

Gendered Impact of Contextual Shocks Increasing Vulnerability of Female Youth and the Role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Life Skills Interventions in Resilience Building: A Case of Mwenezi and Chiredzi

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Abstract

The paper examines the contextual shocks increasing vulnerability among female youth in Zimbabwe's Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts. It explores the efficacy of life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training in building resilience among these vulnerable young women. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting data through questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interviews. The findings reveal that contextual shocks such as COVID-19, inflation, drought, natural disasters, climate change, unemployment, political instability, and cultural beliefs significantly contribute to the vulnerability of young women in these districts. The results highlight the importance of life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training in reducing vulnerability and promoting resilience. These interventions equip young women with crucial skills, knowledge, and information to improve livelihoods, cope with external shocks, and adapt to changing environments. The study recommends effective strategies for building resilience, including women's empowerment programs, financial support, increased participation in development planning, policy implementation, stakeholder involvement, and expansion of vocational training institutions.

Keywords: Contextual Shocks; Female Youth Vulnerability; Life Skills Training; Vocational Education

Introduction and Background

The vulnerability of female youth in rural areas is a significant concern intensified by various contextual shocks. Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts in Zimbabwe face numerous challenges that threaten the well-being and resilience of young women. These regions are highly susceptible to climatic shocks, including droughts and natural disasters, exacerbated by climate change. In addition, socio-economic factors such as COVID-19, inflation, unemployment, political instability, and deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and practices exacerbate the vulnerabilities experienced by these young women.

Globally, women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation. The United Nations (2022) reports that women and girls are 14 times more likely than men to die during disasters. In sub-Saharan Africa, women constitute 60% of the agricultural workforce, making them particularly vulnerable to climate-related impacts on agriculture (FAO, 2020). The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has recognised the need to address gender-based vulnerabilities at the regional level. The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) emphasises the importance of women's economic empowerment and equal access to education and training opportunities. However, implementation remains a challenge across the region. In Zimbabwe, the National Gender Policy (2017) acknowledges the intersectionality of gender and climate change, aiming to promote gender-responsive climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. However, rural areas like Mwenezi and Chiredzi face significant challenges in implementing these policies effectively.

The gendered impact of these shocks is significant, as women and girls frequently face a greater burden of domestic responsibilities, which hinders their ability to access education, training, and economic opportunities. Early marriages, imbalanced power dynamics, and limited sexual and reproductive health rights exacerbate their vulnerability, leaving them susceptible to violence, mistreatment, and premature pregnancies. It is essential to prioritise the complex issues that young women in rural areas face to foster their strength, agency, and overall welfare. Comprehensive interventions integrating life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training can provide young women with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to handle external challenges, adjust to new situations, and enhance their livelihoods.

This study focuses on the Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts in Zimbabwe's Agro-ecological Region IV and V, characterised by erratic rain patterns and droughts. These districts were significantly impacted by COVID-19 and are classified as disaster-prone areas. The research aims to examine the contextual shocks increasing vulnerability among female youth in these districts and evaluate the efficacy of life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training interventions in building resilience. Integrating life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training into interventions can build resilience among vulnerable young women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts by reducing their vulnerability to contextual shocks and equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to cope with and adapt to changing environments.

Review of Related Literature

Global Perspective on Female Youth Vulnerability

The vulnerability of women, particularly those residing in rural areas, is a multifaceted issue that has garnered significant global recognition. Various contextual factors, including climate change, natural disasters, socio-economic instability, and cultural norms, contribute to their susceptibility to adverse outcomes (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2019). Resolving this vulnerability is crucial for promoting resilience and empowerment within this group. Climate change and extreme weather events have been identified as important contributors to the vulnerability of rural women (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2021). Individuals engaged in agriculture and other climate-sensitive occupations are significantly affected by the consequences of climate change, such as droughts, floods, and unpredictable weather patterns. Women in rural areas mainly hold these jobs. Furthermore, women's limited access to resources, information, and decision-making processes concerning climate change adaptation and mitigation exacerbates their vulnerability (Mutambara & Bodzo, 2020).

Regional Context of Female Youth Vulnerability

In the African context, female youth vulnerability is often exacerbated by cultural norms and traditional practices. The African Union's Agenda 2063 recognises the need to empower women and girls, calling for increased access to education, skills development, and economic opportunities (African Union, 2015). However, implementation of these goals varies significantly across the continent. In Southern Africa, the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance (2020) reports that while progress has been made in some areas, such as increased female representation in politics, challenges persist in economic empowerment and access to education, particularly for rural women and girls.

National Context: Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the National Youth Policy (2020-2025) acknowledges female youth's challenges, including limited access to education, early marriages, and economic marginalisation. The policy aims to promote gender equality and empower young women through various interventions, including vocational training and entrepreneurship programs (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). However, Chamunogwa (2021) notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing gender inequalities in Zimbabwe, with women and girls bearing a disproportionate burden of care work and facing increased risks of gender-based violence.

Life Skills, Entrepreneurship, and Vocational Training

Life skills training centres on developing a wide range of competencies for effectively handling life's challenges and building resilience (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2015). On the other hand, entrepreneurship training equips women with the skills and knowledge needed to start and manage their businesses successfully. As Ahamad et al. (2015) highlighted, this fosters economic empowerment and self-reliance. Research has shown that vocational training is essential for empowering women by supplying them with the necessary skills for the job market, ultimately increasing their chances of finding employment and earning a higher income (Sisimayi & Chikasha, 2016). Research has indicated that women who gain vocational skills can enhance their socio-economic status, achieve financial independence, and decrease their vulnerability to exploitation (Ahmad et al., 2016). In addition, vocational training plays a crucial role

in alleviating poverty and addressing challenges such as early marriages and teenage pregnancies, which can hinder women's empowerment and resilience (Kabeer, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the intersection of three key components: contextual shocks, female youth vulnerability, and resilience-building interventions, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

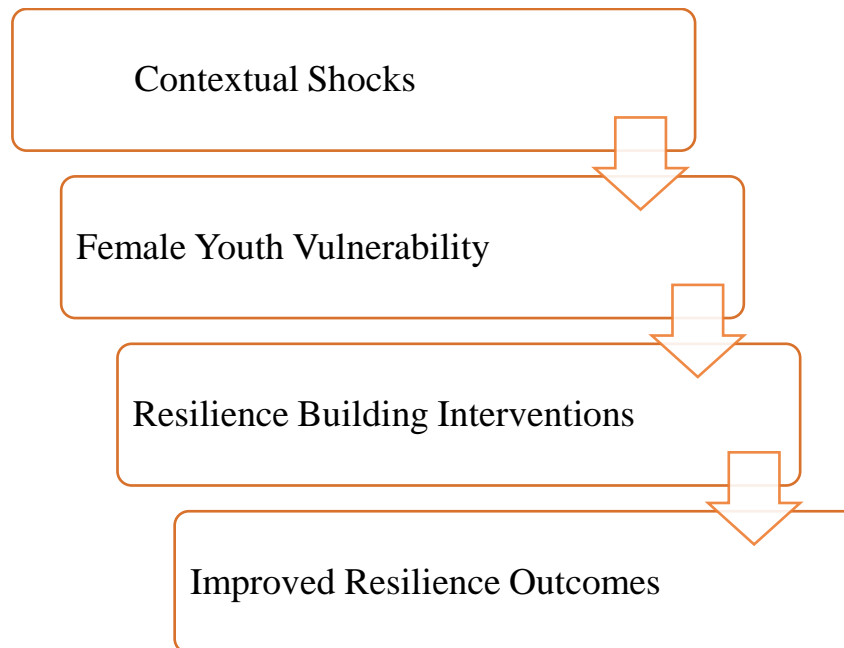


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors' illustration

The framework posits that these interventions can mitigate the impact of contextual shocks on female youth vulnerability, thereby enhancing resilience. This process is mediated by policy environment, stakeholder involvement, and community support. The conceptual framework is based on the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. The independent variables are life skills training, entrepreneurship skills training and vocational skills training. The dependent variable is resilience building. The mediating variables are the factors increasing the vulnerability of female youths to contextual shocks. Conditions like poverty, inequality, and unemployment make it difficult for young women to cope with and recover from shocks like environmental disasters, health pandemics, economic crises, and political instability. The framework shows that in combination with other interventions like gender equality promotion, disaster management inclusion (Mwape 2010), and women's empowerment programs, skills training helps mediate the impacts of shocks by reducing vulnerability and nurturing resilience.

Methodology

The study utilised a mixed-method approach that combined quantitative and qualitative methods. The mixed method research approach through a convergent parallel design allowed the comprehension of the lived experiences of the individuals involved in the vocational training interventions in Chiredzi and Mwenezi districts aimed at building resilience while quantitatively assessing hypothesised statistical relationships between key variables. The approach offered a voice to participants while also grounding findings in their contexts and experiences (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2018). In addition, mixing datasets provided more complete evidence and increased validity and reliability compared to a single qualitative or quantitative method.

The quantitative survey included 306 responses. In the qualitative methods, the research includes three focus group discussions (FGDs) with two young women groups from Chiredzi (12 participants) and Mwenezi (8 participants) and 1 with Chiredzi Ministry of Youth, Sports, Arts and Recreation and Ward-based Community Development coordinators (6 participants). The target population for the study was the young women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts below the age of 35 who are the beneficiaries of the youth empowerment programmes such as the Enhancing Community Resilience and Sustainability (ECRAS) - Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund (ZRBF) project and the Plan International Zimbabwe vocational training fund.

The research also included interviews with 11 purposively sampled individuals who are staff members of ECRAS-ZRBF Project (4), Plan International Zimbabwe (3), Ministry of Youth, Sports, Arts and Recreation (3) and a local training institution, Mwenezi Development Training Centre (1), who have been involved in the youth empowerment interventions in Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts. These were key informants to the study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), sample sizes between 5 and 25 are sufficient for qualitative research. Hence, a sample of 11 was adequate in this study.

The research areas of the two districts of Chiredzi and Mwenezi are in Zimbabwe's Agro-ecological Region IV and V. Erratic rain patterns and droughts characterise these. This resonates with the UNDP (2015) hazard mapping assessment that identified droughts, dry spells, cereal prices, crop and livestock pests, and diseases as major hazards in the Chiredzi and Mwenezi districts. The selected districts were also not spared from the adverse impact of COVID-19, especially migration pressure areas whose migration trends have a huge impact on the livelihoods of young people, particularly young women. In addition, the two districts are classified as disaster-prone areas and many development projects are being undertaken in the two districts to build resilience and improve the livelihoods of the rural people, particularly the youth and women.

Findings and Discussion

Contextual Shocks Increasing Vulnerability of Female Youth in Mwenezi and Chiredzi

The study examines the contextual shocks increasing the vulnerability of female youth in Mwenezi and Chiredzi. Both primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed to achieve the stated objective. In doing so, the participants were asked if they had witnessed any contextual shocks that increased female youths' vulnerability in the Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts. The results show

that most participants (57.2%) strongly agreed that contextual shocks were increasing the vulnerability of female youths in Mwenezi and Chiredzi, followed by 42.2% who agreed. Equal proportions of less than 1% were neutral, whilst others strongly disagreed. These results imply that shocks are increasing the vulnerability of young women in the Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts.

More so, the participants were asked to indicate if young women in rural areas were more vulnerable to external shocks than their male counterparts. The results of this question are presented in Figure 2. The results show that most participants (52%) agreed that young women were more vulnerable to external shocks than their male counterparts. In support, 27.5% strongly agreed, whilst 18.3% were not sure. The minority (2.3%) disagreed. The results show that young women are more vulnerable to external shocks than their male counterparts.

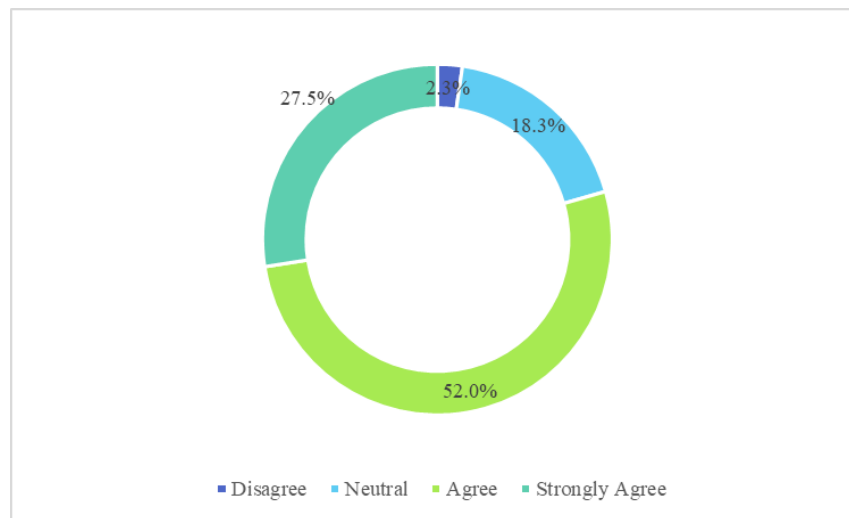


Figure 2: Vulnerability of young women to external shocks compared to male counterparts

Source: Author's illustration

It is widely recognised in the literature that the unequal allocation of household responsibilities based on gender negatively impacts women's and girls' capacity to participate in education and training. UNICEF (2016) reports that girls aged 5-14 spend around 550 million hours per day on household chores, surpassing boys of the same age by 160 million hours. The discrepancies in learning outcomes between girls and boys are a matter of concern. In addition, various factors like early marriages, power imbalances in relationships, and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health rights and services for young women all play a role in the occurrence of early pregnancies and high fertility rates. These circumstances greatly influence the progress of education and training. A study conducted by the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations (2019) highlighted the concerning risks that girls and young women face when they enter into early marriages, including the potential for sexual and gender-based violence. This is because parents delegate the duty of care to husbands, leaving these vulnerable individuals susceptible to harm.

Research conducted by WALPE (2020) and Chamunogwa (2021) highlighted the additional responsibilities placed on parents, particularly women, who took on the primary caregiving role for their families and children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Children in families led by women faced challenges as their mothers or female guardians had to allocate more time to informal activities to sustain their families' livelihoods. This left them with less time to provide homeschooling for their children. It is often observed that girls are more likely to be impacted by the burden of care work within households, as this responsibility is often placed on them due to societal expectations and gender roles. Tasks such as house cleaning, cooking, and water fetching are just a few examples of what needs to be done. A participant shared:

We now understand that in the past, we did not understand this. Sometimes, the men look at the output from the training and from the fields and would rather their wives stay home because, in their comparison, it's more productive to farm than attend training in their eyes.

As a result, young women faced more vulnerable shocks than their male counterparts, especially due to factors such as religion, gender inequality, and cultural influence in their communities.

Research by Mutambara and Bodzo (2020) suggests that certain individuals hold unfavourable views towards educating girls and place less importance on their education, particularly when women's pay is lower than men's and job prospects are limited. Furthermore, girls are often viewed as temporary possessions, not deserving of long-term commitment, as they typically leave their parents' homes when they get married. In many cultures, girls bear the burden of household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for younger siblings. As a result, the opportunity costs for girls' education tend to be higher. Women's reproductive responsibilities often limit their availability for training and economic activities, as these responsibilities are tied to household and farming cycles. This can make it challenging to accommodate fixed training times and durations. Challenges such as long distances to schools/training institutions, limited public transport, inadequate boarding and sanitary facilities in schools/training institutions, and a shortage of female teachers and trainers can significantly hinder female education and training in rural areas. Higher education and training fees can pose a significant barrier for women, who may have limited financial resources and face challenges accessing household funds for training. In addition, the education and training curricula and delivery methods are not always tailored to meet the specific learning needs of women. Trainers and educators may display biased attitudes towards girls and women, leading to concerns about sexual harassment and safety when attending schools and training institutions.

The study collected data on the main contextual shocks for young women in Chiredzi and Mwenezi districts. The results are presented in Table 3. The results shown in Table 3 show that majority of the participants agreed that the main contextual shocks increasing vulnerability of the young women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts include COVID-19 (M= 4.63; SD= 0.529), inflation (M= 4.77; SD= 0.470), drought (M= 4.71; SD= 0.503), natural disasters (M= 4.57; SD= 0.540), climate change (M= 4.75; SD= 0.481), unemployment (M= 3.92; SD= 0.776), political instability (M= 4.29; SD= 0.746), culture and accustom religious practices (M= 4.19; SD= 0.694) as well as historical beliefs regarding educating girl child (M= 4.38; SD= 0.705). The results indicate that several contextual shocks are increasing the vulnerability of young women in the Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts.

Table 1: Contextual shocks increasing vulnerability of female youths

External Shock:	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
COVID-19	306	4.63	0.529
Inflation	306	4.77	0.470
Drought	306	4.71	0.503
Natural disasters	306	4.57	0.540
Climate change	306	4.75	0.481
Unemployment	306	3.92	0.776
Political instability	306	4.29	0.746
Culture and accustom religion and practices	306	4.19	0.694
Historical beliefs regarding educating girls	306	4.38	0.705

Source: Field data (2023)

The results are supported by additional evidence from secondary sources and the interviews conducted. Multiple elements contribute to vulnerability. These factors can hinder individuals' ability to safeguard themselves, restrict or diminish access to social support, impede or complicate recovery, or unfairly subject certain groups to more frequent or severe hazards than others. The challenges involve addressing rapid population growth, poverty and hunger, poor health, low levels of education, gender inequality, fragile and hazardous locations, and lack of access to resources and services, including knowledge and technological means, and the disintegration of social patterns, among others. Religious beliefs and practices had a profound impact on the lives of adolescent girls, contributing to the vulnerability factors mentioned earlier. Religious ideologies shaped attitudes and messages regarding the acceptability of early marriage for girls. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to child marriage due to a complex interplay of cultural norms, power imbalances, and gender inequalities. Male dominance is often imposed on adolescent girls, as marriage is considered a privilege reserved solely for men.

Climate change has a disproportionate impact on individuals who are already disadvantaged, making it even more difficult for them to cope and adapt. People living in rural areas often face significant challenges, such as limited access to services and increased vulnerability to economic, climatic, and conflict-related risks. These risks can devastate their income and livelihood, forcing them to resort to negative coping strategies (FAO, 2019). In these settings, women and girls face the highest level of vulnerability. Research indicates that social protection can effectively mitigate the devastating impacts of external shocks, such as humanitarian disasters, climate change, droughts, floods, and other calamities. One individual shared:

There is poverty that strikes us when you cannot earn an income. Prices end up going up. As a young woman, I will not have anything to buy with. We won't get any money to invest in our enterprise, like buying machines for our dressmaking project. For example, now, at the end of sewing, we have no machines when we return. We use these machines at this community centre since we are on attachment.

Efficacy Life Skills, Entrepreneurship and Vocational Skills Training Being Incorporated in Resilience Building for Rural Young Women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi

The study also aimed to evaluate the efficacy of how life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills training are being incorporated into resilience building for rural young women in the Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts. The participants were therefore asked to indicate if life, entrepreneurship, or vocational skills training helps reduce vulnerability and build resilience among young women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts. The results are summarised in Figure 3. The results show that most participants (60.8%) strongly agreed, whereas 36.3% agreed that life, entrepreneurship, or vocational skills training help reduce vulnerability and build resilience among young women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts. However, the minority, 2.6%, were neutral, and 0.3% strongly disagreed. The results imply that life, entrepreneurship, or vocational skills training helps reduce vulnerability and build resilience among young women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts.

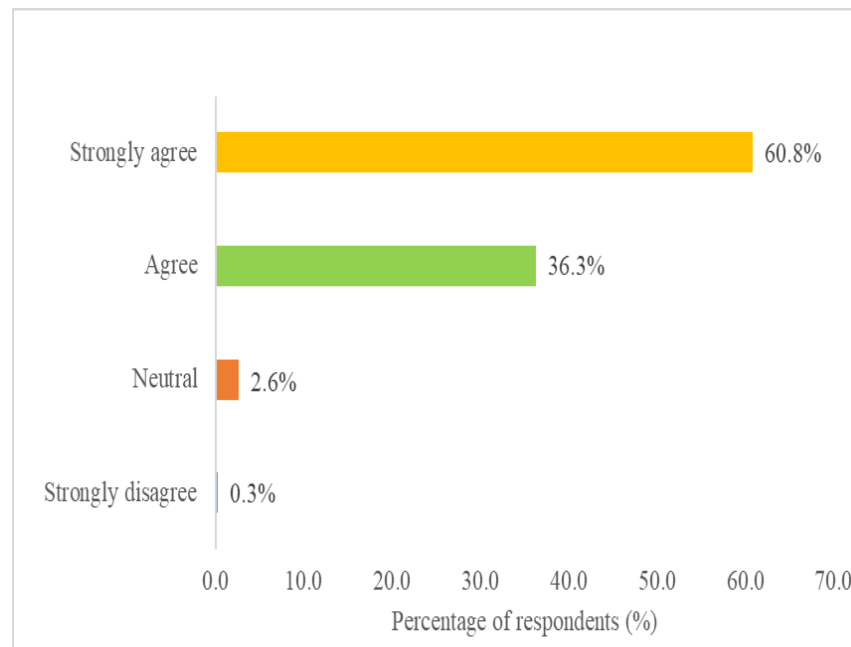


Figure 3: Efficacy of how life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills training on vulnerability reduction

Source: Authors' illustration

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to indicate the effectiveness of life, entrepreneurship, or vocational skills in promoting resilience among young women in rural settings of Mwenezi and Chiredzi. The results are presented in Figure 4. The results show that 61.8%, representing the majority of the participants, strongly agreed that life, entrepreneurship, or vocational skills effectively promoted resilience among young women in rural settings of the Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts. In addition, 30.7% of the participants agreed, whilst 7.2% were neutral. Only 0.3% of the participants strongly disagreed. The survey results infer that life, entrepreneurship or vocational skills effectively promote resilience among young women in rural settings of Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts.

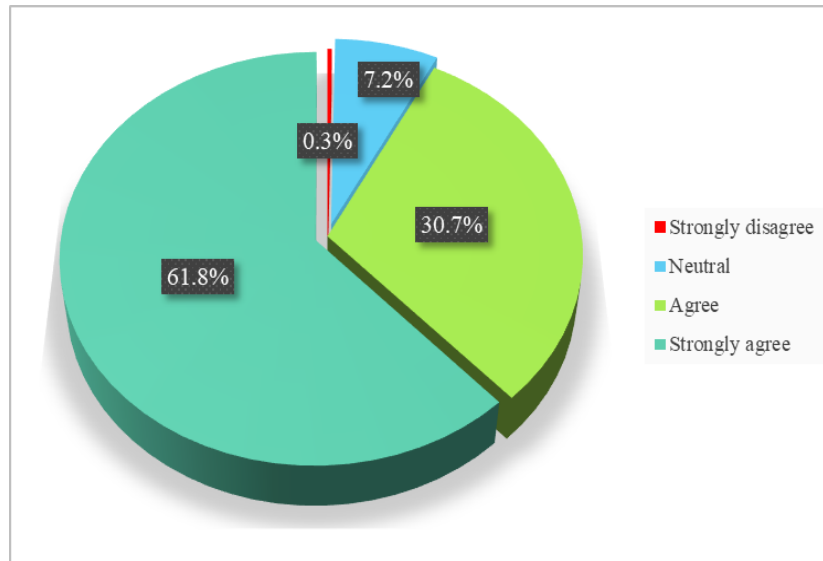


Figure 4: Effectiveness of life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills training in promoting resilience building

Source: Authors' illustration

The respondents were asked to indicate efficacies of life, entrepreneurship, or vocational skills training to help build resilience among young women in the Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts. Table 2 presents the results of this question. The results in Table 2 show that most respondents agreed that life, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills training results in gaining skills and knowledge to improve livelihoods, as shown by the mean score of 3.77 and standard deviation of 0.952. Also, as shown by the mean of 4.26, most respondents agreed that life, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills training results in gaining knowledge and information about threats. Most participants also agreed that life, entrepreneurship and vocational skills training results in gaining skills and knowledge to cope with and adapt to external shocks, as indicated by the mean of 4.01. More so, the mean of 4.14 indicates that the respondents agreed that life, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills training result in skills and knowledge to adapt to the changing environment and take measures against external shocks.

Chi-square tests were undertaken to determine the efficacies of life, entrepreneurship or vocational skills training on vulnerability reduction and building resilience among young women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts to support the aforementioned descriptive results. The results are displayed in Table 4. The results in Table 4 show that life, entrepreneurship or vocational skills training is significantly associated with resilience building ($\chi^2 = 133.767$; $p = 0.000$) and vulnerability reduction ($\chi^2 = 21.942$; $p = 0.000$). The results indicate that life, entrepreneurship, or vocational skills training represents key tools for promoting resilience building and vulnerability reduction among the young women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts.

Table 2: Chi-square test results

Variable		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Resilience building	Pearson Chi-Square	133.767	3	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	59.677	3	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association	60.847	1	.000
	N of Valid Cases	306		
Vulnerability reduction	Pearson Chi-Square	21.942	3	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	25.207	3	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association	12.106	1	.001
	N of Valid Cases	306		

Source: Field data (2023)

How Do These Skills Help Improve Resilience to External Shocks Among Young Women?

Rural women demonstrate remarkable resilience in navigating the challenges of their environments. Building resilient livelihoods is crucial for enhancing human well-being, improving living standards, and empowering women economically (Pelling 2011). Prioritising women's empowerment ensures that rural women can access the necessary household resources. As mentioned in previous literature, the significance of rural women in development and their roles in societies will be better understood and have more positive impacts when they have strong and sustainable livelihoods.

Acquiring vocational training empowers young women to generate income and develop essential life skills. Programmes should also involve the private sector to achieve success. Young women face significant barriers when accessing financial capital and opportunities for education, knowledge, and skills that can help them achieve economic advancement. Inadequate policy frameworks and inequitable gender norms often hinder girls' economic advancement. Recognising the importance of empowering women, various studies have highlighted its role in achieving the millennium goals (Kabeer 2005 and Hasin et al. 2018). According to Ahmad et al. (2016), providing education, vocational skills, and employability training to all individuals, regardless of gender, can lead to development and catalyse women's empowerment. This approach can also help bridge the significant gender equality gap. This is a step towards sustainable development. Research has indicated that women who gain vocational skills can enhance their socio-economic status by contributing to home management. Being financially independent gives individuals a sense of security and reduces their relationship vulnerability (Ahmad et al. 2016).

According to the interviews, it was found that young women are more affected by unemployment than young men in almost all regions of the world. Developing vocational skills can greatly enhance the employment prospects of young women, enabling them to secure jobs, explore self-employment opportunities, or embark on apprenticeships that pave the way for promising careers. Acquiring and applying these practical skills can greatly enhance their prospects, unlocking a wide range of employment opportunities in stable and lucrative fields and allowing them to cultivate their abilities further and maximise their potential. Developing practical skills empowers young women to generate income, improving their financial situation and overall well-being. However, ensuring financial stability for

themselves and their families extends beyond mere profitability; it also entails establishing a sense of security.

Young girls often face significant hardships due to poverty and financial instability, which can have a profound impact on their physical and mental well-being, as well as hinder their overall development. Without a stable source of income, individuals may find themselves more vulnerable to entering into early marriages or unions in search of stability. Unfortunately, this can place them in a difficult position and, in the most severe cases, expose them to the risk of violence and abuse. Through acquiring vocational skills, young women are simultaneously cultivating valuable soft skills. These include effective communication, interpersonal finesse, adeptness in management, the art of negotiation, and the ability to build a strong network. These multifaceted skills enhance the prospects of these young women, enabling them to secure employment or embark on their entrepreneurial ventures. There is evidence to support the idea that vocational training can help decrease the number of teenage pregnancies.

Most people interviewed for the study agreed that teaching people job skills would help lower poverty in their areas. One person who was interviewed said:

Once we have a job using our vocational skills, we can fight poverty. Every day when we finish work, we know we'll get paid something. I agree that poverty is common in my community, but those who have jobs make ends meet.

Another said:

Yes, it can reduce poverty. When I talked about myself, I said I can make ends meet. I can take care of my needs and feed myself and my kids. Discuss clothes, a place to live, and other things you need to stay alive. I'm not rich, but I'm also not poor either.

Another also remarked that:

I agree with you perfectly because our vacation has helped and continues to help us address our poverty burdens. My main reason for lessening our financial problem is that we make money from work.

The findings from the responses showed that women could secure jobs and employment out of the vocational training they have acquired and are in a good position to fight poverty. The women can meet their needs daily and reduce their financial challenges because they earn income from their vocation daily.

Effective Strategies Towards Building Resilience Among Vulnerable Young Women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi

Lastly, the study aimed to find effective strategies for building resilience among vulnerable young women in Mwenezi and Chiredzi based on how the respondents. The participants were, therefore, asked to indicate the strategies to build resilience among vulnerable young women. The results are presented in Table 3. The results indicate that most respondents agreed that women empowerment programmes aid in promoting resilience building, as shown by the mean of 3.74. Also, the mean of 3.78 and standard deviation of 0.949 shows that providing financial support/government grants for life, entrepreneurship or vocational training

and education is one of the strategies to promote resilience building. The mean of 4.52 also shows that most respondents strongly agreed that increased women's involvement and participation in development planning promote resilience building. Furthermore, the respondents strongly agreed that implementing policies to support and encourage life, entrepreneurship or vocational training can enhance resilience building. The respondents agreed that stakeholder involvement, such as NGOs and private sector players, could promote resilience building, as shown by the mean score of 4.34. The results also indicate that increasing vocational training institutions may enhance resilience building, as indicated by the mean of 4.43 and standard deviation of 1.045.

Table 3: Effective strategies towards building resilience among vulnerable young women

Strategy	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Women empowerment programmes	306	3.74	0.670
Provision of financial support/government grants for life, entrepreneurship or vocational training and education	306	3.78	0.949
Increased women's involvement and participation in developmental planning	306	4.52	0.989
Implementation of policies to support and encourage life, entrepreneurship or vocational training	306	4.55	0.872
Stakeholder involvement, such as NGOs and private sector players	306	4.34	0.857
Increasing vocational training institutions	306	4.43	1.045

Source: Field data (2023)

Further evidence and findings from the interviews support the results. Training opportunities for women in rural areas have been implemented globally, regionally, and nationally through various strategies. In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This treaty was a response to the concerning rate of discrimination against women. Since its adoption, there has been a growing emphasis on the plight of women living in rural areas. Adopting a comprehensive approach to enhancing women's education in agriculture and entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe is of utmost importance, as it enables them to achieve economic empowerment. This study's results indicate that education significantly empowers women in rural areas, particularly in Mwenezi and Chiredzi District. Education enables women to enhance their livelihoods and achieve greater economic empowerment.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the contextual shocks increasing vulnerability of female youth in Mwenezi and Chiredzi based on the data from the questionnaires, KII's and FGD's. Climate change and extreme weather events contributed to female youths' vulnerability in the Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts. In the local context, religion, gender inequality, and cultural influences play significant roles in making young women more vulnerable to the climatic shocks in their communities. In addition to the climatic shocks, the main contextual shocks identified in the study included Covid-19, inflation (currency volatility), drought, and natural disasters (Cyclone Idai). The wider macroeconomic environment also has unemployment, political

instability, cultural practices, and historical beliefs regarding educating girl children, which further compounds the vulnerability of rural female youth. Entrepreneurship and vocational and life skills training are being incorporated in resilience building for female youth in Mwenezi and Chiredzi based on the data from questionnaires, KII and FGD importance of life, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills training programs in reducing vulnerability and building resilience. The following recommendations are prescribed based on the study's findings and the literature review.

- Responsible government authorities and stakeholders from civil society should concert efforts toward strengthening comprehensive women's empowerment programs that address multidimensional vulnerabilities, enhance women's decision-making power, access to resources, and participation in development planning, and challenge existing gender norms and cultural beliefs that subordinate women.
- It is also advisable to increase financial support through government grants or micro-financing schemes to facilitate young women's access to life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training programs.
- Government agencies, NGOs, private sector entities, and community-based organisations may also foster collaborations and partnerships to leverage diverse expertise, resources, and capacities in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by young women.
- Stakeholders may also lead efforts toward increasing the availability and accessibility of vocational training institutions in rural areas, offering curricula tailored to local contexts and market demands to provide practical and marketable skills for young women, which the authors recommend.
- Conducting awareness campaigns and community-based initiatives to challenge harmful societal norms, traditions, and beliefs that perpetuate gender inequalities is also recommended by the authors.
- Interventionists are also recommended to engage community leaders, religious authorities, and influential stakeholders to challenge harmful societal norms, traditions, and beliefs, fostering a supportive environment for women's empowerment and resilience-building.

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