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A critical analysis of the challenges faced by deaf farmers in their participation in sustainable food production for nutrition and health in Mashonaland region, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The Deaf Community in Mashonaland region constitutes a part of the minority population in Zimbabwe and this minority group happens to have capable farmers who are often sidelined from agricultural activities because of their difference from the hearing population. The researcher consulted the San Code of Research Ethics for advice. The study involved Deaf farmers who are involved in animal husbandry, horticulture and crop production, their workers in Mashonaland region. In total eight (8) respondents were interviewed. The researcher recorded and transcribed the collected data. The thematic analysis method was used during data analysis. The researcher grouped the transcribed data into thematic areas based on the research objectives. The findings revealed that lack of important information on important issues such as climate change, lack of access to land ownerships, communication barriers, lack of access to tertiary education and the seclusion of Deaf Community's representation in policy making are the challenges faced by Deaf farmers in their participation in sustainable food production for nutrition and health in Mashonaland region. The study recommended awareness campaigns on Deaf Culture and the inclusion of Deaf people and other Persons with Disabilities in sustainable food production.

KEY TERMS: farmers, Deaf Culture, Sign Language, Mashonaland region, animal husbandry/horticulture, climate change, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

African countries such as Zimbabwe are still not making so much progress in fighting for the rights and full inclusion of Deaf people in mainstream society. People with hearing impairments are still struggling to be recognized and to be treated fairly and equally with their hearing counterparts in their respective communities and spheres of influence. For example, Deaf farmers are playing a pivotal role in sustainable food production but when the government and other agricultural organizations distribute resources for farmers, some of their initiatives fail to include farmers who are Deaf. Deafness in the Deaf Community is not a disability, rather it is a unique feature among humans that should be embraced and viewed as another element of diversity among people. Deaf people have their own culture, norms and language that is peculiar to that of the majority. Most Deaf people in Zimbabwe do not view their lack of hearing as an impairment or disability rather it is their source of identity and pride. However, they are still struggling to validate themselves as most people are ignorant about the essence of lack of hearing and speech in that the mainstream society think Deaf people ought to be fixed and cured of their impairment hence family members of the Deaf buy them hearing aids and coerce them to undergo cochlear implant surgeries. The Deaf Community do not view Deafness as an illness that needs to be treated so whether the interventions of addressing hearing impairments are successful or not trying to fix Deafness is a violation of the Deaf people's rights to their unique identity. Deafness does not imply brokenness that needs mending rather as mentioned above it is a peculiar feature of human experiences. Deaf people are active members of their respective societies but their relevance is often overlooked and underestimated by members of the mainstream society and institutions. The study therefore investigated the difficulties that are encountered by Deaf farmers in their participation in sustainable food production for nutrition and health. The objective of the study was to explore domains of the well-being of Deaf farmers.

BACKGROUND

Agriculture in Zimbabwe is the backbone of the economy as most Zimbabwean people obtain their livelihoods from crop and animal production. Agriculture provides employment and income for many people in the country including persons with disabilities. For example, the Zimbabwean Agricultural sector has Deaf farmers participating in sustainable food production but then it fails to fully include them. Farming has multiple challenges such as erratic rainfall, declining soil fertility, low investment, shortages of farm power, shortages of drat animals, climate change, poor physical and institutional infrastructure, poverty and food insecurity to mention but just a few. The Zimbabwean government usually help farmers address these challenges but it often leaves out the Deaf farmers who as a result continue to struggle by themselves in a quest to overcome the challenges and incur a bumper harvest. Deaf farmers are a minority group in the agricultural population that has hearing farmers as a majority so their needs either get very little attention or no attention at all from the Ministry of Agriculture. Farmers with hearing impairments both profound Deaf and hard of hearing encounter challenges in communication as they will have either underdeveloped or undeveloped speech. Mutswanga (2018) explains that hearing loss negatively impacts language and speech development of an individual. This is a huge disadvantage for the Deaf farmers because when the government disseminates important information about agriculture or anything that concerns farming, they are left out as the information will not be available in the language they understand and that is Sign Language. Deaf female agriculturalists happen to face more challenges than their male counterparts. These challenges are gender specific obstacles and they include lack of access to land and unequal treatment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on the Ubuntu theory and the social model of disability. The idea of ubuntu was derived from the Nguni dictum, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* that translates as, "A person is a person through other persons." Manyonganise (2015) has it that ubuntu is humanity and this humanity is shown when an individual respects the dignity of others, shows compassion, care and is also empathetic towards other people. In African communities it is of great importance that no person should exist in isolation or be excluded from the web of life, (Dolamo, 2013). Ubuntu encourages equal treatment and regard for everyone regardless of differences in race, abilities, gender or any dichotomy. The ubuntu approach values dignity, equality and existence whereas dichotomies invoke fear within members of the society which often result in the marginalization, discrimination, stigmatization and isolation of those who fail to conform to the normative or are different, (Kasomo and Maseno, 2011). The adoption of the ubuntu ideology in politics enhances and accelerates service delivery and also promotes good governance, (Nzimakwe). Ubuntu at political level can be described as a call to service and participation as it involves serving humanity in a practical way, (Nzimakwe). When employed in politics the ubuntu ideology

encourages political leaders and government officials to put people first and not exploit the nation's resources for their selfish gain hence it curbs corruption. The ubuntu theory ensures that policies are formulated and implemented in a manner that includes everyone and eliminates exclusion and marginalization. Thus, the adoption of the ubuntu ideology serves as a catalyst for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream societies.

The social model of disability is a crucial way in which through which inequality can be perceived because it views disability as stemming from communities, spaces and services that are not accessible or inclusive. According to this model of disability society is responsible for placing limits on a person not their disability, (Mtetwa, 2019). The social model of disability has immensely influenced the way in which disability is understood. The social model of disability emerged as a reaction towards other models of disability such as the religious, charity, medical and traditional models of disability. The above-mentioned models were centered upon the functional analysis of the body in that persons with disabilities are seen as machines which need to be fixed in order for them to conform to the normative values rather than exploiting the physical environment so that it addresses the needs of persons with disabilities, (Oliver, 2004). Disability is often imposed on people through discriminations, prejudices, stereotypes and inaccessibility, (Mtetwa, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

Study area

Mashonaland is a region in the northern part of Zimbabwe. The Mashonaland region is divided into four provinces namely Mashonaland West, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East and Harare Metropolitan province. Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe and a province unto itself and is located in the Mashonaland region. This region also has vast arable lands in which farmers engage into different farming activities such as crop production, cattle ranching, bee keeping, poultry production and fishery to mention but just a few.

Methods

The paper employed the qualitative data collection method. Purposive and snowball sampling were employed by the researcher to identify and select those with the capacity of providing relevant information with regards to the research questions the researcher seeks to address. The research considered the views of six farmers with hearing impairments, four of whom were male and two females. Two key informants which include a Professor from a State University and a Director of a Non-Governmental Organization called Deaf Zimbabwe Trust which caters persons with hearing impairments were also interviewed by the researcher. These are the people who in one way or the other have interacted with the Deaf farmers on multiple occasions and so they happen to have reasonable knowledge that can assist with achieving the research objectives. Sign language data were transcribed, translated, coded and thematized. Themes were identified, cross-checked with original data and data was discussed according to the notes and memos that were gathered during the interviews. The researcher used to pseudonyms to hide and keep the identities of the participants private and confidential. The researcher used simple names that can be easily signed in Sign Language.

Ethical considerations

The researcher used the San Code of Research Ethics during the research study. The researcher observed care for the research participants as this is one of the significant sections of the code. The section for stipulated that the research study should be in alignment with local needs and should be focused on improving the lives of the research participants, (The San Code of Research Ethics, 2017). The section for caring for the research participants demands that care be shown to the Deaf Community as it is the one under study, hence the research study is going to improve the welfare of the people who belong to the Deaf Community. The researcher was respectful towards the participants as there was an engagement of the participants and the researcher prior to the research, (The San Code of Research Ethics, 2017). The researcher briefed the participants about the research. It was also made known to the research participants what the research study was all about to promote the informed consent of the participants. Participants were also informed by the researcher that participation in the research study was voluntary. The identities of the participants were kept private and confidential by the researcher. The San Code of Research Ethics (2017) demands that researchers be honest with the research participants. It is of paramount importance that the researcher carries out an open and clear conversation with the research participants, (The San Code of Research Ethics, 2017). The language used must be clear and not academic and so the researcher used Sign Language in communicating with the research participants. Sign Language involves using simple, short and straight to the point sentences.

FINDINGS

Demographic profile

The participants enrolled in the study were six Deaf farmers between the ages of twenty-six and forty years old. There were four young men and two young women with hearing impairments and it should be noted that these participants differed in their levels of hearing loss as some were profound and others hard of hearing. All the participants shared different backgrounds. The participants' levels of education ranged from grade 7 to Ordinary Level Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) certificate attainment.

The challenges faced by Deaf farmers in their participation in sustainable food production for nutrition and health in Mashonaland Region.

Lack of access to land ownerships

Land distribution and ownership in Zimbabwe has always been at the center of disputes since time immemorial. Agriculture happens to be the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy and majority people desire to have access to land to sustain their livelihoods. People from the Deaf community happen to experience the strife that is associated with gaining access to land ownerships as this minority group happens to be subjected to stereotyping, stigma and discrimination.

Most Deaf farmers do not have their own land. It is a huge struggle because renting farming land is very expensive. I am a cattle rancher and so I need a vast plot of land around 500 hectares. I then applied for land ownership to the government and they told me that they can only provide A1 plots of land for Deaf farmers. I am not a small-scale farmer, I need an A2 plot of land because of the nature of farming that I am doing. I even visited the offices for the Ministry of Agriculture and tried to explain to them that small-scale plots cannot accommodate my three hundred herd of cattle but no one assisted me. Farai.

I do not own any land and so I rent. Renting farming land is so expensive. I have appealed to the government for assistance but have received nothing. I even wrote a letter asking for land but I did not receive any response. The fact that I am Deaf no one at the Ministry really seems to care. The unequal treatment they give to us Deaf farmers and the one that is given to our hearing counterparts is just so visible. Tendai.

Lack of access to important information

Farmers who belong to the Deaf community usually lack access to important information about agricultural programs that would have been put in place by the government to strengthen food and crop production. The information is rarely disseminated in Sign Language, it is usually in written English, Shona and Ndebele languages and these languages are difficult for Deaf people to comprehend. The Deaf farmers usually incur massive losses due to lack of information and knowledge about other important issues like climate change. Lack of information often compromises the quality of crops, milk and meat the Deaf farmers produce. When the quality of the product is compromised the nutritious level in the product will be diminished.

When important information like Command Agriculture and Pfumvudza agricultural programs are being shared they are rarely disseminated in Sign Language. There is also not much information from the Ministry and other organizations around the country that can advise us on how to deal with natural disasters and protect our crops from destruction in Sign Language. Our government needs to accommodate us Deaf farmers because we too play a pivotal role in food production. Nyarai.

It's been six years since I got into the farming business but I did not know anything about climate change and its impact. I learnt about it recently from a hearing friend of mine who is a veterinary. My cattle's health was deteriorating, there was a decrease in milk and meat production. I suffered a massive loss. When I consulted this friend of mine, he then explained that all this was happening because my animals were experiencing heat stress which was a result of climate change. He signed to me in detail what climate change is. And I cannot believe that all long I knew nothing about it. Tichaona.

Communication barrier

People who belong to the Deaf Community have their own special language with which they feel comfortable communicating in and that is Sign Language. Sign Language is short, precise and very easily understood by the Deaf. It is unlike English, Shona and Ndebele languages which tend to be complex and difficult to understand.

Some people in the mainstream society who cannot communicate with Deaf people may resort to writing down as a means of communication. Written English language is very difficult for the Deaf people to understand too as it may end up confusing them. Written Sign Language also tends to be referred to as “broken English” and this is why most Deaf people are being labelled as illiterate. This is due to the fact that people in the mainstream society lack an understanding and appreciation of Sign Language. Most institutions like the Ministry of Agriculture may not provide for Sign Language interpreters for Deaf farmers and even if they do some professional Sign Language interpreters only know formal Sign Language whereas many Deaf people know how to communicate in informal Sign Language. This is because most of these Deaf farmers did not reach tertiary level of education. Some of them attained a grade seven primary level ZIMSEC certificate whilst others made it as far as Ordinary level. However, for some Deaf people who are hard of hearing they can hear a little bit of sound and so they usually resort to lip reading which is not a hundred percent reliable mode of communication as it creates room for misinterpretation and information distortion.

I am hard of hearing. Communication for me in spoken language becomes easier when I wear my hearing aid. But hearing aids are expensive so I usually resort to lip reading. I have a little bit of speech development but some people struggle to listen to what I will be saying because they say my voice has discord. – Maidei.

I am profound Deaf. I struggle with communicating with people by writing down as written English language is different from Sign Language. When I write down in Sign Language some hearing people fail to understand me because they say Sign Language is broken English. I am usually compelled to hire a Sign Language interpreter whenever I am visiting the Ministry of Agriculture to help me with communication. But Sign Language interpreters are very expensive. I cannot afford them every time. Tinotenda.

Lack of access to tertiary education

Most Deaf people do not reach the tertiary level of education because of a number of challenges. The research findings revealed that for some Deaf people it is because of lack of money. Being a Deaf person can be expensive in that there’s always need to hire a Sign Language interpreter to help with communication and interpretation during lectures. Most tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe have no readily available Sign Language interpreters and this is one of the main obstacles that limits Deaf people from advancing and progressing with their education. Some of the Deaf people fail to reach tertiary education due to lack of money for tuition as tertiary level education can be expensive. Most scholarships provided by the State only support people with other form of disabilities and not the ones with hearing impairment.

Most of the Deaf farmers that participated in this study did not go to school to learn about agriculture. Some learnt by observing their parents, neighbors and other farmers while others consulted books on agriculture to acquire knowledge on crop and animal production respectively. Other farmers researched on the internet and also read about farming in magazines.

I learnt about crop and animal production from my late father. He used to work at AGRITEX (Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services) and so he used to bring home some books and other reading materials on farming. My father really wanted me to go to university but there were no provisions for Sign Language and so he sent me to a college in Cape Town where I learnt upholstery and computer science. I taught myself farming by reading through agricultural stuff that my father brought from his workplace and it helped me realize that I had a great passion for farming. I began to even consult some magazines and the internet for more information especially about cattle ranching. – Tichaona (not his real name).

When I finished my ordinary level, my sister taught me about poultry production. This is because they thought that sending me to university would be a waste of time and resources. At first learning about poultry was difficult for me because some of the chicks would die from either too much heat or cold. I had to master on how to control temperature and make sure that they were well fed. With passage of time, I got used to it and now I am prospering in my poultry production. Maidei.

Other challenges faced by tertiary level institutions is that the Sign Language interpreters find it difficult to provide services for students studying scientific programs. This is so because Sign Language is limited when it comes to medical and other scientific terms. So, there is actually need to develop Sign Language as it is underdeveloped in this country. – Key Informant 1.

Not having the opportunity to attain a university degree often limits Deaf people as they are not provided an opportunity to enhance their expertise. Key Informant 2.

Lack of knowledge about Deaf Culture by the Government and mainstream society

Deaf Culture involves viewing people with who are Deaf as people without an impairment or a disability. Deaf Culture uses the capital letter “D” when writing about Deaf people it is against the medical model of disability which uses the small letter “d” as it views deafness as a condition that needs to be cured and fixed. Deaf Culture is against the use of hearing aids and cochlear implant surgeries. It encourages the Deaf to accept themselves and to live comfortably in the world of silence. The silence in Deaf communities is not without sound. It is a perfect world which gives the Deaf a peculiar identity that makes them special in a way. The Deaf Culture envisions the hands of the Deaf as a voice through which they speak out and make known to the world their thoughts. From the palms of their hands emanates a language which ought to be understood by the government and the majority so that discrimination, stigmatization and exclusion of Deaf people are addressed.

Regardless, of the provisions made by the government for Sign Language interpreters in the National Disability Policy of June 2021, illiterate Deaf people are overlooked. These are Deaf people who do not understand formal Sign Language that Sign Language interpreters are taught in tertiary institutions but understand informal Sign Language they improvised themselves. The Deaf people understand each other but then for a hearing Sign Language interpreter it may be very difficult to understand the informal signs. Most of the Deaf farmers who participated in this study did not attain any tertiary level qualification, this becomes a barrier in their smooth communication with trained Sign Language interpreters.

Farmers from the Deaf Community are usually left out during policymaking and decision-making events but they play an integral role in sustainable food production in this country. There is need for the government and mainstream society to accommodate and consider their thoughts and participation.

When farming programs known as Pfumvudza and Command Agriculture were introduced, most of us Deaf farmers did not know about it because the information about it was not available in Sign Language. Tendai.

We as Deaf farmers we need to be involved in some planning and decision making in food production because we also make certain discoveries that can help the government and benefit other farmers. Maidei.

There is need to stage awareness campaigns about Deaf Culture to help enlighten the government and members of the mainstream societies about the Deaf Community and its people. There is very lite knowledge about Deafness among the majority. Sign Language is even mistaken for “broken English. The government does not even appreciate the pivotal role that is played by the Deaf farmers in sustainable food production. The Deaf farmers put so much effort in producing nutritious food so that the mainstream society can have healthy meals without the help from the government in form of farming equipment, land, fertilizers and seeds. Their farms also provide employment for a number of local people but their effort is not recognized. Key Informant 2.

Gender specific obstacles

The study revealed that female Deaf farmers receive unequal treatment as some organizations which assist farmers with funding and fertilizer provisions prefer helping their male counterparts first before the female farmers. The women assumed that it was because the males are viewed as more competent than their female counterparts. The women were viewed as incapable of yielding quality crops, meat and milk. The Deaf male have always been perceived by the mainstream society as superior to the female gender. This type of inequality really worsens the predicament of the Deaf female farmers because they too are subjected to the challenges that are experienced by their male counterparts. There are non-governmental organizations that support Deaf women in Zimbabwe but not specifically farmers.

DISCUSSION

Barriers to full and meaningful participation of Deaf farmers in sustainable food production

Communication barriers

Regardless of the ratification of Sign Language as one of the official languages in Zimbabwe most people who work for the government institutions in Zimbabwe do not know how to communicate in Sign Language. This shows that Deaf Culture has only been embraced theoretically in Zimbabwe and not practically as most people are reluctant to learn Sign Language. Most Deaf people have undeveloped speech as they have no exposure to spoken language. Mutswanga (2018) explains that hearing loss negatively impacts language and speech development of an individual. The Deaf farmers upon visit to any agricultural oriented government institution

reported that since there are no Sign Language interpreters readily available the service providers usually resort to conversing with them through writing. It should be noted that written English, Shona and Ndebele languages are very complex and complicated for many Deaf people. Written Sign Language is also referred to as “broken English” as Sign Language is a bit different from the English Language. The fact that Sign Language is not fully incorporated like other spoken languages as means of communication in mainstream societies show that the Deaf population remains excluded from the mainstream society. It is very crucial for persons with disabilities to be included as they also contribute to the wellbeing of the entire community. For example, Deaf farmers they play a pivotal role in sustainable food production which in turn results in communities having access to nutritious food which improves the health of individuals. In the inclusion of the Deaf by embracing Sign Language the ubuntu ideology needs to be adopted as it highlights on the influence that the community has upon the individual and vice versa. The idea of ubuntu was obtained from the Nguni dictum, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* that translates as, “A person is a person through other persons,” (Shutte, 2001). Deaf farmers are people who give to their community and expect the community to do the same in their case for an individual can never exist and thrive in isolation. The social model of disability can be integrated with the ubuntu ideology in ensuring that communication barriers between the Deaf community and mainstream society are addressed. The social model of disability claims that society is responsible for placing limits on a person not their disability. This can be attributed to the reluctance of many service providers in the agricultural sector to learn Sign Language so that they are able to communicate with Deaf farmers.

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers involve stereotyping, stigma, prejudice and discrimination of persons with disabilities. These barriers limit the full participation of persons with disabilities in their communities for example, the Deaf farmers. Attitudinal barriers stem from people’s ideas in that disability will be viewed as a personal tragedy that has to be either prevented or cured, it can also be perceived as punishment for wrongdoing from ancestral spirits or God in the African society. Attitudinal barriers such as these may result in the mainstream society’s avoidance to interact with persons with disabilities hence, they are excluded because of their differences from the majority population. Fear that is directed towards disability is unhealthy as it has negative impacts upon the wellbeing of persons with disabilities. This fear of the unknown is linked to the supernatural world in traditional African communities where people are afraid of death, witchcraft and sickness, (Kasomo and Maseno, 2011). Dolamo (2013) further explains that disability can be said to contradict a normative body and the fear and belief is that it is linked to evil and supernatural ancestral powers. In an attempt to address attitudinal barriers, the social model of disability can be adopted as it stipulates that society is responsible for placing limits on a person not their disability. The barriers are an obstacle to quality food production by Deaf farmers as there is need for harmonious relationships to exist between the farmers and the mainstream society for them to be able to brilliantly perform their excellent farming skills which positively impact the community.

Attitudinal behaviors show that Deaf farmers are not treated fairly by both the government and the mainstream society because of their Deafness. However, the adoption of the ubuntu concept ensures that they receive equal and fair treatment as they are also human. The ubuntu ideology embraces differences and perceives diversity as part of human experiences. The concept of ubuntu involves the comprehension of what it is exactly to be human and the need for humans to grow and find fulfillment, (Shutte, 2001:2). Ubuntu is humanness and this humanness is revealed when a person is welcoming, respectful of the dignity of others, compassionate, caring and empathetic towards others, (Manyonganise, 2015).

Gender specific barriers

The study revealed that Deaf female farmers are usually treated as inferior to their male counterparts. This unequal treatment has negatively impacted the welfare and livelihood of the female farmers. It has been revealed that agriculture oriented non-governmental organizations prefer distributing farming equipment and resources among Deaf male farmers first and lastly the female farmers and that is if the resources are still available. Maiyaki (2010) highlighted that although women partake in agricultural activities their male counterparts virtually dominate the industry. Most Deaf female farmers are small scale farmers as there is gender bias with regards to the types of crops women should produce and the ones males need to produce. Generally in Zimbabwe women are expected to farm minor crops such as beans, groundnuts and cowpeas whilst men are responsible for farming commercial crops which generate large sums of cash income and these include tobacco, cotton, coffee, sugarcane and also cattle ranching is male dominated, (Maiyaki, 2010).

Senne (2016) has it that the rights and needs of Deaf women are usually overlooked. This may also be as a result of the “invisible disability” as more attention is paid to women with visible disabilities, (Senne, 2016). The female participants in the study highlighted on the lack of sensitivity towards the use of Sign Language and also there is lack of respect towards them that is exhibited by the majority population. The lack of respect comes as a result of viewing female Deaf farmers as inferior people. The implementation of ubuntu in everyday lives may help with changing the way in which Deaf female farmers are treated. Mashonganyika (2015) is of the view that ubuntu is humanness and this humanness is revealed when a person is welcoming, respectful of the dignity of others, compassionate, caring and empathetic towards others. There is need to educate the mainstream society on the dangers of discriminating against Deaf women and also provide solutions to the problem.

Lack of provision of important information in Sign Language

Important issues that affect agriculture are not addressed nor is information about them disseminated in Sign Language in Zimbabwe. Most Deaf farmers’ lack of knowledge about climate change has negatively impacted their livelihoods in that huge amounts of losses of their produce were incurred. Climate change has posed serious threats to the existence of humans and their livelihoods, (Mugambiwa and Tirivangasi, 2017). Climate change affects agriculture in that it negatively impacts food security and depletes water resources, (Chikosi et al, 2018). Deaf farmers who specialize in crop production now find maize production a riskier business as dry spells are on the increase but they lacked knowledge that it was being caused by climate change. For Deaf farmers in animal husbandry for instance cattle ranching they noticed that milk production was decreasing whilst the quality of the beef was very poor and this was as a result of the stress the animals were going through due to excessive heat.

The exclusion of Deaf farmers in land distribution

The study revealed that upon request for landownerships to promote their commercial farming endeavors Deaf male farmers are given A1 plots which are for small-scale farmers. The Fast Track Land Reform Program had no comprehensive and inclusive processes to take the needs of persons with disabilities into consideration as disability was viewed as inability when the program was implemented, (Mangwanya and Manyeruke, 2020). When land allocation was done it is highly probable that persons with disabilities were not considered as land recipients as they were perceived as incapable of making use of an important resource like land, (Mangwanya and Manyeruke, 2020). Mangwanya and Manyeruke (2020), further explain that persons with disabilities have lesser chances of being allocated land as compared to their counterparts without disabilities. This is an impediment to Deaf farmers’ full and active participation in sustainable food production. Female Deaf farmers and a few of their counterparts continue to rent farming lands as the government has not yet made provisions to help them with acquiring land ownerships. A2 plots of land are commercial plots of land and are reserved for the hearing majority. This shows that the Deaf community remains excluded even from the agricultural industry. The majority of persons with disabilities are socio-economically excluded in the country hence they are part of the poorest people in Zimbabwe, (Choruma, 2006). Mangwanya and Manyeruke (2020) further explain that persons with disabilities have generally been excluded from the mainstream development, poverty alleviation and empowerment programs.

The exclusion of Deaf farmers from agricultural initiatives and policymaking

The study revealed that when any agricultural initiative is put in place to promote either crop production or animal husbandry in the country Deaf farmers are not included. This is so because no information about the initiatives is disseminated in Sign Language and also some agricultural events do not provide environments that are conducive for the participation of the Deaf farmers. Deaf farmers are barely consulted about any agricultural policy framework, their decisions are not given as much importance as those of their hearing counterparts. Choruma (2006) has it that there are no legal provisions mandating persons with disabilities to participate in policymaking or to work with governmental institutions. This causes a huge strain on Deaf farmers as their exclusion negatively impacts them. The ubuntu ideology however, suggests the inclusion of all persons in communities regardless of their differences. Embracing the Deaf community will positively impact communities in all spheres of life that is economically, politically and socially. Most of the Deaf farmers are ignorant of the international, regional and local agricultural policies adopted by the government that promote sustainable agriculture. The study revealed that they did not know about the Sustainable Development Goals let alone goal number two which focuses on the achievement of food security, ending hunger, improvement of nutrition and promotion of sustainable agriculture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that awareness campaigns be staged about Deaf culture and Deaf farmers. There is need for the mainstream society and the government to embrace people who belong to the Deaf community practically. Sign Language needs to be used in all government institutions including the Ministry of Agriculture. Deaf farmers need to comfortably communicate with service providers in the agricultural business and easily gain access to resources and facilities that promote their active participation in sustainable food production.

Deaf women need to be accommodated as well in that they should receive equal treatment with their male counterparts. Deaf women need to be emancipated so that they are not confined to small-scale farming rather platforms should be put in place that encourage them to participate in large scale and commercial farming. Agriculture needs to be gender sensitive in Zimbabwe to promote the excelling of Deaf women in the industry.

There is need to ensure that Deaf farmers are involved in farming initiatives and policymaking. Their opinions need to be valued as well like their hearing counterparts because the farmers are playing an integral role in providing food that improves the community's nourishment and health. Deaf farmers need to be given access to A2 land ownerships as they are competent too in commercial farming. Any forms of inequalities, stigma, exclusion, marginalization, stereotyping and discrimination need to be expelled to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream society. The adoption of the ubuntu ideology and the social model of disability will be the catalyst in the whole process of inclusion.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the challenges faced by Deaf farmers in their participation in sustainable food production for nutrition and health are overlooked. There government needs to embrace Deaf culture practically and not just theoretically in policies like the National Disability Policy of 2021. Deaf female farmers need to be given special attention as their potential to excel in farming is often thwarted by the view that their male counterparts are superior to them. Deaf farmers do play a pivotal role in sustainable food production but they are often limited by exclusion. Knowledge about the Deaf community need to be spread to help promote the performance and participation of Deaf farmers across the country.

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