Gender and Rural Vitality: Empowerment through Women's Community Groups

by

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ABSTRACT

Rural women are often the main supporters of their families and have been involved in improving the quality of life for households and communities. Sustainable rural development and poverty reduction is linked to empowering women. Community groups are one mechanism for empowering women and fostering economic development. For the poor, the ability to organize and mobilize to solve problems is crucial because collective capability assists in overcoming challenges arising from marginalization and limited resources. Even though considerable work has been done on the impact of institutional support for community groups, it is not well documented how the efforts of women's community groups actually lead to improved socioeconomic wellbeing. The results of the study elucidate the positive impact of female group membership as a mechanism for advancing livelihoods and socio-economic wellbeing. The findings are intended to help institutions that work with women groups improve the impact and sustainability of these key mechanisms for development intervention.

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appreciated. To my amazing son, Izzy and the rest of my babies K.U, Dizzo, Cico and Jacket, it is all for you my loves. My appreciation to the rest of the Majokweni family for the thoughts, prayers and checkups. I am because you are.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PACSA   Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action

FJC   Food Justice Collective

SA   South Africa

KZN   KwaZulu-Natal

WID   Women in Development

GAD   Gender and Development

UMDM   UMgungundlovu District Municipality

NGO   Non-Governmental Organization

SET   Social Exchange Theory

CBD   Central Business District

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and problem statement

All over the world, especially in developing countries, rural populations tend to have higher and more severe levels of poverty compared to urban populations (Khan, 2000). The World Bank Group (WBG) (2018) estimated the poverty levels in rural areas to be three times higher than in urban areas. Rural areas also accounted for approximately 79% of the total poor. More than half of the extreme poor live in Sub-Saharan Africa surviving on less than $1.90 per day (WBG, 2018). While poverty is multidimensional and does not have a singular definition, its most commonly stated characteristics include vulnerability, deprivation and powerlessness with limited access to resources such as housing, education, health care, water and sanitation, etc. (Khan, 2000). Argent *et al.* (2009) listed four determinants of household poverty which are household mean size, age, education, and employment. Similarly, Sekhampu (2013) listed the demographic determinants of household poverty as age, gender, education level of a household head, household size, and employment status or unemployment rate.

The rural poor have been discriminated against by policies and institutions. Such circumstances make it a challenge for them to reach the desired goals of sustainable economic growth and alleviating poverty. One of the main causes of rural poverty in developing countries has to do with the lack of land (Khan, 2000). Landlessness can be attributed to causes such as unequal distribution, inheritance laws, privatization, and land degradation. Within different groups and strata in the rural poor population, the effects of poverty are not always the same (Khan, 2000).

The groups most affected by poverty are landless households and rural women (Moser, 2003). In most cases, rural women are landless thus; poverty and gender are not separated. Women make up 70% of the rural poor (WBG, 2018). This is also attributed to their lack of assets that subsequently affect any economic returns because of limited access to the economy (Khan, 2000). Many are de facto household heads because the males migrate to urban areas for more employment opportunities (Moser, 1993).

The women are left in rural households to do household farming and look after the family (Moser, 1993). Depending on various situations and contexts, this may not always be a bad thing because it may allow the women to have control over the land and other household resources. However, the resources available to women who work at home are minimal and only a small percentage own property. Additionally, different circumstances hinder their ability to keep and have access to land and may frequently lead them to give it to male relatives (Bradshaw *et al*., 2013). In poverty, women play a dual role of both victim and hero as they are the ones that care for households, thus, changes to women's productivity will likely also benefit the whole household (Galab and Rao, 2003).

Even though a great deal of evidence supports the principle that gender equality is important for economic growth, the progress to achieving this goal has been slow. Gender inequality is one of the major contributors to poverty (Rao and Kelleher, 2003). In comparison to their male counterparts, women still have fewer resources, power, and influence (Rhodes *et al.,* 2017). Economic policies often focus on those already at the top of the economic chain. So, the trend of women being the poorest continues and poverty reduction stagnates. Hence, poor women and children are still left behind in absolute poverty. Furthermore, the work done by

women leaders that has potential to change institutions in favor of gender equality is often ignored (Rao and Kelleher, 2003).

A high proportion of the rural population is dependent on agricultural activities. Almost a quarter of the world's population is made up of rural women. They also make up half of the agricultural labor force in developing countries. However, their labor force participation rate is 25% lower than that of men (International Labor Organization, 2018). Their representation in the formal sector and leadership positions are also limited. Rural women, in particular, tend to be overrepresented in low skilled, low productivity jobs with very little social protection and non-conducive working conditions (ILO, 2018).

Several studies (Moser, 1993; Kabeer, 2005; Boserup *et al*., 2007; Bradshaw *et al*., 2013) have focused on women in relation to development. The concept evolved over the years, being referred to in different terms depending on the time. Gender and development in the 1970s focused on integrating women into development, influenced largely by Boserup *et al.* (2007). The field began being referred to as 'women in development' (WID) and evolved to 'gender and development' (GAD). The GAD approach resulted from the criticisms of WID which, allegedly it was argued, advocated to merely adding women as more passive than active participants in development. While proponents of GAD, this term took a more active and holistic approach focusing on the cause and root of the exclusion of women (Besada *et al.,* 2017).

However, the intersection of all approaches is that gender plays a focal role in development. Women have been excluded from development by means of patriarchal patterns that do not recognize the interests or needs of women as a priority (Jackson and Pearson, 1998). Economic growth alone will not lead to gender equality, but the empowerment and strengthening of women's autonomy will advance the status of women and girls (Bradshaw *et al*., 2013).

1.2 Purpose of study

The attainability of sustainable rural development and poverty reduction is linked to the empowerment of women. Rural women are often the main supporters of the rural population and have continuously been involved in attempting to improve the quality of life for both their families and communities. In South Africa, rural black women make up the largest percentage of the marginalized population. Studies have shown that women households in SA have a significantly higher rate of poverty compared to their male counterparts, about 50.9% of women compared to 45.9% of men (Obi and Tafa, 2015 citing Human Development Report 2003). Women's access to resources, opportunities, and their economic growth and wealth is generally limited, thus they live under extreme poverty. Poverty for black rural women is also fueled by unequal family structures. This subsequently leads to unequal access to family resources like livestock and land. This results in situations where women juggle multiple roles in the household and bear the brunt of poverty (Kehler, 2001).

Muntongu (2012) acknowledged the importance of the involvement of community-based self-help organizations. Women community groups provide them with a platform through decision making and sharing ideas and goals. More experiments with institutional forms of women's groups are needed; the diversification of on and off-farm income generation activities can assist in the reduction of poverty. Moreover, non-governmental organizations (NGO) can be a pillar for rural communities and women's groups.

The interactions among peers can be instrumental ways for rural women to navigate their way out of poverty. The evidence for advancing women through community group participation was highlighted by Galab and Rao (2003). Women in self-help groups had better access to credit and reduced dependence on moneylenders. At the household level, women in self-help groups

were found to have more occupational diversification. They had other activities outside of agricultural activities that assisted in the increase in household income and employment. The women in the groups were also reported to be more empowered with more control over their savings and income, decision making in households, interactions with officials and other women in the self-help groups (Galab and Rao, 2003).

Due to this reason, women's collective action, organizing, and strengthened networks are essential in acting as a defense and action for overcoming poverty and achieving economic empowerment (Moser, 2003; Rhodes *et al.,* 2017). Empowerment has a number of definitions depending on the context, the crosscutting theme in all different definitions are mainly focused on 'self' including strength, control, power, reliance, having choices, a dignified life, etc. (Narayan-Parker, 2002). It is essential to strengthen women in various roles such as leaders, entrepreneurs, economic stakeholders in order to reduce poverty (Diop, 2015).

A large proportion of the rural population is dependent on agricultural related activities (Khan, 2000). Small-scale farming is one of the main activities done by rural households. Even though women are almost half the workforce, they have significantly lower levels of productivity (Diop, 2015). This can be attributed to the lack of access to various productive resources, thus, improving access would result in fewer people going hungry. Increasing labor productivity in agriculture and improving human capital are key to poverty reduction (WBG, 2018).

1.3 Context

The study focuses on women's community groups in rural Pietermaritzburg and the role they play in the socio-economic wellbeing of women in uMgungundlovu District (an area or region of a city), in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. In an attempt to reduce poverty, the groups engage in various agricultural activities. The members practice small-scale

farming in their household gardens and communal gardens where they share labor when planting

and harvesting. Recently, women ventured into small-scale goat and poultry farming. In addition,

the groups do traditional beadwork, catering, and other activities. Even though there are several

different groups from seven different villages in this district, they ultimately form one network,

the Food Justice Collective (FJC). They partner with a non-governmental organization, the

Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA) (PACSA, 2019).

PACSA is a faith-based social justice and development NGO that has been in operation

since 1979. It operates in the uMgungundlovu region of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Their

programs focus on socioeconomic rights, gender justice, youth development, livelihoods, and

HIV/Aids, their work and practice seek to enhance human dignity. PACSA advocates for the

agency and autonomy of the groups they partner with. Its constituent grassroots organizations act

in their own names and conduct in their own advocacy and development. PACSA supports the

self-help groups through process facilitation, networks, meeting venues, financial support and

other forms of facilitation (PACSA, 2019).

This study focuses on the interworking focuses on women's community groups to

understand how they impact socioeconomic wellbeing. This is distinct from existing studies

because it takes a more holistic approach to study the groups, not confining producing to income

or success to participation numbers. Rather, it uses focus groups and interviews to explore the

multidimensional ways in which social ties, and later social capital, are forged through these

groups. Most studies have only focused on one facet of women collective action such as

resource sharing and capital accumulations and not the cumulative bonds and strengths that

emanate from the groups themselves.

1.4 Objectives

The study sought to explore the role of women community groups as interventions for empowerment and advancing socio-economic wellbeing. The specific objectives were:

1. Assessing women community groups as a means of empowerment for rural women in South Africa

2. Developing a conceptual framework about the role of women's group in the development

3. Investigating the contribution of women groups to food security in the context of a South African rural community

4. Identify mechanisms that can be used by development institutions to improve and sustain women's community groups.

1.5 Outline of the study

The study is structured as follows. Chapter one comprises the introduction which includes the background and problem statement, motivation, and objectives of the study. Chapter two provides a review of previous research and theories on social capital and community groups in development. Chapter three describes the study area, the methods used to obtain data and the analyses employed. Chapter four presents the findings. Chapter five summarizes the main point and implications of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Social exchange theory

The premise of the social exchange theory is that exchanging resources is one of the fundamental forms of human interaction (Homans, 1950; 1958; 1961). The underlying concept of this theory is that individuals stay in relationships because they are of gained or anticipated value. Social exchange emphasizes that yields positive outcomes which drives relationships. According to Homan (1958), social exchange is not limited to just the exchange of material goods, but also extends to non-material psychological needs such as prestige and approval. Self-interest and interdependence are at the core of the SET, these prompt the exchanges that happen between two actors that have something they value from each other. Social exchange can be understood from both microstructures which are more personal, face-to-face interactions, and macrostructures, which include economic and political institutions (Murdvee, 2009).

Homans (1974) looked at social exchange from an individualistic approach while Blau (1964) did from a more economic approach. For Blau, relationships were just like transactions. During an economic exchange, people pay in exchange for a product or service, Blau (1964) believed that individuals behaved in social exchanges as well. His distinction between the two was unlike in economic exchange, the obligations are neither specified nor tangible. These do not include exact prices and are typically things like gratitude, trust and other personal feelings of obligation. Furthermore, one of the key distinctions between the two theorist views was that unlike Homans (1961) whose social exchange theory was explained based on past experiences, Blau (1964) believed that these relationships also depended on what a person believes they will gain in future; motivated by the returns they expect and receive from others. The longevity of the

relationship would thus also depend on trust. If one believes they will continually receive the reward or benefit, the relationship or exchange will likely continue.

Emerson (1974) addressed the dyadic nature that the other two theorists limited social exchange. To transcend the social exchange theory's dyadic nature, Emerson (1974, p357) introduced the productive exchange**,** which is combining resources and dividing labor**;** after which "the result is a valued product that might be divisible (like grain) among all producers, or that might be converted through simple exchange to a divisible medium (money) and distributed among members by some distribution rule."

2.2 Social capital

There exists a considerable body of literature on social capital in sociology (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putman, 1993; Lin *et al.,* 2001; Seibert, 2001; Lin, 2017; Woolock and Narayan, 2000). While there are a plethora of definitions and contexts for social capital, they all share the same commonalities regarding connections between groups, collective action and how that impacts resources and benefits. Social capital is defined by Lin (2001) as social networks that yield positive market results, the "investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace" Just like the social exchange theory, social capital.*"* Every time people engage in an interaction, they anticipate gaining something. It is premised in the participation of an individual in a social group that adds value to their lives due to that participation.

One of the major contributors to the forms of capital theory is Bourdieu (1986). While theorists like Homans and Blau conceded that the nature of relationships is transactional one way or the other, Bourdieu was explicit in describing that people in one's network are crucial in assisting their gains and that people engage in networks with the intention of producing a profit. He further broke down capital into three types namely, social, cultural and economic capital. He

defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." (Bourdieu, 1986, p248).

Bourdieu (1986) emphasized that social capital allows members to have access to collectively owned capital. In addition, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) highlighted the implications that social capital has for development. Social capital is central to development in societies because the interactions and between communities and institutions provide understanding. Poverty is also seen as a lack of access to social capital (Narayan *et al.,* 2000). As this study seeks to understand the role and effectiveness of women groups, the role of social capital in poverty reduction efforts is a central focus.

The main premise of social capital is social ties, and by implication, self-help groups, as vessels in which social assets are produced and reproduced has never been remote to African philosophy. *Ubuntu* is a concept that has its underpinnings in one's unity with the group to fully develop one's individual capacities of the (Mbaya, 2010). *Ubuntu* is an embodiment of social capital, and it has existed in South African native people from time immemorial. The concept of *Ubuntu* is clearly epitomized as a group induced development of the individual to reach actualization of the full human potential.

The concept itself presupposes the foundation of group affiliation as a catalyst that shapes the development of the person, who is '…*a person through other persons.*' Expanding this concept on a macro level, the member's interconnectedness shapes the individual through group cohesion which ultimately determines the progress of the group as a whole. This understanding of participation in the group as a means to yield results under the concept of *Ubuntu* intersects with the basic theoretical underpinnings of the concept of social capital.

Ubuntu, therefore, is indeed a truly South African concept of social capital that has existed from time immemorial (Mbaya, 2011).

Another concept that covers interactions is' Tonnies (1957) sociology of community. Tonnies introduced the Gesellschaft (society) and Gemeinschaft (community). The two differentiate between ones' ties and how they experience them rural, traditional and modern and in more modern upscale communities respectively (Tonnies, 1957). Tonnies argued that the nature of interactions in Gemeinschaft was more close-knit involving more emotional connections and more personal and moral. In contrast, the Gesellschaft which exists in more modern societies was more self-centered and individualistic, unlike in the Gemeinschaft where interactions are more personal and emotional. Interactions in Gesellschaft were more impersonal an indirect only based on rationality (Tonnies, 1957).

In her paper, New Politics of Community, Hill Collins (2010) discussed the change in the nature of communities and how they are part of politics. She argued that communities become a space of identity, affirmation and political expression. She further argues that community inherently emotions and values with meanings, thus it those feelings that drive people within a community to take action. To concede to this, a study by Pronyk *et al*. (2008) in South Africa found that people preferred to act in groups than alone. This applied to everything from *stokvels* (revolving credit scheme) to other household activities. The communities created encouraged actions among members and there is a mutual dependence that occurs and members collectively act to solve a mutual problem (Anandajayasekeram *et al.,* 2008).

2.3 Collective action in marginalized populations

Group membership and collective action are necessary for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Narayan-Parker, 2002). Groups are considered important in rural development as well as

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developing individuals and communities. A group is normally made up of people brought together by similar problems, interests, and needs (Anandajayasekeram *et al.,* 2008). Research (Anandajayasekeram *et al.,* 2008, Muntongu, 2012; Diop, 2015) has acknowledged the benefits of groups and collective action such as the collective development of skills, the increase in bargaining power, resource mobilization and collateral.

The poor do not possess much economic and political freedom. Although they continuously attempt to escape poverty, only a few individuals succeed (Narayan-Parker, 2002). The lack of assets and power often hinders the success of individual actions. Fewer assets and networks often translate to increased levels of vulnerability (Moser, 2003). Stewart (2006) deemed collective action the better option because it enhanced efficiency and increases power both politically and economically.

In networks, the nature of exchange connection is determined by whether the exchange relations have positive connections can be termed as a cooperative social exchange or negative connections, which are competitive access to alternative resources. According to Blau (1964), a mechanism that mediates social interactions when it is a larger collective is referred to as value consensus. The common ground and agreement on values and norms allow one to receive approval and be part of that group. Additionally, sometimes the exchange can be understood from a group context; individuals obtain gains from a common pool regardless of any contributions that are made. This type of exchange is not direct between individuals, but is held in common (Thibaut and Kelley, 2017).

For the poor, the ability to organize and mobilize to solve problems is crucial because the collective capability assists in overcoming problems arising from marginalization and limited resources. "Social capital, the norms, and networks that enable social action allows poor people

to increase the access to resources and economic opportunities, obtain basic services, and participate in local governance" (Narayan- Parker, 2002; p12). The social capital that comes with group membership is essential to poor communities' coping mechanisms in economic crises. In such cases, the social and economic are not mutually exclusive. Moser (2003) highlighted that social capital becomes a buffer for poor communities during periods of income decline, low employment and increasing prices of goods and services. From collective action stems enhanced efficiency and increased power.

Group membership also has an impact on the wellbeing of individuals. The close ties assist in dealing with poverty. This is due to the groups' increased ability in efficiency and sharing resources. The creation of collective identities results in increased self-respect and empowerment. This helps poor people have a claim over resources (Narayan-Parker, 2002; Stewart, 2005). When in groups, poor people are able to magnify the amplitude of their voices. A result of this amplification is a better expression of preferences and demands. Furthermore, state providers are held accountable for the provision of services. In these situations, vulnerable groups, the collective language of community become more effective as a statement of political demand than individual voices (Narayan- Parker, 2002: Hill-Collins, 2010).

Duragova (2015) sees participation. "Encompasses involvement in various aspects of life, whether social, cultural, economic or political, by all members of society based on equality of rights and opportunities" (p4). Duragova (2015) posits that participation is central to inclusive development. They further argued when participation is meaningful it goes beyond merely giving the poor a voice. It aids in strengthening their capacity and influence in decision making, and in exercising claims on any factors that affect their lives.

Collective action improves access to business, development and financial services. The close linkages formed within groups enable the opening of new markets for members to buy essential items and sell products. Additionally, group membership improves access to finance and credit. It is common among the poor to have only a few assets, however, in group settings the combined assets can be used as collateral. This joint liability allows the risk associated with information asymmetry to be transferred to the group (Narayan- Parker, 2002; Stewart, 2006).

While the formation of groups is advantageous, it has also been noted that gender plays a part. In groups with men and women, the latter struggled to express themselves and often had to be encouraged to join groups and suggested the formation of separate groups for women (Anandajayasekeram *et al.,* 2008; Rao and Kelleher, 2013). The nature of societies that revolves around the culture of patriarchal structures severely restrains the extent to which women can participate, according to Tinker (2000). Poor participation and representation in matters that pertain to the needs of women require the formation of separate platforms that have greater latitude in the expression of women's needs outside of other channels. The disaggregation of community development programs may be crucial to their success in order to serve the specific needs of different groups (Tinker, 2000).

2.4 Women in development

The inception of the term Women in Development (WID) can be traced back to the 1970s (Bradshaw *et al.* 2013). It is predicated upon the recognition and acknowledgment that women are often a neglected resource with a potential to contribute to development. The main argument was the strong correlation between women and development (Moser, 2003). The aim of WID was, then, to make women central to development and lessen their discrimination. However, its

biggest critique was its lack of dealing with the root of the problem which are the structures in development (Bradshaw *et al*., 2013).

To remedy the lack of broadness in WID the term Gender and Development (GAD) was coined. This term is viewed as better highlighting and addressing the structural problems. GAD challenged the narrow view of WID which limited development solely to economic growth. It provided a more holistic approach which included human-centered development (Bradshaw *et al.,* 2013). GAD is largely based on gender mainstreaming which Bradshaw *et al.* (2013) defined as "a gendered perspective…central to all activities, including planning, implementation, and monitoring of all programs, projects, and legislation" (p4).

While GAD acknowledged the crucial role women play in economic development, it also recognized that it is not limited to just economic development. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2010) similarly argued that the reduction of poverty and inequality are not only limited to economic policies but should be inclusive of social policies as well. They argued that, for maximum impact to be achieved, there need to be an intersection and coordination in economic, social and political policies and institutions. Duragova (2015) supported this notion highlighting the social inclusion framework that other countries had adopted, one which included access to basic services and economic opportunities focusing on health, education, and inclusion in the labor market.

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2010) introduced the concept of social protection which is often neglected in development policy circles. The focus of social protection is preventing, managing and overcoming situations affecting people's wellbeing. Duragova (2015) argued that social protection mechanisms could assist in enabling an

individual not fall into poverty through helping them realize their rights and involvement in societal processes.

Previous studies have argued that while increasing economic growth will not bring about gender equality, equality is central to achieving the fight against poverty. Empowering women has been noted to have a ripple effect on communities. According to Tinker (2000), income acquired by women is more likely to be spent on the family whereas men would more likely to spend on themselves. Tinker (2000) also argues that food acquired by women will likely to be distributed within the household. Thus, the author is of the view that investing in women improved family livelihoods and stability as it proved to be more effective in improving both nutrition and education of children.

2.5 The marginalization of women in South Africa - land, gender, and race

In South Africa, the apartheid era created extreme income differentials that persist today. The majority of the black people in the country are landless (Aliber, 2003). Though policy has been crafted to give a tenor of equality, there remains a large void between the letter and reality on the ground. Smallholder farmers only own 13% of the land area while commercial farmers own 86% of the agricultural land (Seekings, 2008). This was inherited from the apartheid regime which ensured that white people had a privileged economic position and that land was reserved for white ownership (Seekings, 2008). African farmers were removed from their own land and forced to become sharecroppers (Aliber, 2003). Remnants of these injustices have been carried forward to date, and women still find themselves disproportionately bearing the brunt of these past atrocities (Kehler, 2001).

Previous studies (Kehler, 2001; Walker, 2003) have emphasized the limits that poor black women have that exacerbate their severe poverty levels. An estimated 72% of the people

living below the poverty line live in rural areas with the poorest provinces being Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape (Aliber, 2003). According to Statistics South Africa (2019), female-headed households in rural areas have higher levels of poverty compared to their male counterparts. The groups most affected by poverty are black, female and from rural areas.

The country also struggles with high unemployment levels. There are higher levels of unemployment among rural black women, evidence of the gender, racial and place discrimination pattern embedded in the country's history. Aliber (2003) highlighted that the prevalence of poverty is higher in rural areas especially among rural blacks made worse by low levels of employment and access to productive resources such as arable land. Gender and race still present major barriers in the SA labor market (World Bank, 2018). Most households in rural areas are female-headed households because of migration to urban areas. A legacy of apartheid itself, when families were moved to homelands, men would work in mines or cities while women remained in rural areas (Aliber, 2003). These household are prone to poverty because they often rely on either one income for the entire family, social grants, remittances or low-level funds from self-employment.

Women have always borne the effects of landlessness, albeit disproportionately. Rural women often suffer twice as much and tend to be more severely affected by poverty compared to their male counterparts because of their perceived low social status and discrimination (Khan, 2000; Bentley, 2004. Similarly, Kehler (2001) conceded the dire situation of rural black women in South Africa argued that their lack of access to land, resources, and services keep them as the poorest in SA. Therefore, Bentley (2004) argues that poverty in SA manifests both racial and gender inequalities. Apart from barriers to access, the influences of patriarchal culture increases women's lack of access to livelihoods and food security especially in female-headed households

(Keahey, 2018). Altman *et al.* (2009) supported the notion that South Africa seems to be food secure at the national level but the same cannot be said about households in rural areas. The rural poor can advance their living standards by establishing food security. One of the avenues to achieving this is through smallholder agriculture and appropriate support to foster smallholder farming but access to agricultural land remains a problem (Abdu-Raheem & Worth, 2011).

While it has been more than twenty years since apartheid, economic restructuring in rural areas is slow to advance. This means that the plight of rural black women who make the largest percentage of the poor in the country is yet to improve.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

The aim of this chapter is to explain how the relationship between community groups and the empowerment of rural women was explored. The first section presents a description of the area of study followed by an explanation of the data collection methods. The third and final section of the chapter is an explanation of the methods that were used to analyze the collected data.

3.1 Study Area

The role and effectiveness of women's community groups was assessed in seven South African communities. South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world (Sulla and Zikhali, 2018). It has a higher concentration of lower class and only a small percentage of people who do not live in absolute poverty (Sulla and Zikhali, 2018). Much of this can be attributed to the country's apartheid history. Apartheid was the height of white supremacy and racial segregation in the country. Black people were removed and forced to homelands often with limited access to proper housing, basic services and arable land (Seekings, 2008). A map of the country is shown in Figure 1.
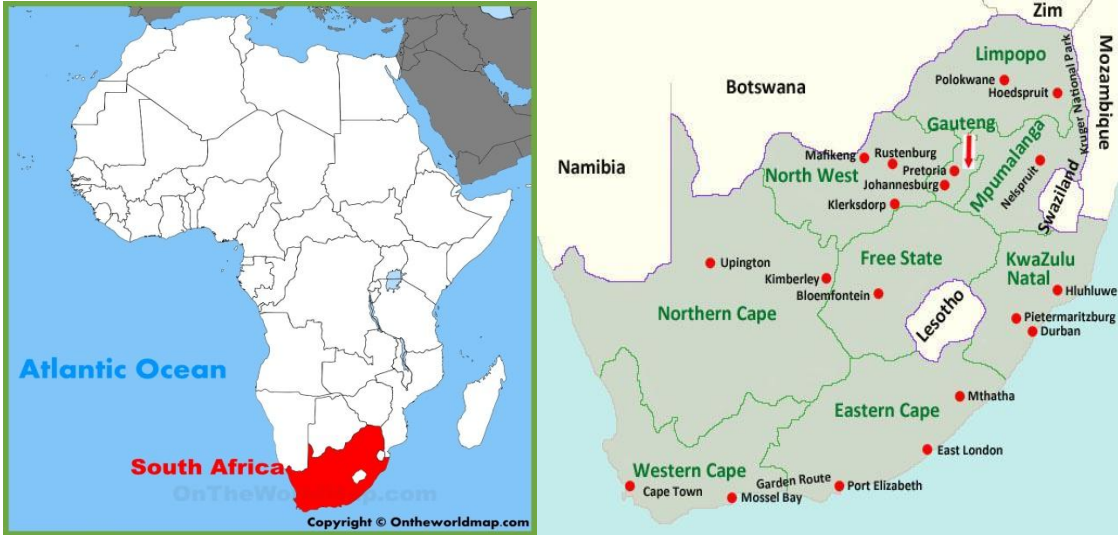
Figure 1. South African map

The data was collected in the UMgungundlovu district (an area or region of a city considered a distinct unit due to particular characteristics) of Pietermaritzburg, province of KwaZulu-Natal. The seven villages, which are all relatively close to each other, are targets of the NGO program endeavoring to empower and encourage women's economic development. Pietermaritzburg (shown in Figure 2) is the capital of KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa and is the second largest city in the province.
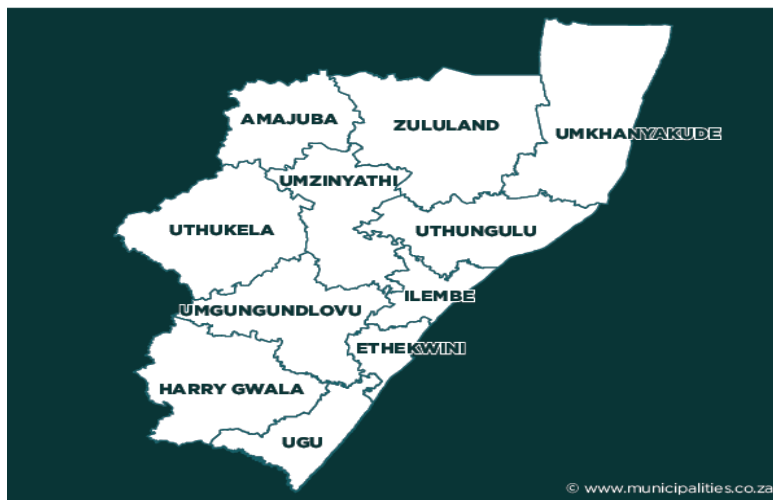
Figure 2. Map of KwaZulu-Natal Province Municipalities (Pietermaritzburg is located within UMgungundlovu).

The province is associated with high poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic vulnerability levels. The current population is estimated at over 600,000 residents (including neighboring townships) and the majority of people in the province live in peri-urban or rural areas. Land ownership in the UMgungundlovu District varies from communal to private ownership. The communal land is managed by the Ingonyama Trust Board. Due to high levels of migration to urban areas, almost half (46%) of the households in the District are female-headed households (Golder Associates, 2013; Hlahla and Hill, 2018). In 2015, the province was reported to have the highest percentage of people living in poverty; KwaZulu-Natal also has the highest population share in the country.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Sampling

The participants were selected through a purposive process based on their membership in the FJC. The sample consisted of 49 participants comprised of 44 females and 5 males including the Pietermaritzburg Agency for CPACSA process facilitator for FJC.

3.2.2 Data collection

The primary data collected to explore the role of women's groups in seven communities of uMgungundlovu District in Pietermaritzburg was collected through six focus groups and one semi-structured individual interview with the process facilitator. The PACSA process facilitator was interviewed for their experience and perspective. The rationale behind focused group interviews as the preferred method is the convenience in collecting qualitative data from groups of people and exploring the different experiences and knowledge. Moreover, they provide a better platform to observe how participants interact with each other (Kitzinger, 1995). Focus groups also assist in steering participants to discuss issues that are of more importance to them,

and they help provide both verbal and observational data (Orne and Bell, 2015). Thus, during the interview, questions were only a guide, and the conversation was flexible with the use of probing to lead to elaboration and more dialogue.

The main methods of the data collection were audio recordings using a digital voice recorder including observing participants and note-taking. As highlighted by Orne and Bell (2015), notes are essential to capture all the intangible information that cannot be captured on the audio recording. The non-verbal enables a thick description and interpretation that would not be provided by structured interviews. Furthermore, as a means of triangulation, the employee of PACSA was interviewed for more perspective on how the organization work with the groups.

The study received approval from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board. The focus groups were conducted in non-threatening environments, locations where the groups hold their usual meetings. All focus groups were conducted isiZulu, the native language of the KZN province. With the consent of the participants, the interviews were recorded and later translated and transcribed verbatim with pseudonyms appearing on the transcripts. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and a half and consisted of four to eleven participants per focus group as recommended by (Kitzinger, 1995). The essence of qualitative research is providing the description of a phenomenon from the participants' points of view. Hence it is important to interview or observe them in natural environments (Orb *et al.,* 2001). The breakdown of the groups is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Focus group composition, 2018

Village	Meeting place	Number of participants
Stocks	Chairperson home	11
Captains	Garden	5
Grazers	Chairperson home	8
Risers	Chairperson home	10
Flowers	Chairperson home	10
BikiniBottom	Chairperson home	4

In as much as it is advantageous to have groupings, group interactions also bring some disadvantages. Social status, class, gender, age, personal or physical, characteristics can affect and distract the discussion. A more, attractive, extroverted person might overwhelm more introverted participants or generally influence reactions, questions, and comments (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015; Nyumba *et al.*, 2017). This is a challenge not experienced during the focus groups because of the nature of the groups and the relationships they already shared.

The goal was to provide a bigger and broader picture of the workings of women groups both on a household and group level and additionally, the behind the scenes that the organization has to do or not do. The guide covered various themes including:

- Details of the activities undertaken by the groups

- Changes in household food consumption

- The advantages or disadvantages of being in a group

- The significance of being in a group with a majority of females

3.3 Data analysis

After the translation and transcription of the six group interviews, the study employed thematic data analysis and grounded theory as means of data analysis. Grounded theory is an inductive approach that allows an extension of a new theory from an existing case (Orne and Bell, 2015). The first step of the analysis involved an open reading of all the data and the comments made on the transcripts served as the initial inductive codes (Baggett and Simmons, 2017). The open coding was done without limiting the codes to specific themes or number, identifying keywords, relationships, and other indicators and recorded on an Excel spreadsheet.

The second step was narrowing down the recurring common themes that arose from the open coding. These cross-cutting themes were identified and grouped. Finally, all the codes identified in the first step were narrowed into five main themes for more detailed coding. The final codes were subsequently used in tagging quotations with themes and properties similar to each other. These steps are essential for drawing comparisons and capturing different group dynamics (Nyumba *et al*., 2017; Orne and Bell, 2015).

3.4 Researcher positionality and limitations

Positionality is defined by Orne and Bell (2015) as the position of the researcher in their social life, who they are, what they do, what they look like etc. This influences processes such as access to the community that will be participants and interview process because of power relations involved between researchers and participants (Orb *et al., 2000*). My philosophical assumptions were influenced by living in a country where most black households are female-headed households and are also the most disadvantaged when it comes to access to resources and services and most prone to poverty. This directed the goals of my research and is a bias I had to constantly be aware of during the interviews. This was however a positive bias during the focus

group interviews, granting me an insider status. One's positionality and biases determine how an insider or outsider may influence what interpretive framework they choose for their study and their interview processes (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Researchers are always both insiders and outsiders during the research process. As a Nguni speaking black South African woman talking to other black South African women granted me an 'insider status' that aided in conducting the focus group interviews. However, I was also an outsider as a 'formally' educated graduate student from a US institution.

Furthermore, what also proved to be a personal challenge was reintegrating myself back into communities in the country as I had been gone for almost a year. Thus, it often felt as if the conversation during the interviews would stray more to me as someone based in the US 'finding' an international market for the participants rather than the core of the focus groups. The study was conducted in the native language of the participants and for the most part during translation and transcription, my fear was losing the meaning of what the participants had really said, I feared important themes would be lost in translation.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the themes summarizing discussions with community groups in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Five main themes emerged from the data and are discussed in the subsequent sections, namely gender, community, food security, the political economy of land ownership and organizational support.

4.1 Gender

Though the Justice Collective (FJC) groups are made up mostly of female members, it should also be noted that some of them have a small number of male members. For different reasons, the female participants preferred groups with more women as members. The culture of patriarchy is still very prevalent in South African indigenous rural communities. This theme encapsulates the participants' struggle with the culture of patriarchy and their perceived benefits of being in predominantly all-women groups.

Most rural areas still have a patriarchal stronghold. This showed itself prominently in some focus group interviews. The focus groups provided evidence that, even when in minority, male superiority still lingered. In one focus group interview, Abraham*, a male member around his 60s, arrived late to the focus group. The reason being he thought it would be held at his house.

Even during the interview, Abraham would almost take over the conversation. Similarly, in one focus group, two men were in the presence of four women, the male-dominated the conversation while the women often had to be probed. This was a stark contrast to groups where it was only the women in the interview where the participants freely spoke and readily answered

questions. This could provide reasoning to why just women in groups were the expressed preference by all the participants in all the interviews.

The ease of communication arises as a result of being in a group with a majority of women. The women expressed that being all female and not having to follow a social hierarchy eliminates communication barriers allowing the freedom to share thoughts and emotions the way the women saw fit. *You are free to talk when it is just women,* says one member. She provides further evidence of these limits explaining *there are certain things I cannot say in front of a male person*, because of the culture. There are even certain ways that women cannot express themselves when in groups with male participants, thus limiting their freedom. The kinship the women shared among each other cannot be separated from the gender dynamics in the groups as noted by a participant saying, *that is what is nice, to have someone comfort you, the other women have comforted me. We are able to comfort and build each other.*

When asked about the benefits of being in a women's group, another member stated how the importance of being free to talk is just as important as being heard. **As *women, we are able to listen to each other… a man…when there a lot of them, they will demand that we are the ones listening to them; they can be here but not be the majority.* In patriarchal spaces, women are made to feel less valuable. Thus, community groups are a platform where women can freely communicate and be. *That's exactly what I'm avoiding; no one is telling us right now that this is how you do something*. One member also contributed. *When there is a man, he must listen. We will never reject them if they want to join, we would let them join, but we don't like to do a lot of talking, all you have to do is listen to us, you can put your view if there is something you want us to know*. The participants felt that if there is a strong male presence in the groups, they would lose their voices. *I think that women and men see things differently. When a man hears*

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something from another man they listen. Similar to other group members, this participant also felt that men do not listen, particularly when something is said by a woman. A plausible explanation for this could be the women recognizing and acknowledging that men do not see them as their equals.

The topic of why males are least preferred was not an easy one to approach. The reasons behind the preference were beyond the scope of this study. However, as the interviews progressed, some participants felt more comfortable narrating some of their experiences**. *I don't know if it's because I'm not educated but you see men? They have abused me a lot*** the speaker recalls a story of a previous incident. After recounting the incident, she said ***I have really been mistreated, that's why I don't like men.*** Thus, the platform becomes a safe space for women. The preference also stems from the recognition of patriarchy, none of the participants denied that they felt that men would overpower them if they are a majority in the groups.

More importantly, the ease of communications offers a sense of safety. From a sense of safety arises intimacy and sharing that would probably be challenging to occur in the presence of males. The participant explains her feelings towards the preference of women over men in the group. ***When you are all women, you are supported. There are many ways in which you are supported. You'd die from stress if you're alone without meeting other women, but when you do you can share your thoughts***. It became apparent that the solace and relaxation experienced from the group is a result of the majority of female membership and the women are very adamant about maintaining the status quo. ***No, it's perfect now with just women, we are able to talk and remind each other. Another woman gets here with their problem, another one will be able to comfort them and by the time they go home, they will be fine.***

The thoughts on the presence of men were mixed from some groups. Though others acknowledged that they prefer no men, some did, but only up to an extent. One participant expressed how it would not be bad stating; **they *were able to help with things like fencing or any of the physical labor in the garden, their presence assisted*.** The participants that felt that they do not mind men in the group did so purely from the point of physical labor. ***Nothing is nice when it's time to work because we don't have the same strength as males because if they were around, we would have hope that the garden would have been fenced.***

4.2 Community

The concept of community is one that is central to this study. All the participants are voluntary members of groups in their different communities. This theme summarizes their motivations to join and stay in the groups. The women have formed emotional bonds that have intertwined with how they improve their livelihoods. A majority of the women in the Food Justice Collective (FJC) are unemployed. The activities they do as part of the groups are their livelihood and have become their peace of mind. The themes highlighting this sense of community for the groups are discussed below.

4.2.1 Emotional bonds and connections

Before the women say anything, it is not hard to see that there are established relations and connections among them; from the banter to the small quirks they know about each other. The groups have become a haven for the women where they share their problems and solutions and are even each other's sources of motivation and encouragement. ***My mom told me that instead of sitting home alone and stressing, I must join other women and see what they do and not just stay at home and be sad and pitiful. When you are with other women, you are happier because you discuss and advise each other.***

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Because most of the participants are unemployed, the various activities they do as groups are part of their livelihoods. One member narrated how it was before she joined the group. *During the time when there was no group, it was not easy even keeping the chickens and doing the craftwork, it wasn't easy because we wouldn't be able to motivate each other. Now we can truly see the way forward.* This came as an answer when one of the participants was asked how it is different from not being in a group and doing these activities alone. Another attested *I mean yes planting we grew up at home doing, and sometimes you'd get lazy to do it but within Sandy, we are a group*. For them, doing the activities collectively acts as motivation that would otherwise be more difficult individually. This is evidence of the importance of collective action. Furthermore, the gathering allows sharing of ideas as well. *You get to hear different people's opinions and they give you advice on the way forward.*

The participants expressed how what might have started merely as groups for livelihood activities, incorporates the socioeconomic well-being of members. The women offload on each other, and they also discuss personal problems *we share, even our sorrows. Others have husbands, others don't. If you have a problem with your partner…when you are alone you get stressed but when you are with other people, you become stress-free because you can share your problem with other women.* Similarly for Mary*, spending time with her peers and talking out her problems was a stress reliever as she explained, *being in a group helped me in a lot of ways. Firstly, when you meet other people you broaden your thinking when you're not in the house meeting other women. Home stress is left at home. You learn a lot when you have a problem; other women are able to help you.* This sentiment was echoed across most interviews. Another comment echoed *if you were just sitting home and thinking you'd just be stressed with*

your blood pressure going up and all other sicknesses you get from stressing and not even getting any answers still.

There is a strong sense of community with shared emotional bonds. One member highlighted *we meet about a lot of things, sometimes just to discuss home affairs. We know each other's home situations and how they live at home. If you tell one of the women in the group about your problem, you won't hear it being spoken about everywhere in the community.* The sharing of intimate details beyond the workings of group activities highlight the levels of trust built and shared among the women. The platform provided avenues where they can share intimate details about their lives. This can be considered an important element of their emotional wellbeing. For the members, the emotional aspect is just as important as the materialistic part of it. *You see when you are here in the garden, you converse with the rest of the ladies, we laugh together and forget about our problems as opposed to being home all alone and stressed.*

4.2.2 Social capital

The aspect of the groups encouraging the women to broaden their scope of thinking was brought up multiple times in all interviews. Participants often felt the time spent together allowed them to do activities collectively and encouraged the sharing of ideas and innovation. *You get to hear different people's opinions and they give you advice on the way forward, also discuss how we spend and save money*. Another person added *generally being in a group and getting to know new and different people. It has broadened our thinking*. The 'two heads are better one' is evident in the different perspectives and points of view that get exchanged in meetings and gatherings. However, the exchange is not just limited to ideas. The tangible skill sharing that happens adds to the empowerment and improved livelihoods of group members.

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The diversity within the group activities ranging from small-scale farming to sewing encourages exchange and transfer of skills among members. ***When you get to the job of the day, you help each other. Women have patience, they support each other. See the jewelry? I can do it! They taught me how to do it!*** This could be because women feel more at ease to learn and make mistakes, thus allowing them to learn from each other. This is evidence that when space is safe as highlighted in previous sections, it allows a learning environment surrounded by peers who you don't perceive as more superior than you because of gender.

The networks are a resource for the members. In times of need they are each other's support and are constantly exchanging new ways of dealing with the livelihood challenges they face. The women through seeing others are encouraged to take actions improving their livelihoods***…when you're alone you don't benefit much. There is no benefit because you'll always think that 'eish I'm alone, where will I get certain things, I don't know anyone, I'm not used to anyone', that does not help because; there must always be someone to help you or a lot of people. So that if you don't know something you ask someone else how to do it and they help you learn it***.

The participants are dependent on each other for both resources and rewards. Even though the costs were not made explicit during the data collection nor were they the focus, factors such as conflict, time and certain payments were the considered costs for the members. It can be assumed that the members of the FJC are getting benefits greater than the costs of being in the group. ***I really like that they helped me and I was able to get what I have now. I also like we meet and advise each other to do things like build houses. When we run out of chickens and another person has, they can come and get from the other.***

4.2.3 Household and community improvement

As mentioned in previous sections, the participants not only engage in small-scale farming but other group activities such as bead making, catering, etc. These activities increase their cash income in several ways. This could be through decreased household food expenditure due to being able to produce a portion of their own food or more cash income through profit received from selling products or crafts. One member described, *even my grandkids are now more relaxed and freer because I'm able to pay school fees on time like other people. Their grade reports are not withheld because I have not paid.* They described an improved financial situation in their households and subsequently their families including education**. *You see when you have planted? You are able to buy bread for your children and they go to school and transport money. And little things needed in school as well.* Another member added *it also helps with kids since they are in school maybe there is a certain book that's needed, you are able to take some money and go buy that book.*

Furthermore, the improvements extend to the rest to other members of the community irrespective of FJC membership. The communities benefit from the presence of the groups whether directly or indirectly from the activities done by the participants. *We go out into the community, maybe elderly women, especially the ones that cannot out into the field to farm. We are able to get some (food) for them and most of the time we work with orphans, children who lost their parents due to HIV/AIDS, we look out for them and help at home.*

These rural communities live under poverty conditions that sometimes limit access to other services. The groups use the networks and connections they have outside to help those in need. *When we hear such, we normally go to that house to find out what the problem is and if we can solve it we solve it in the office. If we can't, we reach out to Social Development, if they*

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need a certificate we refer them to Home Affairs if there is a child who does not receive their

social grant, we refer them to SASSA. The social capital acquired from being in the network

also becomes beneficial and assists in the development of the community.

4.3 Food security, access and choices

More often than not, poverty and food insecurity are interlinked. Poverty often manifests

itself in the inability to fulfill your basic needs such as food, as most rural population is

considered poor; they also tend to be food insecure. Evidence of improved food security in the

households is broken down to three sub-themes namely security, access and, nutritional choices.

4.3.1 Security

One of the most dominant themes coming from all the groups was that of food security.

The households reported to now being more food secure, a condition often attributed to the group

membership. Group membership involved partaking in a number of projects including small-

scale farming as one of their major activities. Participants credited a noticeable difference in their

household nutrition and consumption to small-scale farming as it enabled them to provide food

to their families more confidently. One member affirmed this saying *so now we can have*

vegetables without going out to buy; you see what I'm saying? As for meat, you know

sometimes it happens that you run out of it but now you don't have to wait until month end,

sometimes you grab a chicken outside and put it in the pot. So there really has been a big

difference.

Since the households grow their own vegetables, money for food is less of a factor. They

reported being able to eat more frequently, some even claiming *there was a year when I didn't*

even know the price of cabbage at the store. I'd even be surprised at how long it has been since

I bought cabbage, I just grab it from the garden, all greens. One member affirmed the notion of food security stating *we will never go hungry as long as we have them (poultry)*.

A majority of the members is unemployed and depend on welfare and group activities for their livelihoods. One of the members indicated how subsistence farming helped her household food consumption. *I plant and eat. I am a single mother unemployed and the kids don't work, which means what I put in the garden is what I'll eat, from onions to spinach*. This sentiment was echoed in another group when asked about noticeable differences that could be attributed to group membership. *You also know that you are not stressed about what you will cook later because you know that there is always some vegetable. You see right now? Other people don't know what they'll eat because they have not planted.*

It is also apparent that one of the strong reasons behind the members partaking in the subsistence farming done through FJC is the anticipated regular food provision in their households. *I will never not eat these chickens*, one member said, *because then why do I have them?* with a chuckle in-between, she continued *I keep them so that sometimes I'm able to eat.*

Additionally, as group members, the women participate in stokvels (saving scheme and crowdfunding) and at the end of the year (summer holidays), they buy other food in bulk to ensure that they are always able to feed their households. *We combine Stokvels money for a year so that at the end of the year we share it, maybe for food. Sometimes we get food stamps. At the end of the year you don't break your bank because during holiday kids want to go out, meat at home, fridge things, you know you are sorted from December to January.*

As a result of the relations and ease of communication among each other, participants discussed how they can ask for food or any cooking ingredient from each other should the need arise. One member explained *if you don't have anything to cook when you get home, you go to*

your neighbor and they will see what they have to share. Growing one's own food is not the

only benefit that they get to feed their families through, they also have a supportive network

where they can reach out to each other and share from their own gardens. ***We have a bit of***

spinach here; if someone wants they can just pick it from my garden. I would never go to bed

starving in the presence of the group. Food security in both participants' households and

communities is improved one way or the other by their involvement in the FJC through small-

scale farming and the support offered by being part of networks. ***We would harvest and***

give away some to sick kids and orphans and the elderly, the frail and the sick ones. This

highlights how members of the community also benefit from the farming activities done by FJC.

In addition to the members being able to feed their households, they are able to provide nutrition

to other vulnerable groups in their communities.

The gender element of the gathering and ease of communication among the group

members also plays a role in how the participants approach food insecurity. For example, this

participant indicated that she would struggle to tell a male that she has no food. ***You'd never be***

able to go tell a male that you know I don't have food. Another participant expressed the same

view. ***If you are missing an ingredient to cook with, while we are in the garden I'll ask one of***

the ladies to bring me mealie meal perhaps. It'd be hard for me to ask a man that sort of thing.

This exemplifies the importance of membership and connection in the participants' everyday

lives.

4.3.2 Access

Even though food security is covered in the previous section, this section summarizes the

discussion of participants with regards to food access. The participants expressed improved in

food access as well, living in a rural community means you live far from the Central Business

District (CBD) and getting there requires transportation. A car is often a wealth indicator that most households do not have and thus rely on public transportation at a cost, a cost that is often too high. However, with farming practiced in both communal and household gardens, the members now seldom have to go commute to town to buy all the food items they need. One member explained *what makes me want to plant? I want people in the community to be able to get vegetables without having to go to the CBD*. If not commuting to the CBD, they buy food from local tuck-shops, whose food and produce is often overpriced and not fresh. Having your own food means that participants do not have to decide between spending money to go to town to buy food and actually buying the food.

The benefit is not just direct to the families of the participants but to the communities in general. Participants discussed making their produce available for purchase to people around their areas of residence. Similar to the participants themselves, the community members' access to food is improved without thinking of means that might compromise their budgets. During one interview, a member lamented about how it was for their communities before they lost access to a communal garden they used for their farming activities. *People would come to the garden, hungry people would come and we would pick some for them and when we are harvesting, there was a lot of us. We also planted potatoes, whatever we had. Sometimes when we are harvesting we would come here to the chairperson's place and they (community members) would come. When someone comes to buy vegetables, we take the profit and go buy more seeds or inputs.*

4.3.3 Expanded nutritional choices and varieties

An additional point, beyond food security is how members were able to expand their food choices. Because they plant their own food and have extra money to buy like rice, cornmeal, oil

etc. things they are able to buy more food options rather than eating one thing because of circumstances their choices *You take vegetables from the garden and kids eat, when they are tired of vegetables you take a chicken and feed them*. When it comes to nutrition and general consumption is not limited as it would be. *When you need to change a side dish maybe you feel like having beef which we don't have, you are able to take some of the money and go buy that*.

The participants indicated that the retained cash is able to be channeled to other foods or food sources. *When you are planting… well, you know most of the money you spend on the sides, right? When you have something you planted in the garden you don't use much of your own money.* For example, with small scale farming improving the members' access to food, they reported depending less on stores and therefore more money is retained in the household. According to one participant, *we are able to buy other things, for instance, oil and mealie meal. You can't plant oil and mealie meal*. Additionally, this translates to other everyday things like the children's' school lunchbox or tuck-shop money.

One member also explained how planting improved the nutritional value of their food. *Buying veggies from the stores in town means that you get non-fresh vegetables that have been there for a while that keep being refreshed with chemicals. However, for us, we pick them fresh and the taste is still good. You don't get old produce and we like looking after our health so that we don't keep eating things that are planted using chemicals because they will make you sick. We use natural manure maybe chicken manure or cow dung and use them to plant in the garden*. Access is not just limited to the food itself but access to food with the desired nutritional value and food choices. This covers some aspects of the definition of food security 'access' and 'sufficient'. The participants expressed how the type of food they eat is as important as the availability of the food not just having a diet but having control over your diet.

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4.4 Political economy of land ownership

The previous sections highlighted the positive difference made by small-scale farming being one of the groups major activities for both income and food security. Like many other rural populations depending on farming for livelihoods (Khan, 2008), the land is such a crucial part of the participants' livelihoods and access is one of the major challenges the members indicated they face. Their food security is closely linked to their farming activities that depend on land space.

The challenge to land access is intertwined with history; a participant described her experiences in relation to the country's forced removals history ***I got here during the time of forced removals*** she went on to describe how life was like before they were removed**, *we were staying nicely. We could get water and we had big farming spaces, right here? No.*** Like many other black South Africans that were either removed or ran away, this participant lives in a much more congested town with little land for any farming activities or running water. ***We want to keep chickens, we want to farm and there is no space for that, it's too small. Now if we'd get land sufficient enough to do that.***

How the challenge is experienced varied from one group to another but it was a concern expressed by all the groups. For this member, the group lost the land they had used for planting. She related how life had changed because of that: ***you see now that we haven't planted…I don't even want to lie ...at home I don't have a garden, the cows destroyed it but we use to have a garden and it had produce. I'm struggling now and I keep remembering that if we were still planting things would not be like this***.

Being able to feed themselves and their families helps with poverty reduction. To emphasize this point, another member added ***we are actually suffering a lot. If we could get the***

land, plant, and fence it. Our hearts would be happy so we can be people, our poverty would reduce. The lack of access to adequate land for crop farming not only affects food security but income as well. *You can't plant sufficient vegetables, you only plant a bit that is only sufficient for eating and then you finish it*. Small spaces mean that the women can only harvest so many vegetables that could not be enough to both eat and sell to get income.

The participants also indicated the lack of land and space didn't just affect their crop activities but their poultry activities as well. Thus they need for bigger space was expressed not just for planting as described by this member: *a place that's a bit bigger so we can store more because it doesn't help to build only a small space but have a lot of chickens. They will suffocate each other and you end up not getting anything because they will have killed each other*. This means that the participants often find themselves at a loss after buying chicks and chicken feed but are unable to sell to get income or consume any of the products such as eggs and meat.

The participants often have to find other alternatives that are not always favorable because of either costs or conflicts and power tensions. Sometimes it is travelling as indicated by this participant who has to commute to another village to plant. *I'm not even mentioning the one to get to town from here that's about 30 Rands* as she explained all the additional costs she has to spend to get to the CBD before continuing the village where they plant. *So that's R30 plus R58 and it might go up since its August. So it's close to R100 to go plant, we don't do this in a single day and finish. Even when we go harvest we don't do it in a single day, it costs us a lot.*

Another group plants on borrowed land but is in fear of an uncertain future**. It's such a problem getting land to plant. It's a problem (man sighing loudly in the background). We didn't initially plant where we are planting now at the school.** As they described this, another

member added, *sometimes they give us their own piece of land to work in the school and we don't mind. But when they see that things are going well, they demand the piece of land they had given us back. When we stop working on the land they don't do anything with it.*

Land inheritance and gender are part of the ongoing land politics in South Africa. Given that the groups are made up of majority women and none of them own or have access to land, the matter can hardly be separated from gender. Further evidence of this is a group that who lost access to land they had for planting because the person who gave it to them was only related to the family who owned the land through marriage. *The woman who gave us the land did not ask the rest family. It was said that she was married and didn't have the rights to give us the land so then we were not able to plan.*

4.5 Organizational support

All the groups are grassroots organizations and are supported by PACSA according to their needs. The NGO does not initiate any groups but they form themselves on their own communities and approach the organization with how they would like to be assisted. The relationship between the FJC and PACSA is a long standing on each party has contributed to the growth of the other.

A recurring theme from the participants is encouraged independence from the organization. The concept of independence through contributing to the cost of input is one that was met with mixed feelings from the different groups. While other groups valued and felt it was a good thing because it encouraged independence, it was not unanimous*. In the beginning, PACSA used to give us everything we asked for, so even if you get a seed and you know that you got it for free, you don't take care of it as much as the one you worked for but we didn't see that.* Other members did not express favor of this. *We like being independent but there are*

times when we are in very tight spots. Everything is money, everything is money. Even though some members felt this way, they still acknowledge and recognized the need for independence, a member supported this by adding *it's important that a person is independent and do things for themselves. The only problem is that we are unable to meet our needs*.

By the same token, even though the groups that are in favor of the cash contribution acknowledge its importance as noted through a statement of this member saying *at first it was hard but now we see that the facilitator was right. What you paid for is different from a handout because you don't really care about free things. You are responsible for what you pay for*. They also expressed initial disagreement. *At the beginning it did seem like there is a lot of that conflict. Now we are used to it and consider that should PACSA shut down, we know what to do.* For this participant, the reduced financial support from PACSA anticipates what should happen should the organization not be there. Even though the participants relied on PACSA on a number of fronts; they felt that their independence was encouraged to the extent that even in the absence of PACSA they felt that they would have learned enough to survive.

More importantly, the women expressed how they felt empowered not only because of the independence but it seemed the sense of autonomy the NGO allows them by not telling them what to do. *They don't just tell us as a group what to do, they ask what it that you like is/ are passionate about and then you say it yourselves. You heard the chairperson talk about baking, they asked what we would like to do and we said it. The chairperson told them that we wish to be able to bake. Whatever you express that you like doing, they support you and help you get it.* Being able to make your own choices on what you want to do is a form of empowerment and one that the organization is providing the groups. Further evidence of this is another member that said *They are able to help us with something if you say you like it they get someone to teach it,*

they ask "would you like to be helped" we say "yes" and they say "well if you like, we must

work together and keep ears on the ground and look for people

PACSA provides the platform for networking among all the respective groups in the FJC. The members expressed how this has furthered the skill sharing and more, ***Because it is not just Risers* that meet, it's all the other groups and they all share their points of view, so we take the knowledge, share it and become better because with no PACSA we cannot meet.*** Sometimes the women act as each other's market like the member who grows and sells seedlings to the rest of the groups in FJC at a discounted price. ***They provide training and we go meet other groups as well, they can combine Stocks and Pigeons and other groups. Sometimes they get us people that have better knowledge about what we need and we need and get the knowledge***. Thus, the skill sharing does not only happen intragroup but intergroup as well. The networks allow avenues for the women to exchange knowledge and skills outside their immediate groups.

It is still worth making note that the all the groups still expressed the desire to receive some form of support from the organization, mainly space for activities/ land and capital and infrastructural support like fencing. ***What I wish, if possible, I'd like PACSA to help us with fencing because a garden looks better if it's been fenced.*** The members had experienced a number of losses due to damages or theft which they indicated would be reduced through gated communal gardens.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore women's community groups as interventions for advancement and empowerment and socio-economic wellbeing in South African rural communities of South Africa. The second objective was to investigate the contribution of women groups to food security in the context of a South African rural community. Finally, this study also aimed to develop a conceptual framework about the role of women's group in development and suggest mechanisms that can be used by development institutions to improve and sustain women community groups.

A total sample of 48 participants was made of six groups who are members of the Food Justice Collective (FJC) was selected through purposive sampling. Interviews were conducted in the native language and were later recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis and five main themes were found which were community gender, food, and political economy. Themes emerging from the results highlighted a positive impact of their female group membership and some hindrances to group's productivity

5.1 Summary of findings and discussion

The research provided evidence emphasizing that women self-actualize better in spaces where they feel empowered and where they can practice their autonomy. Due to the long-standing tradition of patriarchy, the spaces that these can happen are spaces without a dominant presence of men. The study found that when women are among other women, there is an ease of communication and they consider the spaces safe. They were able to express their needs and opinions amongst just themselves as women. The result is in line with that of Tinker (2000) who highlighted that patriarchy limits women's expression even in discussions regarding their needs.

He suggested that disaggregating community groups might be essential to serve different people's needs. The results support this because the needs of the women can only be addressed where and when they are freely expressed without limits.

This comfort enabled communication and learning. The learning from each other allows an exchange of skills, knowledge, and ideas that contribute to the improvement of their livelihoods. The study also found that the collective action among people you trust and consider your kin acts as motivation and encouragement for everyday activities. More importantly, while perhaps other groups would result in improved economies, a factor often overlooked is the emotional wellbeing of these women. Women's groups specifically encourage improved socio-economic wellbeing of its members.

The result is in line with Tonnies' Gemeinschaft where the connections shared among communities were more personal and emotional. This can be seen in how the women are each other's support system. This is the manifestation of the community of mind and the personal ties that Tonnies (1957) highlights in Gemeinschaft. This result is also consistent with gender and development as explained by Moser (2003) which embraced the notion of a more holistic approach to development which was more human-centered. The results highlighting how the women share skills in order to advance themselves in markets and not far from social capital as defined by Bourdieu and Lin. The interactions among the members result in a positive gain that they can be used in the market which is the essence of social capital and the social exchange theory. However, the results show that social capital goes well beyond self-advancement for market but the emotional wellbeing of members

Furthermore, this translates to spillover in the geographical locations in which they stay. The close-knit relationships and knowing each other allow the women to be aware of the

vulnerable groups in communities and they help them. So, in these spaces where women are allowed to speak, be heard, share ideas and learn resulted in not only women who felt empowered but improved living conditions in households and communities. These findings are not far from those of Anandajayasekeram *et al.* (2008) who highlighted how communities helped the rural poor to collectively develop their skills and improve their livelihoods through resources mobilization, increased participation in development and bargaining power among other things. While this result does not necessarily encapsulate social capital, it encapsulates the concept of *ubuntu* in which individuals do not only advance themselves but their communities as well. It also highlights the nature of Gemeinschaft in a rural setting as seen by the close ties among the members to the extent of knowing those that are in need.

The World Food Summit in 1996 defined food security as, '…when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (Food and Agriculture Organization 2006, p1). The study provides evidence highlighting that women in groups were able to improve their levels of food security as a result group membership. This included all aspects of food security such as the constant availability of food, the physical and economic access and nutrition and preferences.

Many participants attributed this to small-scale farming. The crops produced from these activities translated to more household income because there was a reduced dependence on store food. Furthermore, the women reported to now being able to buy other staple food items that they could not grow. They also reported having a variety of choice to choose from for their everyday. One of the barriers to food security is access, the planting enables the members to have

access to fresh food without having to commute or pay high prices from third party or middlemen.

Having more disposable income also enables the participants to channel other funds to other uses such as kid's education, building, etc. Many reported to paying some expenses for children's education and being able to provide tuck-shop food money. The study also found several other ways that food insecurity is reduced, such as groups being able to communicate with other women what you need, something the participants claimed they would not be able to do in male presence. The connections the women have built among each other have resulted in trust. Their relationships are not just about work, but they share personal and intimate details about their lives. The groups have become a safe haven for these women and escapes from patriarchy. Thus, they are able to learn from each other and exchange knowledge and tangible skills that contribute to improved livelihoods.

5.2 Conclusion

From this study, it can be concluded that the shared interactions between the women enable information and skill sharing. These exchanges assist in small-scale farming and other activities, ultimately improving livelihoods and socioeconomic wellbeing of participants and their communities. Overall, the shared spaces enabled by women community groups go beyond shared labor. There are many other important facets to groups than just the market ones than research focuses on. The groups gain access to markets while also strengthening community ties which are crucial to the sustenance of the groups and therefore of the women. The results from the study highlight the importance of spaces that allow trust, leading to sharing of ideas and personal problems that have an impact on the emotional wellbeing of the women. Therefore, market access is only one part of the advantage of the groups.

More importantly, these are avenues allowing the members to make decisions, be autonomous and feel empowered. This finding is also closely linked to the importance of women groups as networks. The usefulness of the interactions women have with each other results in the sharing of essential information and contribute to the emotional wellbeing.

Institutional support plays a vital role in assisting the women's groups to improve their livelihoods through financial and organizational support. This enables some members to engage in crop production that subsequently leads to increased levels of food security, access and desired nutrition for households and communities at large. Furthermore, the reduction in food expenditure enables an increase in disposable income, women then are in a better position to access more farm inputs and channel funds to other needs such as home improvements and education. Thus, the findings of the study suggest that there is a need for external support from NGOs and other relevant institutions to support, improve and sustain women community groups.

While most studies have focused on only one dimension of the benefits of groups as a livelihood strategy, from this study it can be established that membership has wider benefits that go beyond tangible and physical market. The emotional connections created play a vital role in sustaining participation in the group, supporting livelihood activities, and fostering the overall emotional wellbeing of members.

The groups are based in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, a province with one of the largest rural populations in the country; patriarchy in rural areas is still prevalent due to the traditional and cultural setting. Therefore, the presence of the groups assists in the escape from patriarchy or ways to deal with the patriarchal culture in their communities. Thus, it can be concluded that women community groups are effective interventions for empowerment, advancement and overall socioeconomic wellbeing of rural women.

5.3 Practical implications

Literature already suggests that empowering women will result in empowered households and communities. There is a need for support programs to motivate and inform vulnerable groups such as women. Therefore, the involvement of institutions and organizations that support them should be highly encouraged and sustained. The services rendered by organizations should be demand driven, in other words, respond to the targeted group's needs. Most importantly, in doing so, encourage members' agency and autonomy which was found to be crucial to empowerment and advancement.

The findings highlight the view that small-scale farming plays a crucial role in food security and access and disposable income, they also highlight the need for improved land access. Since it is more likely that NGOs have limits in terms of policy development, collaborations between them and governments should be improved to strengthen the implementation of relevant policies that lessen barriers to rural women's land access and ownership. This will also encourage participation in crop productions and other farming activities that reduce food insecurity and poverty.

This study also highlighted the advantages and vitality of the interactions and spaces provided by women community groups as crucial for improved livelihoods and socio-economic wellbeing. Thus, the notions of group formation, collective actions and other avenues that encourage such should be promoted and be mostly member-led, and member-driven. The partnership with NGOS should be considered rather than the top-down approach from government officials.

Furthermore, the provision of necessary support and incentives such as input subsidies, meeting spaces, widening of networks renders PACSA's services more effective. Thus, to

encourage participation, such support should be encouraged in relevant organizations and institutions. Additionally, funds from donors and the government should continue to be made available to improve, advance and sustain rural women community groups and subsequently rural vitality.

5.4 Future research

The notion women led spaces should be further clarified because these arrangements foster women's leadership and autonomy are encouraged. However, in the same breath, the groups might only act as an escape and not challenge the patriarchal status quo, especially in households where there might be a male reaction. Further studies can explore the aftermath and repercussions that happens outside the groups. Female-focused studies can suggest how this can be avoided or prepared to ensure that it does not hinder the empowerment of women.

Many policies, laws and, practices act as barriers to access for women. Further studies can explore how groups can be used to improve rural women's land ownership and access to rental property for small-scale farming and other livelihood activities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Focus group guiding questions

1. What made you join the group?

2. What are the goals of the group?

3. What has been the biggest challenge in achieving those goals?

4. What are/were the solutions to those challenges?

5. Have you ever been in a group with male members? How was it different?

6. Do you think it's better to be in a group with more females and why?

7. Is it important for you to work in groups as opposed to working alone? Why?

8. Would you say you are able to provide more food in your household since joining FJC?

9. What other positive changes in your households can you attribute to your involvement in the FJC?

10. What do you think can be improved in the groups?

11. What do you think can be improved in the partnership with PACSA?

Appendix 2: Questions for PACSA process facilitator

1. How is FJC different with other groups that you work with?

2. What strategies have you followed working with FJC for poverty reduction?

3. What are/ have been your biggest challenges with the FJC?

4. What have been the biggest successes in your work with the FJC?

5. What contributed to those successes?

6. Would you say the goal of reducing poverty in the district has been achieved?

7. What do you think can be improved in the future?

8. What is the extent of involvement in the work done by the FJC groups?