

Livelihood strategies of female-headed households in the Coloured community of Sunningdale in Harare, Zimbabwe

The turbulent economic and political situation that has plagued Zimbabwe over the past two decades has had a dire effect on its urban population. The country's tempestuous situation has not only threatened urbanites' access to basic necessities but has also rendered many households and particularly female-headed households vulnerable to poverty and deprivation. Thus the primary objective of this study was to analyse and understand how coloured female-headed households in Sunningdale, Harare, Zimbabwe are surviving in the context of the current economic and political crises in the country. Essentially the study sought to achieve the three main objectives. The first objective was to identify and document the current livelihood strategies that a small sample of coloured female-headed households have adopted; the second was to explore the challenges and problems faced by female-headed households in their daily lives and lastly, the third was to establish what support mechanisms were available to these households to cope with the challenges and problems they face in generating an income and catering to their household needs. Methodologically the study employed a qualitative research approach with in-depth semi-structured interviews being used to collect data from five female-headed households. The data was then analysed using an interpretive approach and presented textually. Essentially the study found that in terms of the first research objective that coloured female-headed households engaged in a range of livelihood activities in order to earn a living, with informal trading being the main livelihood activity that the participants relied on to acquire an income to support their households. With regards to the second objective, it was revealed that the female heads interviewed faced numerous challenges ranging from economic to social problems that limited their ability to develop sustainable livelihoods, thereby increasing their risk to fall into poverty and validating their feminization of poverty. In terms of the third and last objective, the study found that the female heads did not have many reliable support mechanisms available to them thereby limiting their ability to achieve financial and social empowerment.