examining the role of the youth development professional influenced the empowerment of young people.

The fact that youths constitute a special group is reflected in the constitutional provisions of most countries. For example, the Zimbabwe Constitution (Amendment No. 20) of 2013 makes provision for youth empowerment as stated in Section 20 of the Constitution:

The state and all institutions and agencies of government, including affirmative action programmes to ensure that youth: a) have access to appropriate education and training; b) have opportunities to associate and to be represented and participate in political, social, economic and other spheres of life; c) are afforded opportunities for employment and other avenues to economic empowerment; d) have opportunities for recreational activities and; e) are protected from harmful cultural practices, exploitation and all forms of abuse.

Considering the issues articulated above, it was necessary to explore and deepen our understanding of the reality of youth empowerment in the Chimanimani District of Zimbabwe. More than 80% of the district is rural. The exploratory case study was designed to gain insights and explain the observed level of youth empowerment. The central question underpinning the study sought to explore whether youth empowerment in practice matched what various policies and legislations stipulated.

Site of Study

The Chimanimani District is found in the eastern province of Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. It shares borders with Mozambique to the east. Chipinge, Buhera and Mutare Districts are its neighbours on the southern, western and northern sides, respectively. Its total population is estimated to be 133 590, with about 37% being youths, 15–35 years old (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency: ZimStat 2012). Chimanimani is the second smallest out of the seven districts in Manicaland Province. However, it is most richly endowed in terms of natural resource reserves such as forests, fertile soils and precious minerals that include gold, diamond, lime and copper. The district boasts spectacular tourist sites such as the Bridal Veil Falls, Pera Falls, Vhimba Botanical Reserves and the Chimanimani Mountains.

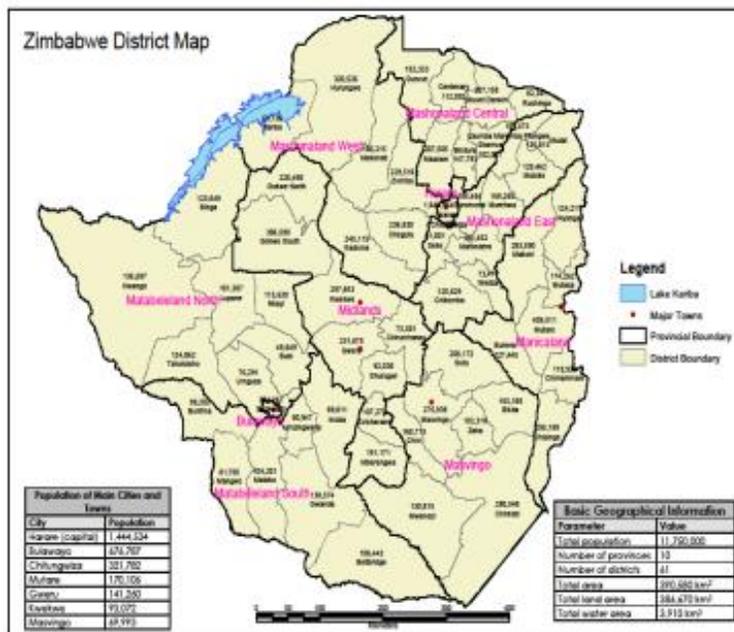


Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe showing provinces

Source: ZimStat (2012)

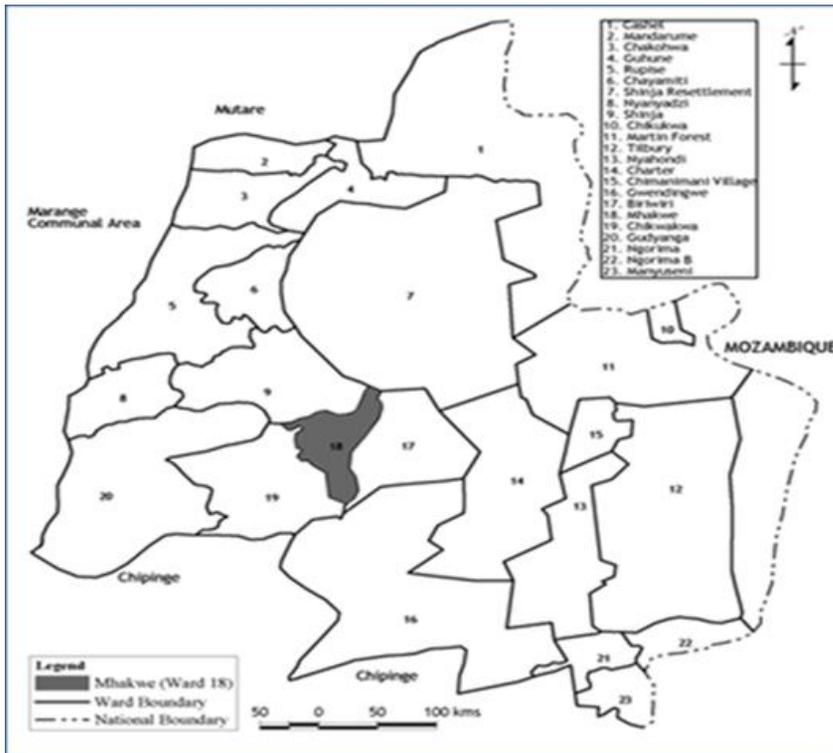


Figure 2: Map of Chimanimani District showing wards

Source: Chimanimani Rural District Council

Methodology

An exploratory case study was conducted in the Chimanimani District, which is made up of 23 wards. An exploratory qualitative research design was deemed suitable because the focal subject was relatively virgin, especially in Zimbabwe. As Cuthill (2002) and Taylor, Catalano, and Walker (2002) explain, exploratory designs are conducted when research problems have received limited or no scholarly research attention. The exploratory research design imparted flexibility to the study in addition to helping find answers to a range of research questions. This was important because of its potential to help define new terms and clarify existing concepts. However, despite these attributes, the use of small samples makes it difficult to generalise the results to the larger population. Survey respondents were selected from four wards that were conveniently sampled. A semi-structured interview guide was administered to 34 selected youths to collect mainly qualitative data. As shown below, the conceptualisation of youth and

youth empowerment, economic, governance and health dimensions were included in the interview guide.

Conceptualising youth and youth empowerment

- a) What do you understand by youth and youth empowerment?
- b) Do you believe youth empowerment is a reality? If not, explain your answer.

Youth economic empowerment

- a) Do you own land?
- b) Do you own or run your own business? If yes, what type? When did you start running it? Where did you get your start-up capital?
- c) What knowledge of entrepreneurship and financial management do you have?
- d) Where did you get the knowledge on entrepreneurship and financial management?
- e) Are you computer literate? If yes, for what purposes?
- f) Have you ever been exposed to any practical working environment?
- g) Have you ever received any loan from the national youth fund or other youth programme?
- h) Do you have access to bank loans to start or expand your current business?
- i) Do you see the business environment as being conducive for the youth to compete with other businesses?
- j) Do you think you have control over issues that affect your everyday life?
- k) What takes much of your time each day?

Youth and governance

- a) Do you believe that you have equal chances with adults to assume leadership positions in your community?
- b) Do you feel your community allows you to actively participate in local meetings without any reservations?

Youth and health

- a) Have you ever heard about cancer, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS? If yes, where and by whom? Do you know of any outreach programme specifically targeting the youth on these diseases?
- b) Are you aware of the indigenisation and empowerment policy? If yes, in brief what does it entail?

The interview guide was prepared in English, but was later translated into Shona, the vernacular language of the area. Translation into Shona was meant to help maintain a

common understanding among the researchers of the youth issues that were investigated. Two experienced social research scientists conducted the face-to-face interviews. It took a week to interview the 34 respondents. Probing was relied on to help follow up and deepen understanding of the issues under investigation. Five government officials, who were drawn from the Ministries of Women Affairs, Small to Medium Scale Enterprises and Gender and Youth, Indigenisation and Employment Creation were interviewed to verify and get a balanced understanding of the insights of the youth. However, the results were left out of the analyses because youth perspectives were the principal focus.

The qualitative data collected in the current study were analysed following the thematic content analysis procedures of Cresswell (2014). During the thematic content analysis, themes were identified, enumerated and analysed. In some instances, the counts of emerging issues or themes were converted into proportions of the total number of respondents in the study. Emerging patterns were reported on. This helped organise and enhance the description of the results in rich detail. Verbatim quotes that were found to be rich in content, explaining identified themes, were selected. They were tabulated together with the formulated themes.

Results

Demographic Information

Out of the 34 youths who participated in the current study, 51% were female. The proportion of youths aged 25–29 years constituted the majority (35%). Those who were 20–24 and 30–35 years old were about 30% and 27% of the total sample, respectively. The rest were 15–19 years old. Most of the respondents were married (59%), followed by those who were single (29%), widowed (6%) and divorced (6%). About 47% of them had completed secondary schooling as opposed to those with tertiary qualifications (44%). The rest had primary school education only.

Conceptualising Youth and Youth Empowerment

All explanations of a “youth” were based on an individual’s age. The most common definition (59%) was “a young person 18–35 years old.” There was another notable family of explanations of “youth” (18%), which cited the age range as 15–40 years. Almost a tenth of the respondents set the base age as 10 years. The rest of the definitions were rather cloudy, with the respondents simply saying, “Anybody who is 35 years and below”; “An adult person above 15 years of age”; “A person who is 12 years and above.”

Conceptualisation of Youth Empowerment

Eighteen per cent of the respondents said they were not sure what “youth empowerment” was. Those who had an idea of what it meant, explained it in terms of wealth creation; decision making; business development; culture; transformation (equity and redress); access to resources such as land and finance; job creation; and

employable skills (table 1). These results should be viewed against the background that 38% of the youths believed they did not have control over issues that affected them every day of their lives.

Table 1: Conceptualising youth empowerment (What is youth empowerment?)

Theme	Counts from interviews		Verbatim quotes from respondents
	Number out of 34	%	
Economic: access to finance; skills; training and other resources	16	47	Youth empowerment is financing youth projects; It is being provided with loans and land to use for projects; It is giving power to young people e.g., providing cash to start their own projects; It involves training and financial support; It is providing youth with education and financial support to establish business; It is improving young people's access to economic resources; and It is capacitating youth with social, economic, political knowledge, access to resources.
Economic: wealth creation; business development; income generation or earning	8	23	It is the transferring of wealth to the young people; It means cooperatives by youth in the community; Giving young blacks resources to start businesses; It is employment creation for youth and making youth economically active; It is strong encouragement of young people to start their own businesses; It is to involve youth in development projects; and It is the creation of opportunities for youth towards development e.g., job creation
Governance: decision making; succession culture; power	5	15	It is a process of giving youth power to control the activities of the country; It is the ability to control one's activities for sustainable development; Youth empowerment is a political statement used in Zimbabwe for trying to keep inheritance within the family; and It is the power that is given to the youth in the development of the country.
Transformation: equity and redress	3	9	It is a programme designed to emancipate the young generation for earning a living; It is a situation whereby young people are given the opportunity to indigenise; and Promoting affirmative action policy for young people in business and farming projects.
Equipping youth with employable skills	2	6	It is promoting youth with technical jobs such as bricklaying, carpentry and others; and It is when youth are trained and participate in economic and political spheres.

A key question was in relation to whether youth empowerment was a reality. More than half (53%) of the youth regarded it as a myth (table 2). Table 2 shows some verbatim lines of argument that explained why youth empowerment was thought to be a mere façade.

Table 2: Is youth empowerment a reality?

Theme	Counts from interviews		Verbatim quotes from respondents
	Number out of 34	%	
Youth empowerment is a myth: Corrupt practices and nepotism marginalise young people	18	53	Most youths are not employed and the government should empower us; Not everybody is benefitting from economic empowerment, youth development officers are appointed on partisan lines; Youth empowerment is for young persons who belong to the ruling party; Youth not affiliated to the ruling party are not economically, socially and politically empowered. Youth, through the ruling party, are used to terrorise their families and fellow community members in return for employment in the Ministry of Youth; and Young people are marginalised from the formal economy.
Partial youth empowerment	2	6	Yes, but so far mismanagement is hindering; Youth are benefitting to an extent
Existing initiatives and opportunities such as indigenisation	8	23	Many young people are receiving loans or investment capital from the youth fund to start projects in poultry, market gardening and potato farming; I see youth doing income-generating projects financed by the Ministry of Youth, Economic Empowerment and Indigenisation; Government is channelling loans and grants to youth so that they may start their own income-generating projects; Youth can be given resources to boost their own business and also can be trained; Yes, young people were given certain projects to earn a living; and It is a reality because it is being given space and enough resources.
Business development, training and income-generation projects	6	18	Some youths are now controlling business through empowerment; Yes, because unemployed youths are operating businesses; There are many businesses controlled by young people; and Yes, it is a reality because all youths have access to education and work; Yes, since the Ministry of Youth is in existence.

Youth Economic Empowerment

Youth Ownership of Land and Business

Almost all the youths who were interviewed (>95%) did not own land. Only 38% of them indicated that they owned businesses. Of these, approximately 75% were involved in informal activities such as street vending, selling clothing items at flea markets and cross-border trading. The latter sourced mainly clothes from Mozambique for resale locally. Others were proprietors of liquor-trading businesses and mainly school stationery stores.

Access to Loans from the Youth Empowerment Fund and other Funding Facilities

Ninety per cent of the youth revealed that they had never accessed or received loans from the National Youth Empowerment Fund or any other source. The remaining 10% were female youths who had secured loans from the Women's Development Fund, which was introduced to cater for all women, irrespective of their age.

About 30% of the youths explained that they had not benefitted from any loan facility because they lacked knowledge about the funding opportunities at their disposal and how to access them. More than 60% cited "lack of transparency and accountability in the Youth Empowerment Fund, which the Ministry of Youth, Gender, Women Affairs and Community Development runs" as a major challenge for them. The rest of the youths revealed that "... for me, lack of collateral security ..." made it impossible to even attempt to access any loan facility.

Access to Bank Finance for Business Start-up and Expansion

Only 13% of the youths reported that they had accessed financing portfolios that commercial banks had established. The funding was used to start or expand businesses. It was highlighted that bank lending policies favoured those who were working or employed. Thus, without proof of reliable income from employment, youths could not access any financing facilities that banks had.

Nature of Environment for Youth Business or Enterprise Development

Approximately 51% of the youths believed that the prevailing business climate was not conducive for them to run competitive enterprises. A tenth said the business environment was somewhat conducive. The major perception was that the business climate was not conducive for youths to introduce and run thriving enterprises. Themes underpinning the arguments in support of this assertion are consolidated in table 3. A haemorrhaging liquidity crisis, corrupt practices and patriarchy hampered attempts to establish and run successful youth-owned businesses. Compounding these challenges was the revelation that slightly more than a quarter (26%) of the youths had not been exposed to the industrial attachment for them to gain work-related experience during and/or after their education and training periods.

Table 3: Reasons why the business climate was not conducive for youth enterprise development

Theme	% counts ¹ (n = 17)	Verbatim quotes
National investment climate and liquidity crisis	56	The persistent liquidity crisis in the country makes it difficult for youths to compete with those that are run by more established entrepreneurs; ...cash crunch is so serious that many young people cannot start small and medium enterprises; It is difficult to secure start-up capital; and There is no capital available and also liquidity constraints are a challenge.
Corruption and nepotism	38	When youths receive funding, they usually misappropriate it; The business climate favours those aligned with ZANU PF who try to compete with established businesses through corrupt practices.
Gender (problem with patriarchy)	6	Our patriarchal system demands that young women seek approval from parents and spouses before venturing into business or joining formal employment.

Note: % counts take into account the perspective of only the youth, who believed that the prevailing climate was not favourable for successful business development

Understanding Entrepreneurship and Channels of its Acquisition

About two-thirds (71%) of the youths could not explain what entrepreneurship was. Those who indicated they knew what it was reported that they had acquired knowledge about it through seminars and training workshops that government and NGOs organised, being mentored within families and by seasoned entrepreneurs, formal training initiatives and learning by doing, in descending order of importance (table 4). Also included in table 4 are the verbatim quotes underpinning how the youths acquired knowledge on entrepreneurship.

Table 4: How youth acquired knowledge on entrepreneurship

Theme	Counts out of 11	Verbatim quotes
Seminars and training workshops	4	I acquired the knowledge of entrepreneurship through workshops organised by NGOs; and I attended seminars, workshops and training that the Ministry of Youth, Gender, Women Affairs and Community Development ran
Mentorship	3	Some businessmen teach me how to manage assets; I was taught by my parents; and I was raised in a family that ran businesses and thus acquired knowledge and training from my parents
Formal training programmes	2	I learnt about entrepreneurship in my Ordinary Level Accounts as a subject in the curriculum; I was trained by the International Labour Organisation; and I attended a School of Business.
Learning by doing or exposure	2	I learnt about it through running my small business; and ...through exposure to other businesses.

Computer Literacy

More than three-quarters of the youths (77%) reported that they were computer literate. Computers were used mainly for internet searching or surfing, word processing when writing reports, downloading educational materials, emailing, data capturing and storage. One youth said: "I am just semi-literate with computers. I use the computer to compose songs and play music." Yet another one emphasised the importance of computer literacy in the following words: "We are living in a world where one must know how to use computers to carry out most tasks."

Youth and Governance

Approximately 79% of the youths believed that adults did not create adequate space for them to take up leadership positions in their communities. The observation that only 31% of the youths agreed that their communities allowed them to participate actively in meetings without any reservations, seemed to reinforce this view of youth marginalisation and disempowerment. One male youth remarked: "... yes but chances are slim for youth to take part in community meetings because it seems to be a preserve for adults." Another perspective centred around the patriarchal nature of the community. A female youth aptly summed this up when she said: "No, male dominance is deeply rooted in our community."

One focal question, underpinning youth and governance issues, related to awareness and central tenets of the indigenisation and empowerment policy. Slightly less than two-thirds (62%) of the respondents did not know that there was such a policy in Zimbabwe. Those who knew about it expressed varied opinions regarding what it covered. The opinions are categorised in table 5 as themes and verbatim quotes extracted from the interviews.

Table 5: Are you aware of the indigenisation and empowerment policy? If yes, in brief what does it entail?

Theme	Verbatim quotes
Rights and access to land	... granting land rights to black people of Zimbabwe; and It refers to the empowerment of black indigenous Zimbabweans so that they access natural resources
Transformation: equity, redress, business development and self-reliance	Yes. It is a process of giving black people control over some businesses; It is sharing of profits in ratios 51:49% for indigenous people and outside investors, respectively; It encourages Zimbabwean youth to start their own businesses
Access to and control of resources for development	It is making use of the available resources towards development; It is power to the people for them to use as survival skills
Supportive policies and legislation	... policies introduced to empower the nation at large

Youth and Health

The youth-health nexus was explored with a biased focus on awareness and knowledge of cancer, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Only two youths said they did not know anything about the diseases. Sources of knowledge of youths on the diseases varied considerably. Among the sources were electronic media (in particular radio and television); churches; outreach programmes of the Ministry of Health; university modules such as “HIV/AIDS Education”; health professionals at clinics and hospitals; live stories that people affected by the diseases narrated; village health workers; youth clubs; community meetings; and notices posted in public places. One respondent revealed that she got information about the diseases and more from Midlands State University peer educators, schools, training that the Ministry of Health and NGOs such as the Red Cross delivered.

Half of the respondents were aware of some disease-focused outreach programmes being implemented, specifically targeting youth. The Ministry of Health, National AIDS Council and NGOs were running most of the programmes. Some of the NGOs mentioned were Family Aids Counselling Trust (FACT), which focused on HIV/AIDS mainly; Population Services International; Dynamic Youth Development Organisation;

and Young People's Network. Both the National Aids Council and FACT were championing work addressing the African Youth Decade 2009-2018 Plan of Action adolescent sexual and reproductive health and behavioural change. One youth even confessed by saying: "I came across a road show but I never had an interest in what they were doing." Another youth revealed that "health workers conducted door to door health promotion and outreach programmes."

Discussion

Lack of consensus on the definition of youth (that was highlighted above) was confirmed in the current study. However, it is crucial to point out that the convergence on persons 15–35 years old as the youth was in line with what the Zimbabwe National Youth Policy and the African Youth Charter of 2011 stipulate. Presumably, the perception that a youth can be 10–40 years old reflects the confused reality, especially of what is expected in politics.

The heterogenous nature of the term "youth," which is sometimes reflected through conceptualisation and disaggregation in terms of specific development challenges, needs and activities they are usually involved in, was not projected in the current study. For example, categories such as youth in sport, politics, business, employment, in school and out of school, amongst others, are spelt out. Young women, youth with disabilities, pupils and students, unemployed, out-of-school and those living with HIV have different development needs. It is not clear why none of the respondents explained youth in terms of this categorisation.

Some imperatives of youth empowerment that were given reflected political inclination. Given the toxic nature of the politics prevailing in Zimbabwe (Kabonga 2016; Nhapi and Mathende 2019; Oosterom and Gukurome 2019), this was not surprising. A distinct dimension that was observed was equipping youth with knowledge and skills to function in a dynamic global community. The skills and knowledge are important for job-seeking and running own enterprises—a view that supports the Human Rights Watch (2005) and Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi's (2013) contention that 50% or more youth joined rebel groups in Africa, citing unemployment as the underlying reason.

The view that youth empowerment in Chimanimani was a myth was worrying, although it should be treated as a blessing in disguise. It brought to the fore issues that were standing in the way of the realisation of youth empowerment. Topmost was the corrupt and partisan nature of the distribution of scarce resources, such as funding that youth required to turn their ideas into sustainable action. Kabonga (2016) made similar observations in a study he conducted in Ward 3 of the Chegutu District of Zimbabwe. The multidimensional nature of the characterisation or conceptualisation of youth empowerment is in sync with what is available in literature (Machingo 2018; Nhapi and Mathende 2019). The most prominent domain was youth economic empowerment, which is unpacked further in the next section.

Numerous issues relating to youth empowerment, that must receive attention in order to help propel rural development in the Chimanimani District, were unravelled. Lack of land ownership, limited participation in business development, the difficulty of accessing start-up capital and limited understanding of entrepreneurship were revealed. Against this background, it was refreshing to note that more than three-quarters of the youth were computer literate and used their skills to develop themselves.

Land is a key resource by virtue of it being a source of prestige, employment, economic emancipation and empowerment. Adjibolosoo (2013) observes that the late 1950s–1990s saw most African countries attaining political freedom. During that period, various expectations such as land ownership and aspirations that included political emancipation, socio-economic growth and civic liberties among citizens were raised. In the current study, it was revealed that the youth did not own land, and they were frustrated that it was being distributed in an unfair, unequal and corrupt manner. This is a worrisome situation, considering the fact that from the year 2000, Zimbabwe had embarked on a radical land redistribution programme on a massive scale. The results of the current study confirm the general public sentiment that land redistribution in Zimbabwe was allocated unfairly, through ruling party patronage networks. Thus, the observation that more than 90% of the youth did not own land was not surprising.

Only 38% of the youth were running entirely informal businesses. It was also revealed that although the government availed loan facilities to support the economic empowerment of youths, heavy bureaucracy, red tape and corruption rendered all that futile. This observation finds support from Oosterom and Gukurume (2019), who conclude that even though Zimbabwe had introduced the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy in 2008, youths are yet to benefit from it significantly. Nhapi and Mathende (2019) identify three major reasons why this situation persists, namely: a) the financial crisis, especially the liquidity crunch the country is facing; b) the socioeconomic and political legacy that creates structural barriers to youth participation and influence; and c) political discourses and agendas that thwart the expansion of youth economic opportunities.

Marango, Mutongoreni, and Mararike (2018) report that youths in the same district, who access loans, use them to buy cars or even to pay a dowry for their spouses. The fact that there are no consequences for such financial mismanagement highlights the existence of what Hardin (1968) calls the “Tragedy of the Commons.” In simple terms, Hardin (1968) coins the concept “Tragedy of the Commons” to explain a situation whereby individuals access a shared resource, placing self-interest in the forefront and depleting it without considering that others should also benefit. Taking the latter contention into account, it can be argued that in the Chimanimani District, youth economic empowerment will remain a pipedream if the current corrupt handling of funding facilities is not addressed.

It was found that the youth had no sound knowledge of entrepreneurship and financial management. The few who had some knowledge, had acquired it through the formal education and training system. Presumably, the lack of entrepreneurship development seminars and workshops explained why few youths ran businesses. Moreover, most youths had benefitted from industrial attachment, which suggests that any programmes introduced should strive to expose trainees to real-life work environments. These results lend support to Gwiza and Hamauswa (2015), who are of the view that youths who benefit from ongoing empowerment initiatives or opportunities in Zimbabwe, require business advisory services to build and strengthen their entrepreneurship thrusts. The cocktail of services that are important for the survival of new enterprises include business planning, financial management, marketing and regulatory compliance on formal matters, for example application for registration and licensing. Small business enterprises cannot rely on highly expensive consultancy services because this is not sustainable.

In general, entrepreneurship entails an individual conceiving an idea, creating the roadmap to its successful execution and remaining competitive in the market. Central to entrepreneurship is innovation (Drucker 1985; Schumpeter 1934). This definition does not suggest that the idea should be entirely business-oriented. In the current study, the youth viewed entrepreneurship through a narrow business-biased lens only. It was clear that there was the belief that there were some entrepreneurial skills that had to be identified, taught and applied in running businesses. A close examination of the dimensions of entrepreneurship articulated in the current study reveals that small businesses and scalable start-ups were the only ones that the respondents seemed to be aware of. Large company and social entrepreneurship were not mentioned. Social entrepreneurship should receive prominent attention and financial support, given that it is an approach to developing and implementing solutions to social, cultural and/or environmental challenges (Abu-Saifan 2012). This would make it a major pillar of rural development in the Chimanimani District.

Almost 80% of the youths were computer literate. The ability to use computers should be regarded as significant empowerment, given its importance in contemporary development discourse. The youth used the computers mainly for online communication and word processing. Access to and the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and other internet-related platforms enabled the youth to share ideas, information on job opportunities, and participation in economic and political engagements. All of this should be viewed from a skills-development perspective. Kabonga (2016) contends that skills development and education form the basis of youth empowerment. With specific reference to computers, if well harnessed, computers and the internet can help communities to access and share information better (Wellman et al. 2001). This builds and reinforces social capital and the capacity of a community to plan and implement development programmes from an informed position (Pigg and Duffy 2004; Valaitis 2005). Youths find it easier to utilise computers, which makes them assets in offering well-researched and considered solutions on how to enhance

youth participation in community development, especially in rural areas where access to information is a major challenge.

Youth empowerment should help young people to realise their socio-economic aspirations through individual and group efforts. Positive attitudes, structural and cultural processes can enhance such attainment. In the current study, entrenched patriarchy, a tendency to thwart youths from assuming leadership positions, lack of knowledge of the youth empowerment policy and high levels of corruption were the principal governance-based impediments that were cited. These results echo the findings of Ndebele and Billing (2011) and Machingo (2018) that complex and shifting power dynamics create difficulty for youths to penetrate decision-making structures.

The finding that youths felt marginalised explains their apathetic attitude towards development-related matters in the Chimanimani District. Ribot (2004) argues that debates on citizen participation evolve around key issues such as choices, accountability, transparency, ownership and a sense of belonging. Taking into account the arguments revealed above, it is not surprising why youth empowerment was perceived to be a mere façade. Thus, there is ample justification for creating opportunities for the youth to acquire the ability, authority and agency to make decisions leading to the implementation of change in their lives and those of others, irrespective of age and gender. Furthermore, the results justify studies that would elucidate the age and gender dynamics and impact on youth empowerment.

As already advanced, citizen participation is central to community development. It should be adopted as a central tenet of policy making, implementation and evaluation (Chikerema 2013). Berner et al. (2011) contend that participation enhances communication between government and citizens, thereby building public support for government goals and earning public trust in their institutions. The fact that a majority of the youths were not happy with their community leaders for blocking their active participation in meetings without any reservations, is worrisome. Olowu (2009) regards this as a tendency of the elites to hijack democracy. Recently, Nhapi and Mathende (2019) contended that patriarchal and hierarchical structures worsen the youth bulge challenges faced in Zimbabwe. Partly, all these situations explain why youth involvement in rural community development was substandard. Thus, there is a need to invest in efforts that change this perception, especially in light of the fact that the youth constitute 37% of the population of the district (ZimStat 2012).

Another worrying observation was the ignorance of the existence of the youth indigenisation and empowerment policy. This was surprising, particularly in light of the fact that the government ministry in charge of this core business was active in the Chimanimani District. Furthermore, even the youths who claimed to know about it, could not explain its provisions clearly and accurately. It was revealed that frontline civil servants relied on rallies of the ruling party, namely ZANU PF, to share information about the policy. Similar observations have been reported in past studies.

For example, Kabonga (2016) reports that politicisation of the discourse of youth is associated with ZANU PF violence and there is a general belief in society that it is impossible to have apolitical youth. Therefore, youth apathy with respect to involvement in political party participation in Zimbabwe must be viewed against this societal reality.

Numerous health promotion and development initiatives were being implemented in the Chimanimani District. Yet some youths were not interested in participating in them. Why the youths were apathetic, even when they had nothing else that kept them busy, needs to be investigated. The use of various channels or media to disseminate information and educate people about cancer, HIV/AIDS and STDs partly explains why awareness of health promotion and education initiatives was considerably high. This supports the Marango et al. (2016) recommendation that it is crucial to sustain effective communication within the Chimanimani District, resulting in the strengthening of social capital as a driver of rural development. Buttressing this argument was the observation that the Zimbabwe education system had integrated health issues into curricula starting from primary schooling. Of major concern was the admission that the youth resorted to drugs and commercial sex out of desperation. This confirms the observations of Landa and Fushai (2018), who report that when youths face seemingly insurmountable challenges, they resort to transaction sex, which is high-risk behaviour.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the Chimanimani District, youth was conceptualised solely on the basis of age, with 18–35 years being the most popular view. Decision-making power, culture, equity and redress, access to assorted resources (although funding was the major one), employment creation, employment and skills development constituted the principal considerations when assessing the extent of youth empowerment. The fact that more than 90% of the youths did not have land, coupled with the strong views that it was allocated along partisan lines, threatens peace and security in the district. Moreover, only 38% of the youth interviewed were involved in entirely informal businesses. For almost all the youths, lack of knowledge, corrupt ruling party practices and demands for collateral security constrained them from accessing loans and other funding opportunities for business start-up and expansion. All of this highlights the need for reinforcing educational awareness campaigns and anti-corruption programmes.

The fact that the youth highlighted patriarchy and generational issues as the factors militating against them in assuming leadership positions, is a positive development that should be addressed. This might mobilise greater participation of the youth in local social change and development, thereby empowering them to be recognised as significant members of their communities. If the high level of computer literacy among the youth is harnessed and deployed in sourcing information as well as planning and implementing development programmes, then they might believe that society regards them as assets.

Awareness of health programmes in the district was considerably high, even though some of them revealed that they were apathetic towards them. Both formal and informal methods of information and knowledge dissemination were clearly effective in this regard. Government and NGOs were regarded to be working in a synergistic and complementary manner. This is an opportunity that might serve as the rallying point for youth empowerment interventions in the district.

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