

# Women's Economic Empowerment Through Entrepreneurial Opportunities In Zimbabwe's Informal Furniture Industry

Kapesa Tonderai<sup>1</sup>, Faustino Kufakunesu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Accountancy Bindura University of Science Education, Bindura, Zimbabwe

<sup>2</sup>Department of Economics and Business Sciences Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University, Bindura, Zimbabwe

Corresponding Author: Kapesa Tonderai

---

**Abstract:** The study assessed the levels of economic empowerment of Zimbabwean women through entrepreneurial opportunities in the informal sector of the economy, with a case study of Glen View furniture complex. The study was motivated by the high level of indigenisation in the economy vis a vis the inequity in benefits distribution across citizens on gender bases. Beneficiaries of the land reform's A1 were mere 18% women and A2 only 12% women. Determination of empowerment levels and economic participation of women was primarily guided by the Sara Longwe Framework. The research investigated the extent of women's involvement and participation in the furniture manufacturing trade, given the technical nature of the businesses. Coupled with that mandate, the paper interrogated the effects of patriarchal tendencies against the gendered power relations in business ownership and decision making. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, which combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. The study acknowledges that there are more men than women at the Glen View furniture complex, which is indicative of the imbalanced proportion of beneficiaries. The paper also sought to ascertain whether women plying their businesses at the Glenview furniture complex were empowered at the lower levels or they were denied the opportunity to partake in the decision making levels. The study regrets that, women continually face financial challenges; they lack business support and entrepreneurial skills necessary for effective business operation. The research recommends the impartation of technical skills and knowledge to enhance the sustainability of women's businesses. There is also need for the involvement of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Gender in the activities of informal sectors for ensuring equity on gender bases at all levels in order to guarantee women are appropriately represented to decide on business matters of their own.

**KEY WORDS:** WOMEN, ZIMBABWE, EMPOWERMENT, ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES, EQUITY

---

Date of Submission: 20-10-2019

Date of acceptance: 02-11-2019

---

## I. Introduction

The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) describes economic empowerment as "a process that increases people's access to and control over economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets from which they can generate an income, skills development and market information". Focusing on women's empowerment it is defined as, "Capacitation of women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contribution, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth". Accordingly, the study sought to assess the extent to which Zimbabwean women in general were being economically empowered through the entrepreneurial opportunities in the informal sector with particular emphasis being in the furniture manufacturing industry as represented by the popular furniture manufacturing complex located in Harare's high density suburb of Glenview. Focus of the study was on the informal sector because it appears this sector is flourishing whilst the formal industries are waning as the economy is incessantly on a free fall.

### 1.1 Background

The empowerment of women has been an issue under debate for some time, not only in Zimbabwe but the world over, with conservatives especially from the African continent peddling the view that women should depend on their husbands and therefore not supposed to be economically active. However, in the advent of globalisation there now is a paradigm shift and women's rights are being recognised progressively and this also been furthered by an escalation in feminists pressure groups and conferences. The United Nations has also contributed to the empowerment of women when it declared the years 1975 to 1985 to be a "Decade for Women" which resulted in four women's conferences being held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and the ultimate being the Beijing conference (1995) all hosted by the United Nations Women

(Arum, 2010). After this women's recognition as being equal to men in the work place has been enhanced, although there still exists a conviction by men that women are unable to perform certain tasks as much or as good as men and one of these tasks include carpentry.

A study conducted by Oxfam Zimbabwe entitled Women's Economic Empowerment Study (2011); the empowerment of women economically appears to be a mysterious goal irrespective of the acknowledgment of its significance by the Zimbabwean government, women's organizations and development partners. An examination of the context of economic empowerment for women conducted by Oxfam showed that poverty remains a serious challenge for females in both urban and rural areas.

The quest for gender equality is a critical objective, which is globally shared, as demonstrated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations, specifically MDG 3, which seeks to promote gender equality and empower women. Furthermore, there is growing acknowledgment from policy makers, donor agencies and practitioners that women's marginalisation suppresses efforts for the reduction of poverty, productivity, competitiveness, and economic growth, hence calls for a better understanding of the barriers that limit women's access to productive opportunities.

Although numerous of initiatives have been made by the government and its development partners since the Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, including the attempt to setup a women's bank and different women's cooperatives, women still remain marginalised economically. It is acknowledged that women's challenges in achieving economic empowerment are rooted in structural patriarchy issues and as a result of patriarchy; Zimbabwe remains a male dominated society in all its aspects including but not limited to the economic, political and social aspects. The fact that there are few women in decision making positions poses a serious challenge, in a country like Zimbabwe. According to the UN Women after the 2013 parliamentary elections women comprised only 35 percent of the Parliamentarians, 14 percent of Senators, 20 percent of Government Ministers, and these figures were all below the 2005 target of 30 percent. At other levels of decision making in 2012 the ZWRCN indicated that women were 67 percent of Public Service Commissioners, 29 percent of Supreme Court and High Court Judges, 41 percent of Magistrates, 30 percent were Ambassadors and 60 percent of Deputy Directors to Principal Directors in the public service were women.

The ZimStats Labour Force surveys (2011) indicates that women dominate the informal economy, whilst more men than women are in wage employment, as indicated by the total unemployment to population ratio which is lower for females at 72.3 percent compared to 83.9 percent for males. The 2010 Millennium Development Goals Status Report observes that, while progress has been made towards increasing women's participation in some key positions in the civil service, women are still largely under-represented and far below the MDG 3 target. Increasing women's participation in decision making in all sectors at all levels to 50:50 by 2015 is off track and may be difficult to achieve. The Zimbabwean government has a Gender policy for the period 2013 to 2017 and this policy is a sign of continued commitment on the part of the government of Zimbabwe to ensure there is elimination of all gender disparities in terms of economic status. Unfortunately, this policy document reveals that 68 percent of female headed households live under the Total Consumption Poverty Line as reported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2010 report. The number of poor women is clear evidence that women of Zimbabwe are economically disempowered, since the majority of the population of Zimbabwe is female (51.9%) but economically they are fewer in positions of influence and in terms of affluence.

Although the Zimbabwean economy has improved in terms of inflation reduction, economic performance has remained greatly subdued as indicated by capacity utilisation for the manufacturing sector which took off from 10% in 2008 to 30% in 2009, then 43.7% in 2010, 57.2% in 2011 before declining to 44% in 2012, going down to 39% in 2013 and it further went down to 36.3 % in 2014 due to the low performance of the economy (CZI Manufacturing Survey, 2014). The informal sector is the only escape route for employment of the numbers currently being retrenched from the formal sector, by company closures. Saungweme, Matsvai and Sakuhuni (2014) showed an interesting trend in the numbers that the informal sector has been employing since the mid-1990s as shown in table 1.1 below:

**Table 1.1 Employment statistics**

Classification	1993		2002		2011	
	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
Employed population	1,136,900	335,250	992,400	1,887,550	606,163	4,572,771

**Source: Saungweme, Matsvai and Sakuhuni (2014)**

As shown by table 1.1 above the only time when more people in Zimbabwe were formally employed than informally was in 1993 and ever since the informal sector has been growing, with the ZimStats (2012) reporting that at least 3.7 million Zimbabweans were involved in the informal sector and of these 54.6% of those employed in this sector being females. It is not clear at what level these women were employed and how much empowered they are. Furniture manufacturing appears to have good business prospects in Zimbabwe especially

in the Glenview vicinity as every Hararean is familiar with this complex known to make high quality furniture and sells at much lower prices compared to city retailers and furniture dealers in Harare. There are however, a number of questions which this study seeks to resolve and some of which include: Are the women able to cope with this loss of formal employment? What are they doing after being retrenched? Are they able to venture into business? What kinds of businesses are women getting into after they have been retrenched? Are there any empowerment tools specific for women in Zimbabwe?

### 1.2 Theoretical framework

Theoretically the study was guided by the Women's Empowerment Framework otherwise known as the Longwe Framework which was developed by Sara Hlupekile Longwe, a consultant on gender and development from Lusaka, Zambia. The Longwe framework was envisioned to aid development planners to question what women's empowerment and equality means in practice, and wherefrom, to critically appraise to what level any development intervention is supporting this empowerment (March, Smyth and Mukhopadyay, 1999). According to Longwe women's empowerment refers to the enablement of women to take an equal place with men, and take part equally in the development process in order to attain control over the factors of production on an equal basis with men (Longwe, 1994).

Longwe (1994) also argues that numerous development literatures examines the extent to which equality between women and men has been attained according to the conventional sectors of the economy and society that is in terms of equality in education and employment amongst many others. This form of analysing equality by sectors concentrates on separate areas of social life, rather than on women's equality in the development process. The Longwe framework outlines that development means enabling people to take charge of their own lives, and escape from poverty. Poverty is seen as arising not from lack of productivity, but from oppression and exploitation. Longwe's framework is based on the concept of five unlike 'levels of equality'. The extent to which these are present in any area of social or economic life determines the level of women's empowerment (Longwe, 1994). The levels of equality are:

**Table 1.2: Levels of equality**

Control		
Participation	↑ Increased equality	↑ Increased empowerment
Conscientisation		
Access		
Welfare		

**Source: Sara Longwe (1994)**

The levels of equality are hierarchical as shown by table 1.2 above and if a development intervention focuses on the higher levels, it is more likely to result in greater women's empowerment than an empowerment project which focuses on the lower levels. Therefore, if an intervention concentrates on welfare only, it is very unlikely that women will find the project empowering, since equal participation in the decision-making process about certain resources is more important for achieving women's empowerment than equal access to resources; and neither participation nor access are as important as equal control (March et al., 1999).

When these levels of equality are used to analyse the impact of development interventions on women's equality and empowerment, it is important to understand that an ideal intervention does not necessarily show activities on every level. In fact, an intervention which is empowering for women will have many components which fit into the higher categories, but none in the lower ones. The 'Welfare' level restricts its focus to access to material resources; therefore, an intervention which addresses control of resources would be classified at a higher level, that is, under 'Control', thus it would be seen as concerned with a higher degree of women's equality and empowerment. Longwe's (1994) levels of equality are defined in more detail as follows:

**Welfare:** Longwe defines this as the level of women's material welfare, relative to men. Do women have equal access to resources such as food supply, income and, medical care?

**Access:** This is defined as women's access to the factors of production on an equal basis with men; equal access to land, labour, credit, training, marketing facilities, and all public services and benefits. Longwe points out that equality of access is obtained by applying the principle of equality of opportunity, which typically entails the reform of the law and administrative practices in order to remove all forms of discrimination against women.

**Conscientisation:** This is understood in the Longwe Framework as a conscious understanding of the difference between sex and gender, and an awareness that gender roles are cultural and can be changed. 'Conscientisation' also involves a belief that the sexual division of labour should be fair and agreeable to both sides, and not involve the economic or political domination of one sex by the other. A belief in sexual equality is the basis of gender awareness, and of collective participation in the process of women's development.

**Participation:** Longwe defines this level as women's equal participation in the decision-making process, in policy-making, planning, and administration. It is particularly an important aspect of development projects, where participation means involvement in needs-assessment, project formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Equality of participation means involving women in making the decisions by which their community will be affected, in a proportion which matches their proportion in the wider community.

**Control:** this term denotes women's control over the decision-making process through conscientisation and mobilisation, to achieve equality of control over the factors of production and the distribution of benefits. Equality of control means a balance of control between men and women, so that neither side dominates.

This framework forms the basis for this study and the research evaluates the level of empowerment as propounded by this framework. All the levels of empowerment as propounded by Longwe(1994) are envisaged in Zimbabwe's informal sector, and the Indigenisation and Economic empowerment is a development and empowerment intervention being championed by the government of Zimbabwe and the same policy is also encouraging Zimbabweans to focus on the control of the means of production and resources. As an example locals are encouraged to have control over their natural resources, but there are no specific guidelines on the level of involvement which women should be part of this process. Therefore, this study sought to evaluate the levels of empowerment which have been achieved in the informal furniture manufacturing sector as represented by the Glenview furniture manufacturing complex, which is a good proxy of the entire nation as this complex is very popular in Harare and in Zimbabwe.

### **1.3 Research problem**

Zimbabwe is saddled with challenges of high unemployment and low capacity utilisation in the formal industrial sector. This leaves the informal sector as the major economic backbone for Zimbabwe. This is all in light of the economic empowerment of the local citizens and the Indigenisation of the economy, with the majority of the equity in all companies with an asset base of US\$500, 000.00 or more being required to be owned at least 51% by local Zimbabweans. This appears to be good for the locals but a question still remains on the existence of guidelines to ensure the empowerment of women in general, through the Indigenisation policies and Act. This is in view of other past empowerment efforts which have not empowered men and women equitably. The land reform as an example did not benefit women as much as it did men, as affirmed by a study by Chingarande (2004) women beneficiaries under the A1 fast track land reform were 18 percent whilst only 12 percent benefited from the A2 land resettlement scheme. It was therefore imperative to study how the indigenisation of the economy has empowered women economically.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- a) To establish the extent of involvement of women in the furniture industry at the Glenview furniture complex.
- b) To determine the level of empowerment of women at the Glenview furniture complex.
- c) To establish challenges hindering women from participating in the informal furniture manufacturing industry.

## **II. Research Design and Methodology**

According to Cooper and Schindler (2009) research design is a plan and structure of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions. The research design is therefore a plan for the entire research study that gives the framework of the researcher's courses of action. The purpose of a research design is to assure the researcher that the evidence obtained enables her/him to effectively address the research problem in an unbiased manner. There are numerous designs from which a researcher can choose in order sufficiently and adequately address the research problem and a choice can be made from exploratory, explanatory, case study, and descriptive designs. Accordingly the study adopted a descriptive research design. Cherry (2012), describes descriptive researches as studies which seeks to depict what already exists in a group or population, thus, descriptive studies do not seek to measure the effect of a variable; they seek only to describe.

The population for this study was made up of all traders at the complex whose figure is variable on a daily basis but averages about 450 even though these statistics are from the informal records kept at the complex and the numbers vary regularly because some traders frequently change their locations for business and are highly mobile in nature but for the purpose of the study the population is 450. According to Best and Khan (2006) 10% of the target population is an adequately large sample, therefore this research had a sample size of at least 10% of all business people at the Glen View furniture complex and precisely the sample was 50 participants.

## 2.1 Data collection instruments

These are apparatuses used to collect data from participants and this study used questionnaires and interviews to gather data.

### 2.1.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires with both structured and semi structured as well as closed ended and open ended questions were administered to participants at the Glenview furniture complex. The structured questions consisted of closed-ended questions also referred to as forced-choice questions (Saunders et al., 2009). One set of questionnaires was personally administered by the researcher and the questionnaire is provided as part of the appendices. Use of the questionnaires as an instrument was largely influenced by the literacy level in Zimbabwe reported to be in excess of 85%, which means the majority of respondents are able to read and write and therefore can be able to respond to the questions asked alone. Moreover, use of questionnaires was because these were less expensive to administer than conducting interviews. The questionnaires also allowed for confidentiality since the respondents did not write their names and there was no influence or bias from the researcher as the respondents completed the questionnaires in the absence of the researcher. A total of 40 questionnaires were distributed.

### 2.1.2 Interviews

The researcher used face to face interviews as a research instrument after considering the key advantages of the face to face interview technique that its ability to elicit more information as compared to questionnaires. Use of the interviews was also for the purpose of triangulating data collected from questionnaires. These interviews were conducted with those members of the Glenview furniture complex who had managerial or administrative responsibilities, that is, members of the management committee of the complex. A total of 10 interviews were scheduled.

## 2.2 Data collection procedures

Questionnaires were delivered to participants who were given one week to complete the questionnaires after which they were collected in person by the researcher. In order to follow-up on participants, the researcher obtained their contact details only for the purpose of getting hold of the respondents when questionnaire had not been returned. Furthermore, the researcher had a contact person who is part of the traders at the complex and this assistant was responsible for distributing the questionnaires as well as collecting the completed questionnaires. Interviews were conducted informally with no prior booking since the operations of the furniture manufacturers are highly informalised. The researcher interviewed only those respondents who were willing and ready to entertain the researcher whilst they were doing their other chores. These interviews were conducted predominantly in vernacular Shona and the researcher transcribed the responses before translating them into English for purposes of presenting findings for this study.

## III. Results and Discussion

The study had targeted a sample of a total of 50 participants from the Glen View furniture complex. 40 questionnaires were distributed and 10 interviews had been scheduled to be conducted with players at the Glen View furniture complex who are part of the management committee of the Glen View furniture complex. Out of the targeted 40 questionnaires 36 were responded to representing a response rate of (36/40) 90%. The researcher had also scheduled to conduct a total of 10 face-to-face interviews, of these only 7 were held successfully to completion, representing a success rate of (7/10) 70%. The combination of interviews and questionnaires translates to an overall response rate of (43/50) 86% as shown in table 4.1 below:

**Table 1: Response rate**

Instrument	Targeted	Responded to	Percentage response rate
Questionnaires	40	36	90%
Interviews	10	7	70%
Total	50	43	86%

Presented above is the summary of the response rates for the two instruments used to collect primary data. Presented below are the demographic features of the participants in the study. Before focusing on the presentation and discussion of the key objectives of the study, the demographics of the respondents are shown in Table 2. Majority of respondents were female, and had secondary education as their highest qualification. One third of the respondents indicated were owner managers of at the Glenview furniture complex and these were the majority followed by purely employees. Majority of the respondents were also aged between 30 and 40 years.

**Table 2: Characteristics of respondents (n=43)**

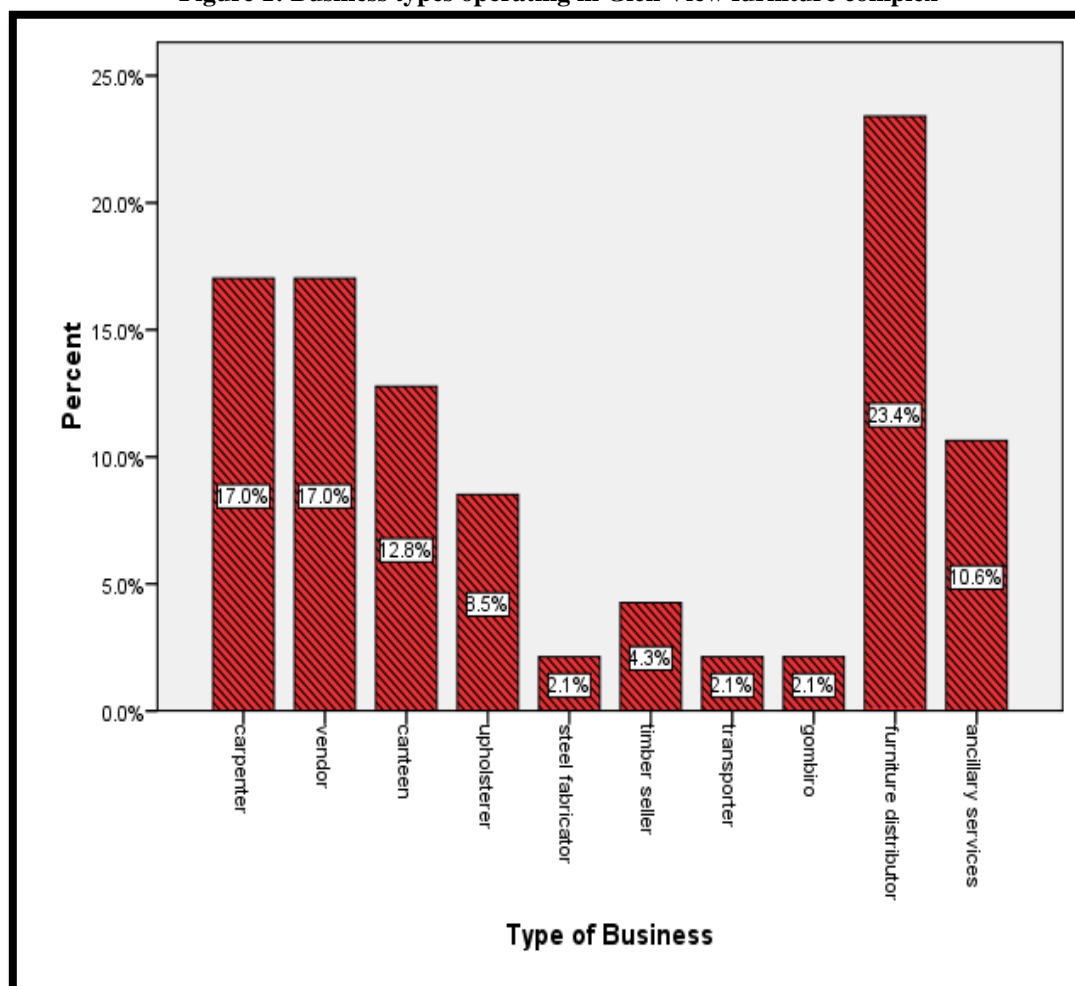
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>		
	11	32		
<b>Age</b>	<b>≤ 30 yrs</b>	<b>≤ 40 yrs</b>	<b>≤ 50 yrs</b>	<b>&gt; 50 yrs</b>
	14	22	4	3
<b>Education</b>	<b>University Degree</b>	<b>Secondary Education</b>	<b>Primary Education</b>	<b>Other</b>
	11	22	8	2
<b>Position held by respondents</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Owner/Manager</b>	<b>Employee</b>
	10	6	14	13

Presented in table 2 above are some of the key demographic features but of these some were outstanding and had to be presented separately below.

**3.1.1 Type of business operated by respondents**

Although the Glen View furniture complex is known for the production of high quality furniture for use domestically as well as in office use, there a number of other businesses being operated within the complex. Some of the businesses are complementary to the furniture industry whilst some of the businesses are meant to supplement the production of furniture.

**Figure 1: Business types operating in Glen View furniture complex**



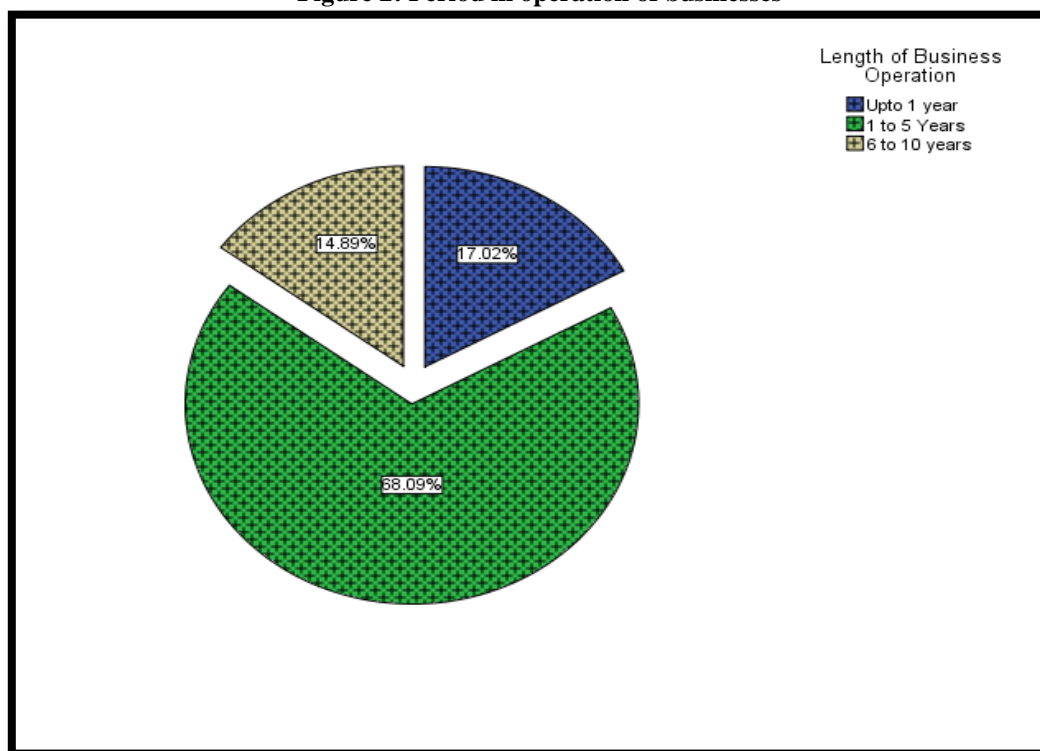
As depicted by figure 1 above the most represented business by respondents was for furniture distributors with 23.4% of the respondents. This was probably because the study focused on women respondents as is also suggested by the low representation in respondents for steel fabricators, transporters and 'gombiros' which had 2.1% of respondents each. The possible reason was that women were shunning away from the heavy aspects of the Glen View furniture complex. Canteen operators and vendors were equally represented in the

study. The business composition was also seen to be too varied by as observed by Kabeer (2005) in a study conducted in Bangladesh.

### 3.1.2 Period of operation for businesses

The period of operation of the various businesses operated by the participants in the study are shown in figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Period in operation of businesses**



As shown in figure 2 above most of the businesses (68.09%) operated by respondents have been operational for a period between 1 and 5 years, whilst those which have been in operation for 6 to 10 years have been the least represented with 14.89% of respondents' businesses. The majority of businesses run by women were also generally made up of young businesses in a study done by Desai (2005).

### 3.1.3 Extent of involvement of women

In order to establish the extent of involvement of women at the Glen View furniture complex a number of closed ended questions were asked and the responses obtained are presented hereunder.

#### Ownership of furniture making stalls by women

The following are the responses obtained as to women in the glen view complex owned any furniture manufacturing stalls:

**Table 3: Women ownership of furniture manufacturing stalls**

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	14	32.6	32.6
	Agree	21	48.8	81.4
	Not Sure	3	7.0	88.4
	Disagree	5	11.6	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

As shown in table 3 a total of 81.4% indicated that women do own furniture manufacturing stalls in the Glen View furniture complex whilst an additional 7% of respondents were not sure of whether or not women own such stalls. It was only 11.6% who disagreed with the fact that women own furniture manufacturing stalls at the Glen View furniture complex. This indicates that there were women who furniture manufacturing stalls,



however, it could not be established how many of the variety of furniture were produced by women. It appears the level of empowerment by the ownership of furniture manufacturing stalls at the Glen View furniture complex is depicted by the Longwe's (1994) low level of empowerment as women are given access to the means of production.

### Women only want to work at the Glen View complex

The question was asked as a follow up to the question above and the responses obtained are shown below in figure 3:

Figure 3: Women on want to work

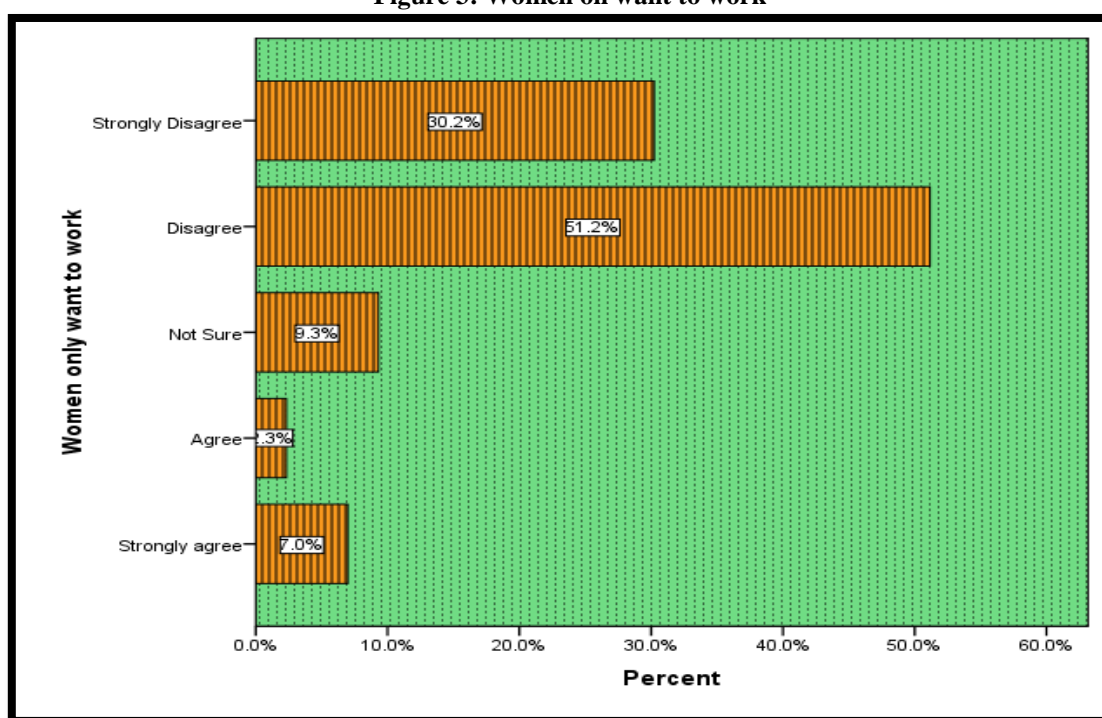


Figure 3 shows that majority of the respondents were in disagreement of the fact that women only wanted to work at the Glen View furniture manufacturing complex implying that women do really seek empowerment in the informal sector. It was however, gathered from the interviews conducted that women were still somehow sceptical to get involved in certain aspects of the industry as they end up being called by names. For example the name 'gombiro' is a very common name for those who seek to capitalize from buyers' ignorance by selling things they do not own but which they are aware of their existence. Women because of their desire for dignity and uprightness do not desire to be involved in such forms of involvement. Moreover, some of the jobs in the furniture manufacturing industry tend to be heavy and as such most women are said to be either too smart or too weak to handle the demands of such jobs. The fact was confirmed by the extent of women who were found to be involved as sales ladies or others who preferred to offer such support services as canteen services as well as fruit or airtime vendors.

### 3.1.4 Levels of empowerment of women

The level of empowerment of women is a complex variable which required the judgement of the researcher after careful consideration of the responses obtained from all the questions asked through the questionnaires administered and the interviews conducted. Empowerment is generally regarded as the course of action by which a person or group develops vital understanding and action, or the capacity to act tenaciously and successfully for desired ends (Rowlands, 1997). The word "empowerment" is used across an assortment of organizations and academic fields, and thus is difficult to define besides in relation to a given context. For example, "empowerment" outlined highly in U.S. essential political movements of the 1960s, is found in social work, psychology, and education literature, and has been taken up by feminist and development organizations in the Global North and South (Oxaal and Baden, 1997).

Tracing the concept of empowerment over centuries, Batliwala (2007) concludes that the inbuilt variability of the term which permitted "empowerment" to feature so notably in diverse struggles for social justice also enabled its "de-politicization" by governments, mainstream development organizations, and



policymakers in the 1990s. In the same manner levels of empowerment are also difficult to distinguish clearly but however, this study was theoretically guided by the Sarah Longwe framework, which identifies the levels of empowerment in developmental issues as follows, Longwe (1994):

- ❖ Welfare
- ❖ Access
- ❖ Conscientisation
- ❖ Participation:
- ❖ Control

According to the Longwe (1994) framework women are empowered at the lower levels where they are granted access to the means of production but have no control over the decision making process at the Glen View furniture complex. The preserve for decision making was said by those interviewed to be for those with political power and influence. Ownership of stalls in the Glen View complex was said to be patronised and not based on any business merit and a number of women are said to be shying away from the political involvement preferring to play it safe since politics can sometimes be dirty for these women. This information is shown in figure 4 below, which shows the positions held by respondents to the questionnaires distributed.

**Figure 4: Level of participation by women**

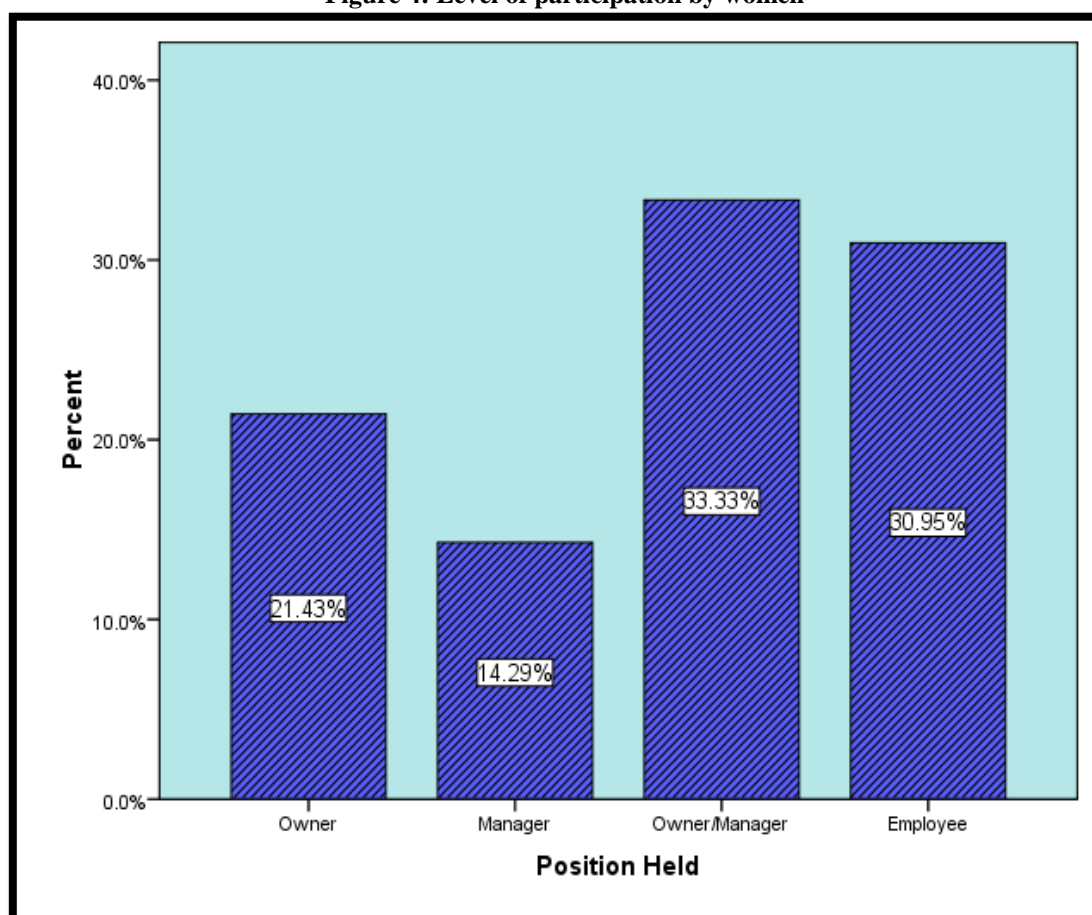


Figure 4 show that 21.43% of respondents were owners, whilst 33.33% were owner-managers which show that the majority of respondents were owners of the means of production at the Glen View furniture complex. Similar levels of participation were obtained by Desai (2005) and Akhtar (2008) in studies done in India. Employees and managers were also equally represented with a combined total of just above 45% of the total respondents.

### **3.1.5 Problems hindering economic participation of women**

In order to establish the challenges and problems hindering women from economically participating economically at the Glen View complex a number of closed ended questions were asked. The responses obtained are presented here one-by-one.

### Lack of furniture making skills

On the challenge of women lacking skills for manufacturing furniture the following responses were obtained:

Figure 5: Women lack furniture manufacturing skills

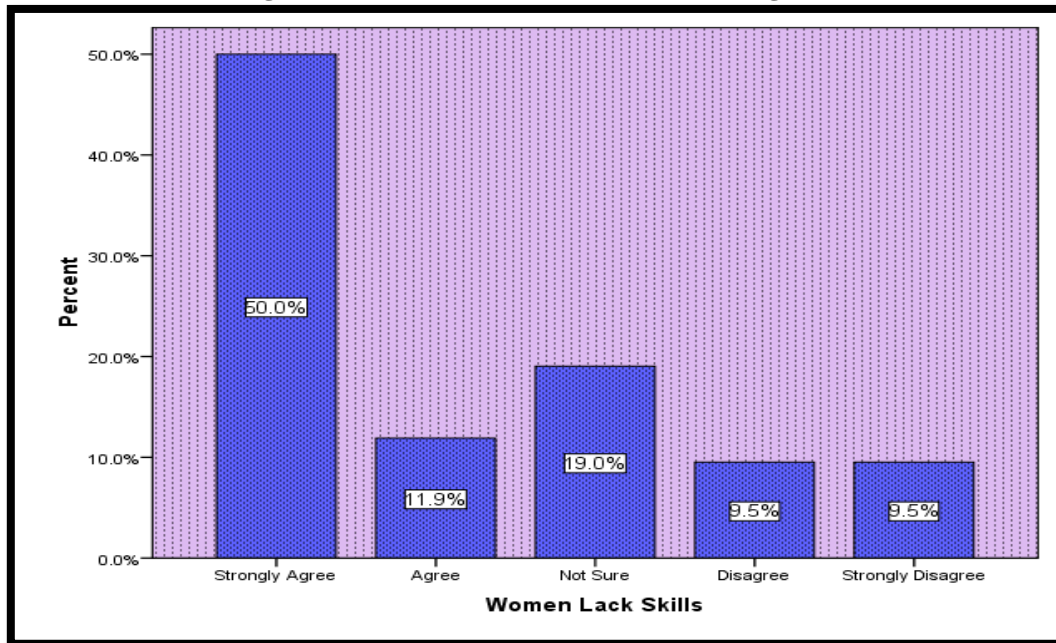


Figure 5 shows that a total of 61.9% (50%+11.9%) agreed that women do not have the skills required to open their own businesses as furniture manufacturers. As shown in figure 5 women have a major challenge that they lack key furniture manufacturing skills which are basic for them to get into the furniture business. Dasharathi (2008) also found that women in Bangladesh were not enthusiastic to obtain skills in certain fields which are regarded to be male dominated and this appears to be the position with the women at the Glen View furniture complex.

### Lack of business support for women

This was another challenge which the study sought to find how prevalent it was for the women doing business at the Glen View furniture complex. The responses obtained are given in the pie chart below:

Figure 6: Women lack business support



54.55% of respondents strongly agreed whilst a further 38.64% agreed that women at the Glen View complex lack business support whilst a mere 4.55% were in disagreement that women lack business support. As shown in figure 6 there is a major challenge for women business people that they lack business support and therefore, the relevant authorities ought to offer the relevant business support required by women so that they venture into business in the furniture manufacturing sector and generally in the informal sector so that government policies can be realized. The lack of business support for women was also found to be a problem by Tafere and Camfield (2009) in Ethiopia as well as by Van Niekerk and Quene (2006) in South Africa. Similar, challenges were also reported by Leach and Staram (2002) and Isserles (2003).

### **Other challenges**

Some of the challenges identified by the participants in the study worthy noting included:

- ❖ Financial challenges as most women were regarded to be poor as there are few women in wage earning employment and therefore are unable to raise the required funds to start furniture businesses
- ❖ Lack of technical skills, with the patriarchy background in Zimbabwe the girl child was always encouraged to study cookery related subjects in schools and as result most women had never had experience in carpentry.

### **3.2 Conclusions and recommendations**

The following are the conclusions derived from the study as they relate to the objectives of the study:

- ❖ Women are involved at the Glen View furniture complex to a greater extent but however, they are not involved in the furniture manufacturing business most of the women are working as sales people at the furniture manufacturing stalls owned by others or they offer ancillary services such as provision of Ecocash services, airtime vending, canteen services as well as fruit and other food items vending.
- ❖ Women are empowered at the lower levels in terms of the Longwe (1994) framework as women at the Glen View furniture complex are given access and welfare issues are addressed as the majority of the women were employed and those who own furniture making stalls do not have decision making authority since there is a complex at the complex which appears to be male dominated from the sentiments passed by respondents.
- ❖ Women are facing a number of challenges hindering their involvement and participation at the Glen View furniture complex and these challenges include but not limited to lack of business support for women, lack of business skills and technical skills for women to participate in the furniture making businesses as well as the lack financial resources and support to ensure women get into established businesses in the informal sector.

These conclusions have been drawn from the findings obtained from the respondents to the questionnaires as well as from the interviews conducted and the findings are based from a wide spectrum of respondents who have different backgrounds and as a result of the triangulation of data collection instruments and respondents findings obtained are likely to be reliable.

Based upon the findings and conclusions drawn from the study given above the researcher gives the following recommendations to all stakeholders in Zimbabwe's economic planning and policy making as well as stakeholders who have an interest in the empowerment of women. The study therefore recommends that:

- ❖ The Ministry of Women's affairs and Gender issues must ensure in every local business setting such as a complex there is a gender balance between men and women so that decisions and policies which will be made are gender sensitive and not oppressive to women. Women should be incorporated in the highest decision making levels and these women must be able and remember to champion the cause for women so that more women are empowered economically for the good of the citizenry of Zimbabwe.
- ❖ Women should be supported with all resources necessary for them to get involved and participate in the economic affairs of the nation and thereby uplifting their economic and social statuses which improves the welfare of their families as well as their own economic welfare. These resources should include financial resources for purposes of business set up and expansion and this should be done following the format which was employed in the Asia Pacific region in countries such as India where the Graemeen Bank had women empowerment as their target customers and provided loans without stringent normal lending conditions.
- ❖ The authorities should not hinder the business advancement of women at the Glen View furniture complex so that those who are doing business are encouraged to grow their businesses rather than being forced out of business as a result of unfavourable conditions such as hard licensing requirements as well as prohibitive licensing fees and conditions. Moreover, women who are doing businesses no matter how small should not be harassed by the authorities and should rather be nurtured and groomed for greater business participation and growth of their operations.
- ❖ Women must generally be encouraged to get into business by way of providing them with technical skills in businesses such as carpentry, building and welding so that women are not sidelined as a result of lacking

the requisite technical as well as business management skills which usually results in the majority of those women who own businesses in this area not benefiting as intended as they are short-changed by their employees who are better informed and knowledgeable than the business persons.

### References

- [1]. Awumbila M. (2006) "Gender Equality and Poverty in Ghana: Implications for Poverty Reduction Strategies." *GeoJournal* 67: 149-161.
- [2]. Best, J.W. & Kahn, J. (2006) *Research in Education*: New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd.
- [3]. Batliwala S. (2007) "Taking the Power Out of Empowerment - an Experiential Account." *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4-5: 557-565.
- [4]. Carr E.S. (2003) "Rethinking Empowerment Theory Using a Feminist Lens: The Importance of Process." *Affilia* 18, no. 8: 8-20.
- [5]. Charnes J. and Saskia W. (2003) "Measuring Women's Empowerment: an Assessment of the Gender-related Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure." *Journal of Human Development* 4, no. 3: 419-435.
- [6]. Chingarande S.D. (2004) *Women and Access to Land in the Context of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme*. Policy Brief Prepared for The African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS), [www.zpt.co.zw/docs.women.pdf](http://www.zpt.co.zw/docs.women.pdf) (accessed 02/04/16)
- [7]. Golla A. M., A. Malhotra, P. Nanda, and R. Mehra. (2011) *Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment: Definition, Framework and Indicators*. Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women.
- [8]. Ibrahim, S. and Sabina A. (2007) "Agency & Empowerment: A Proposal for Internationally Comparable Indicators." Paper prepared for the workshop 'Missing Dimensions of Poverty Data,' Oxford UK.
- [9]. Kabeer N. (2011) "Between Affiliation and Autonomy: Navigating Pathways of Women's Empowerment and Gender Justice in Rural Bangladesh." *Development and Change* 42, no. 2: 499-528.
- [10]. Malhotra, A., S. R. Schuler, and C. Boender (2002) "Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development." Background paper prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives.
- [11]. Mosedale, S. (2005) "Assessing Women's Empowerment: Towards a Conceptual Framework." *Journal of International Development* 17: 243-257.
- [12]. Oxaal Z., and S. Baden (1997) *Gender and empowerment: definitions, approaches and implications for policy*. BRIDGE: Development - Gender 40. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- [13]. United Nations. (Accessed March 12, 2016) "Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women ." *Millennium Development Goals*. Last modified 2012. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>.
- [14]. The World Bank, (2005). *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. Edited by Deepa Narayan. Washington D.C.

Kapesa Tonderai" Women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurial opportunities in Zimbabwe's informal furniture industry" *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)*, Vol. 21, No. 10, 2019, pp. -44-55