BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

Impact of youth led initiatives in community development. A case Study of Ward 15 Chimanimani District

By

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ABSTRACT

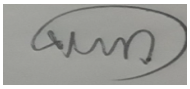
The impact of youth led initiatives in community development. A case study of ward 15 Chimanimani district had the following objectives: to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of youth driven initiatives in ward 15 Chimanimani district, focusing on their contribution in community development, to identify the barriers hindering youth empowerment and their efforts in developing their communities and to determine the factors (both internal and external) that enable and support youth engagement, and to analyse the best practices and lessons learned from other successful youth led initiatives, with the aim of replicating effective strategies in other rural communities. The study made use of a qualitative research design making use of in depth interviews and semi-structured interviews as data collection methods. The study findings suggest that youth led initiatives were effective in driving positive change. There are still many barriers that are hindering youth empowerment and their efforts in developing their communities and this includes resource constraints, material gaps, social, cultural, gender based and institutional barriers. The study recommends that youth led initiatives use a gender transformative approach to project design in order to combat the cultural norms that restrict participation and that the Ward Development Coordinator explicitly co-opt youth representatives from the ongoing programs as voting members in order to address their exclusion from local governance processes

DECLARATION FORM

I Leane Rutendo Undenge (B224014B), hereby declare that this dissertation is a result of my own research. I am aware that plagiarism is a serious academic offense and that falsifying information is a breach of peace and governance ethics, therefore I truly declare that the research have followed all ethics that are in the peace and governance profession.

Student:  Date: 03/09/26

Supervisor: Dr Chipaike  Date: 03/09/26

Chairperson  Date : 08/09/26

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents Mr. and Mrs Undenge, they have been my source of inspiration, love and motivation**.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to appreciate many people who helped towards the success of my research project. Great thanks to my family and friends for their unwavering support and all the respondents for their willingness to participate in my research project. Above all, I would to take this opportunity to thank God who made the four-year journey at Bindura University of Science Education a possible one.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

MYEDVT - Ministry of Youth Empowerment Development and Vocational Training

PYD - Positive Youth Development

FDGs - Focus Group Discussions

GBV - Gender Based Violence

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals

ZIMSTAT - Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It has long been known that enhancing local communities' social, economic and environmental well-being requires community development. According to Ndungu and Karungu (2019) involving young people in community development projects is crucial to achieving sustainable development goals. Youth-led projects have become important forces behind sustainable community development especially in areas that are recovering from socioeconomic and environmental difficulties like Chimanimani. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stated that youth engagement is essential to achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Unlike traditional development techniques that sometimes marginalise young people youth-led programs promote agency and group action enabling communities to harness new perspectives for sustainable growth.

Young people often embrace intersectional ideas which ensure inclusivity for marginalised groups and foster equitable growth. In this regard, the Chimanimani district's Ward 15 is a noteworthy case study that shows how young people are actively enhancing their communities through creative neighbourhood-based solutions.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study's primary goal is to comprehend how youth-led projects affect grassroots development in Ward 15 of the Chimanimani District. This entails being aware of how such programs support local improvements in the economic, environmental and social spheres.

1.3 Statement of the research problem

The entrenched marginalisation of young people's capabilities in community development projects is one of the primary challenges in the Chimanimani district. Ditton (2015) asserts that a

crucial flaw in community development strategy is the ineffective use of youth potential, which results in communities that are less inclusive and resilient for all. Lack of resources, restricted access to learning opportunities, decision-making platforms and a prevalent cultural perspective that undervalues their ability all contribute to this problem. Johnson (2015) asserts that neglecting to address these rural hurdles not only hinders young people but also actively weakens the future of the entire community by denying a generation the opportunity to contribute their energy and skills to local development. Thus, this can lead to situations where youth's energy is not effectively applied to address the ward's pressing development challenges. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the specific initiatives undertaken by youth in the area, assessing their contributions to economic development, social cohesion and community engagement.

1.4 Research objectives

1 To examine the nature and organization of youth led initiatives in Chimanimani ward 15.

2 To assess the role of youth-led initiative in addressing community challenges and utilising local resources including factors that enable or constrain their effectiveness.

3 To analyse the best conditions under which youth led initiatives contribute to community development outcomes in Chimanimani Ward 15.

1.5 Research questions

1. What is the nature and organisation of youth led initiatives in Ward 15?

2. How do youth led initiatives utilise local resources to address community challenges in Chimanimani ward 15 and what factors enable or constrain their effectiveness?

3. What conditions do youth led initiatives contribute to community development outcomes in ward 15 Chimanimani?

1.6 Assumptions of the study

1 The assumption is that identifiable youth led initiatives (formal or informal) exist within Chimanimani district and that they have some observable goals aimed at some form of community development.

2 The assumption is that the cultural, social and political environment of Chimanimani district will have influence the nature and operation of youth led projects.

1.7 Significance of the study

While there is a growing body of research supporting the positive impact of youth-led initiatives in community development, there is still a need for localized studies such as the one in Chimanimani District ward 15 that can provide insights into the unique proactive roles young people are playing in promoting social change and tackling regional issues .By looking at these activities a lot can be learned about how young people viewpoints , creativity and energy support community resilience and sustainable development.

By carrying out this research on "Impact of youth led initiatives in community development. A case study of Chimanimani district, ward 15 it will be significant to several stakeholders including local government representatives, Non-Government Organisations, community leaders and the youth themselves. This is so because findings from this study will then help guide community development plans and policies targeted at youth participation at the local level. In addition, Non-Governmental Organisations will use them to create more successful initiatives that empower young people and make the most of their abilities. Local leaders might learn how to encourage youths and other community members to work together to solve local problems. Most importantly, young people of Chimanimani will gain from realizing their potential

influence and honing their leadership abilities strengthening their positions as proactive change makers in their communities.

Research on this topic is important because it has the potential to impact the community and beyond in numerous ways. Firstly, by identifying effective youth-led projects and emphasizing exemplary practices that may be applied in other areas the research can improve community development programs. It might also highlight the difficulties and obstacles young people encounter when trying to bring about change which could help guide national and local policy decisions meant to address these problems. Furthermore, by promoting more conducive circumstances for youth participation the study can increase understanding and appreciation of the role that youth play in community development.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

This study's goal is limited to understanding the effects of youth-driven projects on community development. Only youth residing in Chimanimani East constituency particularly ward 15 are included in the study. The age group is limited to individuals between the ages of 18 and 35, according Zimbabwe's constitution.

1.9 Limitations of the study

A major challenge encountered during the study was accessing verifiable data from informal undocumented youth-led initiatives in ward 15 due to varying levels of formalization. This inconsistency posed difficulties in triangulating information and objectively assessing the long-term impact of community development activities across all groups. Therefore it is recommended that the Chimanimani Rural District Council in partnership with the Ministry of Youth Empowerment Development and Vocational Training establish a ward level youth initiative database in ward 15.

1.10 Definition of key words

Youth is defined as a person between 15 and 35, transitioning from childhood to adulthood from dependence to independence National Youth Policy (2020-2025)

Youth-led initiatives are formally or informally structured actions, programs or movements in which young people (typically aged 15–35) take primary leadership roles in identifying, designing, implementing and evaluating solutions to community challenges according to Ginwright and Cammarota (2022)

Community development is defined as the process of transforming a community into a desired state on the social, political and economic fronts with the primary goal of raising the local population's standard of living Riswan (2021)

1.11 Dissertation outline

The research project is organised in five chapters.

Chapter One: This chapter gives an overview introduction to the study. In the chapter, the researcher gives a funnel approach to the impacts of youth led initiatives in community development. The chapter also states the problem at hand and lists the research objectives and research questions. Other critical elements in the chapter include the significance of the study and dissertation outline.

Chapter Two: This chapter provides a critical review of literature that will open lines of further enquiry, suggest recommendations that the investigation can implement. In that manner, the chapter will cover the theoretical framework of the study and the conceptual framework.

Chapter Three: The chapter provides an outline of the study whereby it will identify, define, describe and justify the various methods that will be used to ensure that succinct answers to the research questions are provided. The chapter will cover the philosophical underpinnings, research approach, research design, methods of data collection, data collection instruments, research domain, study population, sampling method, sample size, research procedures, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, data analysis and ethical considerations will be presented in the chapter.

Chapter Four: This chapter serves to present, interpret, analyse and discuss the findings of the study. The findings of the study will be discussed comparatively with the use of empirical literature.

Chapter Five: This chapter gives a conclusive remark to the investigation. A summary of the study will be provided from a general to objective context. Conclusions will be made on all objectives of the study. Recommendations will be provided in line with the findings obtained in the investigation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of literature and theoretical frameworks applicable in understanding the impact of youth-led initiatives in community development, with specific attention to the context of Chimanimani District Ward 15. The review examines key concepts, theoretical perspectives and experimental findings that inform the understanding of youth-led development in rural Zimbabwean contexts. The chapter begins by conceptualizing youth-led development and its application in community settings then proceeds to establish the theoretical foundations that underpin this study including Positive Youth Development and Resilience Theory.

It then summarises previous studies on the types, effects and difficulties of youth-led community development projects, particularly on African and Zimbabwean contexts. The chapter concludes by pointing out important gaps in the body of literature that this study aims to fill as well as outlining the conceptual framework that will direct this inquiry.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework guiding the study. Positive Youth Development and Community Resilience Theory are used in complementary ways to explain how youth led initiatives in Chimanimani District Ward 15 build youth capacities and mobilise community resources for development outcome.

2.2.1 Positive Youth Development theory

Positive Youth Development is an asset based framework that shifts focus from fixing youth problems to building youth capacities Lerner et al (2005). Rather than viewing youth as at risks to be managed, PYD positions them as resources to be developed for their own and their communities benefit. Benson and Scales (2009).The 5Cs model offers a multifaceted view of positive development, is a key theoretical idea in the PYD framework. According to Lerner et al. (2005), the five Cs in the developmental concept are competence, confidence, character, connection and caring. According to Alicea (2012), competence is the ability to act effectively in specific settings; confidence reflects positive self-worth. Character entails integrity and moral standards; Connection refers to positive bonds with people and institutions and person's empathy and sympathy for other people is referred to as caring Dimitrova (2018).

However, PYD argues that development does not end with individual assets. When youth possess the 5Cs a 6th C emerges: Contribution the enactment of behaviours that benefit self, family, community and civil society Lerner et al (2005).

For the purpose of this study the 6Cs are operationalized within Chimanimani ward 15 context. Competence is conceptualised as skills relevant to local shocks such as climate smart agriculture. Confidence refers to youth agency in community structures. Connection denotes ties to post cyclone Idai recovery networks, youth clubs and adult allies in ward governance. Character entails transparent and accountable management of community resources such as ISAL funds. Caring is operationalized as support for vulnerable groups including child headed households affected by disaster. Contribution is therefore operationalized as youth led initiatives that aim to produce community development outcomes in ward 15 including food security projects and disaster preparedness activities.

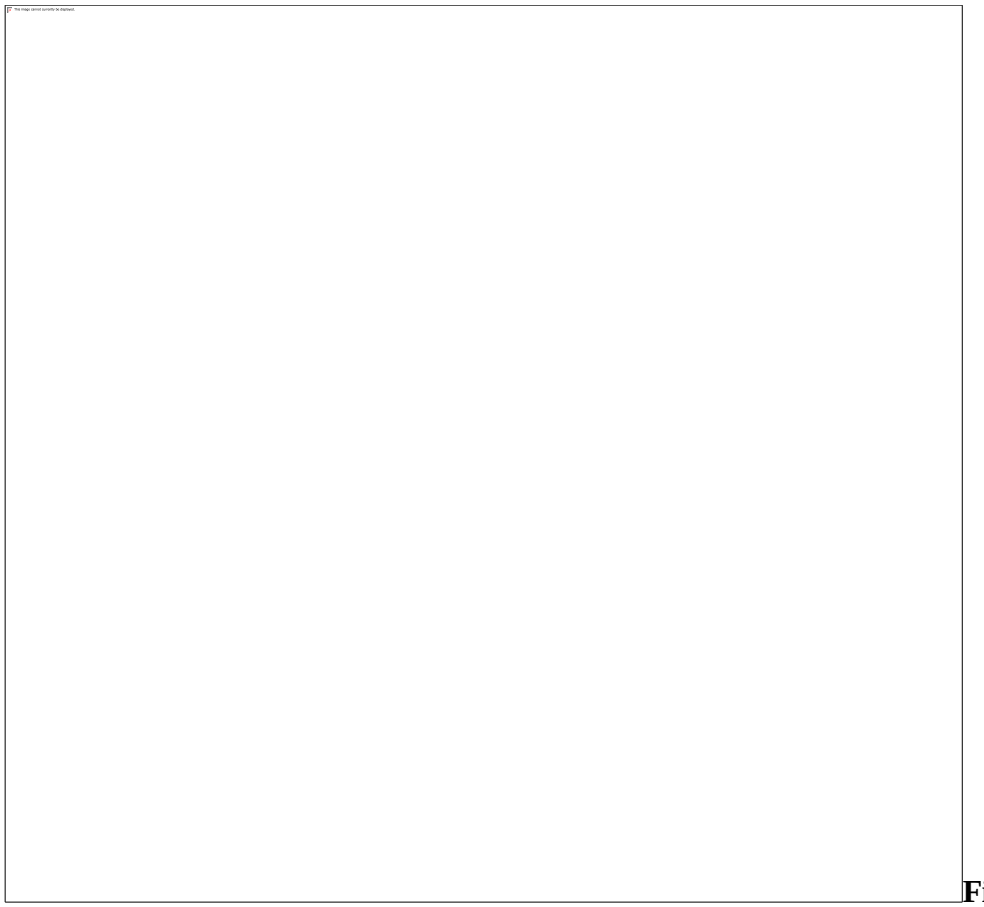


Figure 1. PYD 6Cs Model Applied to Youth-Led Initiatives in Chimanimani ward 15

While PYD explains how youth develop the capacity to lead, Resilience Theory is required to explain how that leadership activates community capitals to produce development outcomes in ward 15.

2.2.2 Community resilience theory

According to Norris et al (2008) Community Resilience Theory explains the capacity of a social system to absorb disturbances, adapt to change and transform in response to shocks and stresses. Unlike individual resilience which focuses on personal coping community resilience is a collective process grounded in the resources and relationships available within a specific place

Magis (2010). The framework is operationalized through the community capitals model which identifies eight interdependent stocks of resources which are social, human, natural, economic, political, technology, community participation and stakeholder engagement Emery and Flora (2006). Resilience emerges not from the mere presence of these capitals but from their mobilization and combination during crises.

For ward 15 Chimanimani, this framework explains how youth led initiatives draw on specific capitals to address compound shocks. Natural capital includes communal gardens or water sources degraded by cyclone Idai. Social capital comprises burial sociaties and youth networks that coordinate labour. Political capital refers to youth access to ward development committees. When activated together these capitals produce development outcomes.



Figure 2. Shows Community Resilience Framework applied to Youth led initiatives in Chimanimani ward 15.

The model above illustrates how eight interdependent capitals enable communities to absorb, adapt and recover from shocks. In this study youth led initiatives mobilise these capitals to produce development outcomes following cyclone Idai adapted from Norris et al (2008).

2.3 Conceptual framework: Understanding youth-led community development

Youth is the transition period from the dependence of childhood to independent adulthood UNDP (2014). According to Fiveable (2024) youth led initiatives are programs or projects that are designed, developed and implemented by young people typically aimed at addressing issues relevant to their communities or social issues. A number of distinguishing traits set youth-led projects apart from other types of youth involvement. Youth agency is critical in enabling young people to take ownership of their development and drive positive change in their communities.

Among these are youth agency and autonomy which allow young people to have significant control and decision-making authority over the project participatory approaches which involve community members as partners rather than beneficiaries and contextual awareness and flexibility which allow projects to effectively address local needs and circumstances. Contextual understanding and adaptability enable initiatives to respond effectively to local conditions and needs. These traits may be seen in Chimanimani through community resilience-building initiatives that address the unique environmental and socioeconomic circumstances of the area youth-led agro ecological businesses and catastrophe risk reduction initiatives. Youth led community development initiatives have the potential to promote sustainable livelihoods, reduce disaster risk and enhance community resilience.

Community development according to 0''Brien (2009) refers to the mobilization of community members to actively participate in initiative aimed at poverty alleviation, solving social

problems and achieving socio-economic development. Community development literature is dominated by two broad paradigms which is the needs-based approach and asset based community development. However, this study adopts an asset-based lens to community development, while needs based models position rural communities like ward 15 as deficient and youth as recipients of interventions, ABCD recognises youth as primary assets whose competence, social networks and adaptive energy drive development. This aligns with Positive Youth Development view of youth as resources to be development and with Resilience Theory's emphasis on utilising existing capabilities to absorb shocks. In the context of Chimanimani ward 15, a rural area affected climate shocks like cyclone Idai, an asset based view better explains how youth-led initiatives transform individual competence into community resilience. Therefore, impact in this study is not measured by gaps by outsiders but by assets mobilised by youth to achieve community goals

2.3.1 Global overview of youth led initiatives and community development

Youth-led initiatives are recognized as powerful drivers of sustainable development, with young people contributing innovative solutions to global challenges from climate action to food security. According to the United Nations (2019), young people are not just victims of climate change but also change agents, entrepreneurs and innovators who are contributing significantly to the cause. Many regional initiatives are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDGs 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 13 (climate action) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). These efforts frequently address areas of insufficient institutional support or fill governance gaps. Valentine et al (2019) argues that institutional neglect often forces youth to innovate, collaborate and develop alternative systems to drive community solutions. International bodies like the United Nations through the UN Youth Strategy: Youth 2030 promote youth engagement as essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2.3.2 Regional overview of youth led initiatives and community development

With 70% of its people under 30, Africa has the youngest population in the world. Through youth-led projects that successfully address local needs with resilience, creativity, and civic responsibility, this group in Africa is progressively influencing the development agenda. According to Rappel and Steinbach (2023), the media's prevailing narratives for a number of decades portrayed young people in Africa as lazy people who detested hard labour and as perpetrators of violent conflicts. For example Kasherwa (2020) imply that African policymakers frequently view youth as a problem rather than important development stakeholders. Yeboah et al, (2017) noted however that a growing body of research from a range of contexts has challenged some of these generally held beliefs acknowledging African youth as resilient, hard-working and creative agents. Research and policy discussions acknowledge the critical role that youth and youth-led civil society organisations play in fostering peace and sustainable development Hilder (2022). The African Union Youth Charter adopted in (2006) serves as foundational document that not only recognizes the potential of young people but also provides framework that promotes the right, duties and empowerment of young people in development processes for example Article 12: Right to Development. By ratifying this charter AU member states demonstrate their commitment to integrating youth in all development policies and governance processes for instance Article 13: Youth Participation in decision-Making Processes.

AU Agenda 2063 Aspiration 6 envisions an African whose growth is people-driven and depends on the potential of Africans, particularly women and young people. People are seeing an increase in youth-led projects that capture the essence of Aspiration 6 throughout the African continent. Young people are utilising their potential to propel development and effect positive change in their communities, from the creative agricultural projects in East Africa to the entrepreneurial endeavours in West Africa. Honwana, (2015) noted that youth are engaging in wait

hood not passively but through activism, creativity and informal organizing to claim space in community development and politics. Youth led projects in countries such as Malawi, Zambia and Uganda are giving youth education on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), especially in rural areas. In conflict-prone areas like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Burkina Faso, youth are participating in dialogue facilitation, mediation and trauma healing.

2.3.3 Forms and characteristics of youth-led initiatives

A wide variety of activities, structures and methodologies are included in youth-led projects as they differ according to local priorities, settings and available resources. Physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities for belonging, positive social norms, support for effectiveness and mattering, opportunities for skill building and integration of family, school and community efforts are key components of effective youth development programs. The development of life skills, opportunities for youth involvement and leadership in significant family, school, and community activities and positive and enduring adult-youth relationships are what Lerner (2017) refers to as the "big three" essential qualities.

The ACTIVE project in Chimanimani District, Zimbabwe, is an example of a youth-led initiative that focuses on building community and strengthening resilient livelihoods through supporting youth agro ecological enterprises. The convergence of livelihood, environmental and community development concerns that frequently characterises youth-led approaches in rural environments is reflected in these programs. The project included training in nursery management and tree planting, agro ecological demonstration plots for onsite practical learning and also the creation of a network of proactive youth climate champions to highlight the variety of youth-led development strategies. Studies show that youth-led initiatives often demonstrate adaptability and responsiveness to local conditions and needs.

Given Chimanimani vulnerability to ecological disruptions and climate change, this adaptability might be crucial. In this regard, youth-led projects appear to demonstrate what other academics call developmental experiences which simply means opportunities for adult networking, collaboration and initiative all of which promote youth development and community resilience.

2.3.4 Impacts of youth-led initiatives

Ndebele and Billing (2015) noted that there is growing awareness of the potential role that youth may play in local level development, despite the fact that most of these proposals are still utopian and have only modest results. Critical characteristics including problem-solving skills, leadership qualities and a sense of efficacy and agency can be developed through involvement in youth-led initiatives. According to Hopper and Iwasaki (2017), youth-led involvement should be encouraged via meaningful and constructive leisure activities that emphasise what young people do with their free time rather than what leisure time does to them.

Ali et al (2021) claim that because young people's unique positions and opportunities, they may no longer be passive participants in development processes but rather actively and visibly contribute to community development. Youth-led projects can challenge adults preconceptions about young people's skills while simultaneously producing observable development results at the community level. In Chimanimani, improved district emergency preparedness and planning through the development of yearly district management plans is a result of youth-led initiatives illustrating how catastrophe preparedness and local governance may be improved through youth involvement.

Additionally, studies indicate that youth-led programs can significantly alter how the community views young people and how generations interact with one another. Young people can

dispel unfavourable perceptions about them and open doors for more egalitarian and cooperative communal decision-making processes when they show that they are capable of spearheading successful development initiatives. These relational implications are a significant aspect of youth-led development that affects community social dynamics and governance in addition to more readily quantifiable project outcomes.

2.3.5 Challenges to youth-led development

Despite their potential, youth-led initiatives face significant challenges that can limit their effectiveness and sustainability. According to Bangura, (2022) the external context of youth-led CSOs function may be limited by a number of issues that impact their efficacy including financial, cultural and institutional ones. Research highlights several common barriers including limited funding, inadequate institutional support and restrictive policy environments that fail to recognize or support youth leadership in development processes. In many contexts, adults' attitudes and power structures also constrain youth agency and leadership, paying lip service to youth participation while maintaining adult control over decision-making and resources. Banks (2021) mentioned that these restrictions hinder young people's potential in both their current and future lives.

Gaithuma (2025), argue that because their voices and opinions are not acknowledged, young people in Africa are being left out. In Zimbabwean contexts, youth-led initiatives may face additional challenges related to the country's economic situation which can limit funding availability and create pressure for immediate measurable results that may not align with the often iterative and process-oriented nature of youth-led approaches. Additionally, historical political factors may create wariness around youth organizing and collective action potentially constraining the space for youth-led initiatives particularly those that engage with structural or political issues

for example Grosse and Mark (2020), observed that young indigenous activists are marginalised by the existing colonial power structures.

2.4 Literature gap

The literature review highlighted several significant research gaps about youth-led community development initiatives, particularly in the Zimbabwean contexts. First little study has been done on youth-led strategies in rural Zimbabwe. Although there is literature on youth development programs generally and on youth participation in development, there are fewer studies that specifically address initiatives where teenagers hold major leadership and decision-making authority particularly in environments like Chimanimani District.

Secondly, the practical application of the theoretical frameworks of Resilience Theory and Positive Youth Development in Zimbabwean youth-led initiatives is not sufficiently explored. With little observed research on how different frameworks interact and inform one another in particular situations, such as Ward 15 of Chimanimani District, the integration of these viewpoints is still primarily theoretical.

Thirdly, the contextual elements that influence youth-led projects in post-colonial African contexts such as the ways in which historical, political and cultural elements affect the origins, character and effects of youth-led development strategies are not given enough consideration. Developing theories of change and support tactics that are sensitive to local interests and realities requires an understanding of these contextual aspects.

Last but not least, the perspectives and experiences of young leaders as individuals are often under-represented in the literature particularly concerning how they handle power dynamics and resource limitations when launching and sustaining community development projects. Youth

voices and perspectives must be prioritised in order to have a genuine knowledge of youth-led development processes and outcomes.

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has given a thorough review of the literature and theoretical perspectives that are pertinent to understanding youth-led community development initiatives in Chimanimani District Ward 15. A solid conceptual framework for analysing the research subjects is developed using resilience theory and positive youth development ideas. This literature examination has revealed significant gaps in present knowledge, especially concerning youth driven projects in rural Zimbabwe and the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives in the analysis of such initiatives.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research approach used to examine the effects of youth-led projects on community development in Chimanimani District, Ward 15 is described in this chapter. It explains research philosophy, research design, sampling and demographic sampling strategies, data collection instruments and techniques, data analysis procedures and also ethical concerns. The primary objective is to create a clear roadmap that demonstrates the reliability and validity of the research process ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the realities in the field.

3.2 Research design

A case study methodology was used for this research because it enables a thorough, comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the particular situation of Ward 15 in Chimanimani District. The study was limited by the particular phenomenon (youth-led initiatives) and geography (Ward 15). This design made it easier to employ a variety of evidence sources to fully comprehend the intricate social processes at work. A mixed-approaches strategy was used, giving qualitative methods priority while adding more quantitative data. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) this combined approach enables data triangulation, in which the advantages of one approach offset the disadvantages of the other. While the quantitative component offered a more comprehensive perspective of trends, the qualitative component offered in-depth detailed information.

3.3 Study area

The study was carried out in Ward 15 of the Chimanimani District. The rural district of Chimanimani in Zimbabwe's Manicaland Province has experienced severe developmental difficulties that were made worse by Cyclone Idai in 2019. Due to the recorded existence of active youth-led organisations involved in a variety of community development initiatives, such as small-scale entrepreneurship, agriculture, disaster recovery and environmental conservation, Ward 15 was purposefully chosen. Because of this, it is essential to comprehend the possibilities and difficulties of youth-led development in a post-disaster environment with limited resources.

3.4 Population under the study

According to Phillips and Mrowczynski (2021) the target population is the group from which the researcher intends to draw conclusions. Therefore, people who can provide relevant data that is required for the study may be regarded as members of registered and informal youth-led groups/clubs in Ward 15, community members (adults and elders) residing in Ward 15 who have

been beneficiaries or observers of these initiatives and key informants, including local traditional leaders (e.g., village heads), Ward Councillor and officials from local NGOs and government departments (e.g., Ministry of Youth) operating in the area.

3.5 Sampling techniques

To gather information on impacts of youth led initiatives in community development the researcher utilized purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling, according to Newing (2020), entails choosing participants based on their availability, degree of education, suitability and willingness to engage. With this approach, the researcher can concentrate on important participants and youth group leaders who can provide pertinent data for the study. Because the objective of qualitative research is to collect high-quality data rather than to generalise conclusions, purposeful sampling is beneficial Palinkas et al., (2015). In order to reach hidden demographics, the study also employed snowball sampling to choose a few young groups. Initial contacts were asked to recommend other youth initiatives that were currently underway.

3.6 Sample size

According to Whitaker (2017), a sample is a piece of the population that is examined on behalf of the group being evaluated. This is a crucial idea in qualitative research, because gathering more data produces little or no new themes or insights (Guest et al., 2020). Because of the tiny population, the study's sample size was limited to 45 participants. 30 youth respondents from 3 focus group discussions (FGDs) participated, 7 from face to face interviews and five key informants participated in in-depth interviews.

3.7 Data collection methods and instruments

Data was collected over a planned period of 6 weeks in the field using the following methods:

3.7.1 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 key informants. These includes field officer from TSURO Trust, ward development coordinator from Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Development and Vocational Training, officer from Green Governance, youth community leader and ward 15 Councillor. An interview guide with open-ended questions was used to explore themes such as perceived impacts and challenges faced by the youth. This method allowed for probing, capturing detailed and nuanced information.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus Group Discussion was used to gather data from youth members and identifying shared opinions. Their motives, project planning and execution perceived achievements and failures and ties with the larger community were all discussed using a discussion guide.

3.7.3 Documentary Review and Observation

Reports from NGOs, project proposals, meeting minutes and youth group constitutions were among the key papers examined. Furthermore, direct observation of project being implemented (e.g., community gardens, irrigation schemes) was conducted to identify, capture pictures and validate self-reported data and gain contextual understanding.

3.8 Ethical considerations

According to Greaney (2023), research ethics simply refers to guidelines that researchers adhere to in order to make sure their investigations are carried out responsibly. To ensure subjects are protected from any physical discomfort resulting from the research, the researcher established clear boundaries. Prior to the study, the research objectives were fully explained to the participants beforehand and informed consent and privacy were carefully considered. Additionally, the researcher respected each participant's right to privacy to avoid any infringement upon it.

3.8.1 Informed Consent

Participants received a clear information sheet explaining the research purpose, procedures, risks and benefits. After the form was read aloud, written consent was obtained for individuals who could not write a mark.

3.8.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

All information was kept private, identifiers were eliminated, and fake names were used in the final report to protect participants' identities. Also participants were told that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could stop at any time without facing any consequences. The researcher was aware of the delicate post-Cyclone Idai context and refrained from asking questions that might be upsetting to them. The research aimed to be beneficial by giving voice to the youth and providing insights that could inform future support.

3.8.3 Seeking Approval from Authority

Research approval was sought from the relevant university ethics committee and permission was obtained from Chimanimani District Administrator's office before commencing data collection.

3.9 Data analysis

Thematic data analysis was used in this research. According to Braun and Clarke, (2019) thematic data analysis can be viewed as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in qualitative research. Thematic analysis was effective in this study as it helped with organizing data into themes that made it easy to understand. This made it suited for exploring the social effects of natural disasters on education. The thematic data analysis process was done as follows:

3.9.1 Step 1: Familiarisation with Data

The researcher immersed the self in the data to gain a deep understanding of its content. The researcher read and re-read the interview transcripts and focus group discussions. By so doing,

the researcher managed to note the initial impressions and potential patterns. The researcher was able to interact with the data more during this familiarisation phase.

3.9.2 Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

Finding data pieces that were pertinent to the research questions was the first step in the researcher's coding process. Initial codes were allocated to these pieces. This step of generating initial codes was crucial for breaking the data up into small pieces so that a more focused analysis could be conducted.

3.9.3 Step 3: Searching for Themes

After creating initial codes, the researcher grouped them into broader categories. This necessitated searching the codes for patterns and commonalities. The researcher used coding charts to assist organise these relationships and clarify how codes relate to broader topics**.**

3.9.4 Step 4: Reviewing Themes

To make sure the codes appropriately reflected the data, the researcher examined them and then ensured clarity and relevance by refining, merging and discarding themes as needed. In order to confirm that the themes are based on the data and accurately represent the experiences of the participants, this phase was crucial.

3.9.5 Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

After that, the researcher identified and labelled themes summarising each one and identifying the facets of the data it encompasses. Each theme's importance in relation to the study questions was communicated with the aid of precise definitions, guaranteeing its value.

3.9.6 Step 6: Producing the Report

The last stage was to produce the report, combining results together. The researcher gave a compelling narrative that illustrated the effects and efficacy of youth-led community

development projects based on the research objectives as main subjects. The study presented the themes and contextualised them within the corpus of contemporary literature.

3.10 Limitations of the methodology

Although the study offered detailed information the case study design restricted the findings' applicability outside of Ward 15. When self-reported data was used in surveys and interviews, individuals may have inflated positive effects due to social approval bias. The snowball sampling technique though necessary, may have introduced some bias towards more visible or well-connected youth groups. These limitations were mitigated through triangulation and reflexive practices

3.11 chapter summary

This chapter discussed the research methodology utilized in the study. It provided an overview of the research design, target population, sampling techniques, instruments used for data collection and data analysis methods.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four presents the findings from the empirical investigation on youth-led initiatives and their impact on community development in Ward 15 of Chimanimani District. The main conclusions from the theme analysis of focus groups, interviews, and observational data gathered during fieldwork are now covered in this chapter. Four main themes that arose from the data analysis process are used to structure the presentation of findings. Mory (2024) indicated that in this chapter a number of topics are being examined, including the reasons why young people

volunteer the quantifiable and intangible impacts of their involvement on society at large and the institutional or individual obstacles that prevent the involvement.

4.2 Demographic information of participation

The study had a total sample of 43 participants. These were 30 youth participants from various initiatives, 7 respondents for structured questionnaires and 5 key informants. This demographic profile is important for contextualizing the research findings. Robson (2017) noted that age, sex and race are examples of aggregate and de-identified demographic data that must be reported for study participants.

Table 1. Shows demographic *data of youth participants in Focus Group Discussions (n =30)*

Characteristic	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Sex	Male	13	43.3
	Female	17	56.7
Age group	15-24 years	12	40.0
	25-35 years	18	60.0
Total		30	100.0

Table 2. Indicates demographic data of respondents for structured questionnaires (n=7)

Position	**Initiative Type**

Leader	Green Minds Youth Initiative
Leader	Mukudya Theatre Group
Member	Green Minds Youth Initiative
Leader	Progression Digital Ark
Member	Progression Digital Ark
Chairperson	Chimanimani Children Association
Member	Mukudya Theartre Group

Table 3. Shows demographic data of Key Informants (n=5)

Code	**Role/ Position**	**Institution/ Department**
KI-1	Ward Development Coordinator	MYEDVT
KI-2	Field Officer	Green Governance
KI-3	Ward Councillor	Ward 15 Local Authority
KI-4	Youth Community Leader	Ward 15 Structure
Total		5

4.3 Nature and organisation of youth led initiatives in chimanimani ward 15

The research identified a diverse range of youth-led initiatives operating across Ward 15, the findings reveal that these initiatives are diverse in focus but share common organizational features with environmental and agricultural projects constituting the majority of activities. They operate as voluntary, grassroots entities with flat leadership structures.

Respondent 1, questionnaire said:

"*Green Minds is about healing the land we as young people saw that if we don't act no one will, we are young people who plant trees and fix gullies".*

This reflects voluntary, community-based organisation with collective action not hierarchical control.

Respondent 4, questionnaire mentioned:

"*Mukudya means 'harvest'. We harvest ideas through theatre and traditional dance we go to schools, participate in road shows and tell stories that change behaviour*".

The organisation was informal as it relies on road shows and embedded in community spaces like schools rather than offices.

Respondent 5, questionnaire said:

"At Chimanimani Children Association we are youth helping children by giving them school stationery and sometimes even school fees".

The Chimanimani Children Association showed informal organization, operating as a voluntary, flat structured group where youth collectively mobilize resources like stationery and school fees to support vulnerable children.

Respondent 3, questionnaire explained:

"*The Progression Ark is whereby we take pictures of activities that are occurring within the district and document them this is about survival not games*".

This demonstrated task based organization using photograph for advocacy. While "within the district" suggest that the group operate through mobile, community based network

4.4 Role of youth led initiatives in addressing community challenges and utilising local resources

Participants identified various community challenges that youth led initiatives actively addressed which includes challenge of educational exclusion among vulnerable children, unemployment and information blackout. Participation in environmental projects, particularly soil conservation and gully reclamation is the most notable category of youth-led efforts. This can boost business reputation, attract socially conscious customers and encourage positive social change, claims Hamzah (2022). Participants gave thorough explanations of how their work has improved the community and how young volunteers had banded together to solve the ward's serious land degradation that affected its agricultural land.

4.4.1 Environmental Rehabilitation

One member leader clarified:

"We noticed that the gullies were growing larger with each rainy season. Nobody was doing action to stop the destruction of our parents' fields. Thus, we went to the headman and requested authorisation to work on the property. We began gathering stones and using anything we could find to construct gabions by hand."

Young people's strong participation in environmental action is evident and has had a global impact Han and Ahn (2020). The project's combination of regional resources, ancient wisdom and fundamental contemporary conservation methods showed incredible inventiveness.

4.4.2 Climate-Smart Agriculture

Agro-ecology and climate-smart agriculture constituted a second significant area of youth participation. A number of participants participated in the adoption and promotion of sustainable farming practices such as the manufacturing of organic fertiliser, drought-resistant crop types and conservation agriculture. According to Hellin et al. (2023), they also need to use transformative adaptation to address the social disparities that arise in Climate Smart Agriculture programs as well as altering land and cropping patterns.

A participant stated:

"We are now learning how to farm in a different way. We have to adjust because the rains are no longer consistent. Some of us are engaging in conservation farming, which involves digging pits, applying mulch, and rotating crops. It is labour-intensive, but even in dry years, we are seeing results."

This supports the idea put forth by South et al. (2022) that offering concrete assistance, like mentoring and training, improves motivation and long-term participation. The adoption of climate-smart actions by young people in Ward 15 is consistent with larger national initiatives that have been reported in recent literature. According to project documentation, providing kids and adolescents with resources and skills for local climate adaptation has emerged as a strategic focus for enhancing community resilience in Zimbabwe's most vulnerable districts.

4.4.3 Gully Reclamation

Using stones gathered from nearby locations, young volunteers built several gabions across a number of gullies in the ward. The long-term control and restoration of gullies will require ongoing, self-evolving initiatives, each of which will lead to more intriguing and fruitful projects (Peterson, 2018). These structures' effects were explained in terms of both agriculture and the environment. Rehabilitating the gullies will enhance and stabilise the soil for efficient plant growth, according to Jones (2017).

Participant stated:

"An automobile may be concealed in the deep valley behind the school. Now that the gabions have been constructed, earth is filling them. The water no longer rushes through when it rains taking everything with it. The soil remains while it extends out. People can pass safely and the grass has already begun to grow again".

4.4.5 Reforestation and Biodiversity

In addition to soil conservation, youth initiatives included tree planting and the protection of indigenous vegetation. Peterson et al., (2018) noted that the main thrust of activities will be to reclaim and restore the land to its reproductive level. Participants talked about initiatives to plant fruit trees and create community nurseries, which had both nutritional and environmental benefits.

One young leader said:

"In the last two years, we have planted more than 500 trees, the majority of which are native species like gum trees. There were very few native trees left in this area. From the handful that were left, we gathered seeds and cultivated seedlings. They are already expanding and birds are coming back."

Tens of thousands of hectares of damaged land are to be restored and sustainably managed. The ecological restoration work being done by young people in Ward 15 is part of larger landscape-level goals outlined in national climate adaptation policies

4.4.6 Unemployment

Youth-led initiatives had a wider range of economic effects, some of which were still developing. Nonetheless, a number of tangible economic results were recorded. Some of the young participants, especially those engaged in agricultural production, had started earning a little money from their pursuits. One participant talked about how the economy had changed for her.

Another participant added:

"I didn't have a source of income prior to joining the group. My husband was everything to me. These days, I occasionally sell fresh stuff along with dried vegetables. It's not much, but it covers my kids' school tuition, soap and other necessities. I feel as though I own my own money".

The gendered aspect of economic impact is demonstrated by this story, where women participants place a higher value on the financial independence that even little revenue generating can offer

4.4.7 Response to multiple vulnerabilities: GBV, Substance Abuse and Climate Change

Community members particularly women indicated that the dramas depicting GBV have empowered victims to speak out and seek help from local structures like the Victim Friendly Unity. In response to performances on drug abuse young people reported increased awareness of the long term health and social consequences of substances. Parents also noted that they became more vigilant about their children’s behaviours after watching the performances.

FDG respondent stated:

"*Before Mukudya's play I thought the beatings were normal but now I know it's a crime*.

4.5 Factors that enables their effectiveness

4.5.1 External Partnerships and Support

Although the youth activities in Ward 15 were mostly grassroots in nature, external partnerships were crucial in providing resources, training and contacts. According to the World Economic Forum (2021), they have motivated youth groups to create their own brand identities, spread awareness of their cause and successfully convey their goal to the general public. Support from non-governmental organisations that are currently based in Chimanimani such as TSURO Trust have been mentioned by a number of youth respondents. According to Bramly (2023), they might act as mentors and sources of inspiration for young activists teaching them the value of adaptation and resilience in their quest for change.

A participant contended:

"TSURO Trust gave us training in sustainable agriculture and connected us with other youth doing similar work," said another young participant. In order for us to record and distribute our work, they also provided some of us with smartphones. That helped us see how we could share our tale".

This allusion to the provision of smartphones is consistent with programs that have been reported in Chimanimani where young people have been given gadgets to support their role in driving climate action and transforming agriculture, allowing them to create and distribute material on various platforms. According to research, volunteering builds social networks and trust, which strengthens community resilience and social cohesion (Musick and Wilson, 2017). In this sense,

outside collaborations have also made it easier to access networks and information that go beyond the immediate area.

Additionally, youth participant affirmed:

"I got to know young people from other neighbourhoods and even districts throughout the training. We exchange ideas and discuss what works and what doesn't. They occasionally invite us to events in Mutare or Chipinge. It gives us a sense of belonging to something greater".

This wider network is consistent with findings from the literature on youth development that the establishment of relationships and connections with mentors and peers from all sectors enhances young people's ability to lead and work together. Research shows that volunteering enhances young people's wellbeing, self-esteem, and social skills Duchame (2023) and Kadir et al., (2024).

4.5.2 Motivations for Youth Participation

It is crucial to comprehend the factors that encourage young people in Ward 15 to participate in community development projects in order to assess their effects. According to Munoz-Lierena et al. (2025), motivation and satisfaction in specific volunteer professions are significantly impacted by many social factors. In this sense, the study found that youth engagement is motivated by a variety of interrelated factors. Economic necessity was the most important of these reasons. Many young people in rural Chimanimani saw community-based activities as a means of creating a livelihood because formal employment prospects were so scarce.

Participant contended:

"We have nothing else to do. We have to do this in order to survive. We can't all move to South Africa, and there are no jobs in town. We shall always be reliant on our parents if we don't make anything for ourselves here."

This economic necessity is in line with official statistics showing that, while making up 62% of Zimbabwe's population, young people especially young women face disproportionately high unemployment rates.

4.5.3 Environmental Concern

Many participants indicated sincere worry about environmental degradation and its effects on their communities in addition to economic considerations. Walker (2020) pointed out that young people from low-income families might be concerned about regional and global environmental problems. This awareness of the environment was especially noticeable among young people engaged in tree planting and gully rehabilitation.

Another participant mentioned:

"This place was green when I was a kid, there were more trees in these mountains and more water in the river Nyamatanda but all has been distroyed so we want to restore what has been lost for both ourselves and our children".

4.5.4 Youth Agency and Organizational Capacity

However, youth's own agency and organisational ability was the most important enabling factor. Participants explained how in spite of many challenges, they had planned, organised and persevered in their efforts. In order to manage resources, plan events and advocate for their concerns the youth in Ward 15 had established unofficial but efficient organisational structures.

The youth leader observed:

"*Our committee convenes once a week. We make plans for what has to be done, who will do what, and how we will spend any available funds. Although it is not as official as a recognised organization, it nonetheless serves our needs and everyone is aware of their role".*

This self-organization exemplifies the civic abilities, such as financial management and strategic planning that young people can acquire by community involvement

4.5.5 Resilience and Persistence

Perhaps the most interesting thing was about the youth's perseverance in the face of difficulties and disappointments. The participants described many failures and setbacks that had not deterred them from achieving their objectives.

The participant stated:

"Our initial attempt to construct gabions was unsuccessful. We did not build them correctly so when the rains arrived they were washed away so we made the decision to give it another go and seek guidance from an expert this time".

This learning-oriented approach and readiness to persevere in the face of setbacks point to a maturity and dedication that contradicts oversimplified stereotypes of young people as impatient.

4.5.6 Use of Local Language and Cultural Symbols

Several factors enable these initiatives to be effective in Chimanimani especially the Mukudya Theatre Group. Kristian (2025) argues that language is the foundation of connection. The group performs using the dominant local languages such as Ndau and incorporates familiar proverbs, music and dance. This cultural alignment ensures high comprehension and emotional resonance. Traditional dance in particular acts as a hook that draws all age groups.

A responded contended:

"We communicate clearly to our audience including those who are illiterate, kids and the elderly by using our local language ndau".

4.5.7 Low-cost appropriate technology

Based on the information gathered PDA take pictures and document activities occurring within Chimanimani. According to Simoncini (2016) pictures are more important than text in terms of providing information to readers with low literacy. PDA reportedly uses affordable, durable equipment eg basic smartphones and offline capable apps that does not require constant internet connectivity to take pictures. Given that ward 15 has limited network coverage and unreliable electricity this low tech, offline friendly approach is critical. The initiative function in remote areas where sophisticated digital platforms would fail.

Responded emphasized:

"*We don't need expensive cameras, everyone has a phone so we just use what we have to take pictures".*

4.6 Constraining factors

Limitations, ignorance, cultural constraints and organisational flaws have all been cited as major obstacles, according to Rais et al. (2021). Despite the positive outcomes and supportive factors that were previously highlighted the study also identified significant barriers and challenges that continue to restrict youth-led programs in Ward 15**.**

4.6.1 Resource constraints

The most frequently cited problem was lack of funding. This severely limited young people's ability to extend projects or invest in more revolutionary endeavors despite their remarkable inventiveness in using locally available resources.

One participant said:

"We have numerous ideas but we lack the funds to carry out these initiatives. So sometimes we deal with what we have, but it is insufficient.

This financial constraint is consistent with global research on adolescent development which demonstrates that resource access is a structural barrier that affects young activism and leadership.

4.6.2 Material and equipment gaps

Beyond financial resources, young people reported a lack of essential tools and supplies for their jobs.

One participant stated:

"We require materials because most of the time we take turns using a single tool or borrow from our neighbours which restricts and slows us down.

Owing to these material constraints a significant quantity of adolescent labour was employed for basic tasks that might be accomplished more successfully with the appropriate equipment which reduced the extent of the impact.

4.6.3 Institutional and policy barriers

Even though young people were becoming more well-known locally, they were still not fully incorporated into formal development planning procedures. According to Thew et al. (2021),

actors' active participation increases recognition. Young actors should actively participate in decision-making processes to make sure their ideas are heard and taken into account.

A youth leader stated:

"*The district has development plans but we do not see our activities reflected there. We doubt if we are not in the budget because when resources come from outside they go through official channels that do not reach hence we remain invisible to the system."*

Despite improvements at the local level, systemic integration is still elusive, as this observation confirms previous study findings that young inputs seldom have a significant impact on policy and development practice. According to the World Health Organization (2019) and Van de Westhuizen (2021), youth are at danger of marginalisation since they are less likely to participate in governance and decision-making due to political and economic barriers. Participants continue to talk about bureaucratic roadblocks that made their work more difficult especially when they were trying to get official backing or recognition.

Youth leader stated:

"In order to open a bank account and submit an application for funding, we attempted to register collectively. The procedure is costly, time-consuming, and complex. We gave up. We carry on unofficially, but that restricts our options."

Because they deny youth organisations access to official financing sources, such as government youth empowerment initiatives and outside funds, these bureaucratic obstacles are especially important. George and Reed (2017) argues that to secure funds or satisfy donors, traditional and limited governance systems are upheld.

4.6.4 Dependence on volunteer labour

In a similar vein, participants recognised the limitations of volunteering as a foundation for long-term influence. The amount of time available for volunteer activity is sometimes limited by career and academic commitments Mori (2024).

One participant highlighted:

"Even if we are volunteers, we must eat. We are unable to devote as much time to community service when we must work to support our family. There is constantly conflict between what we want to do for the community and what we must do for ourselves".

This conflict between volunteerism and livelihood demands implies that youth-led projects must finally provide enough revenue to support participants and further community development objectives in order to be viable.

4.6.5 Sustainability concerns

A last group of issues pertaining to youth projects' long-term viability. Concerns about what might happen when existing leaders grew older or moved on were voiced by participants.

The participant said:

"We are mostly in our twenties and thirtie's and soon we will not be referred to as youth who is going to take over because for now those youth who are still in school have not received enough attention from us. That is my concern".

This worry about continuity highlighted a larger issue facing youth-led project.

4.6.6 Social and cultural barriers

Despite indications of changing attitudes participants reported that negative stereotypes about youth persisted particularly in certain situations. Teenage autonomy and engagement may

be hampered by traditional norms and constrictive societal expectations, particularly in conservative environments Smith et al., (2020). Creating spaces for participation without meaningful power-sharing is a persistent issue in youth involvement which is mirrored in the idea that tokenistic inclusion exists but is not really heard.

A participant mentioned:

"*Officials occasionally treat us like children who should only be seen and not heard when we attend district meetings. They are courteous, but they don't really consider our recommendations. We are not included, yet we are invited".*

4.6.7 Gender-based barriers

According to Pearse (2017), the effects of climate change in rural areas have the potential to exacerbate already-existing gender disparities and establish new ones. Other gender-related obstacles mentioned by female participants were limited decision-making authority in mixed groups and assumptions regarding women's responsibilities.

A participant added:

"It is more difficult for women. Some people chat when I go to meetings or work in the field; they expect you to be at home taking care of household chores. Not all ladies are as fortunate as my husband. Additionally, the guys in our group frequently have the last say on choices".

Given that young women in Zimbabwe confront additional vulnerabilities and obstacles to engagement, the gender component of youth participation is especially important.

4.7 Summary of findings

The results of an empirical study on youth-led projects and their effects on community development in Ward 15 of Chimanimani District have been given in this chapter. The study found

that young people are actively involved in projects related to emerging enterprise growth, climate-smart agriculture and environmental rehabilitation. Economic need, environmental concern and the need for social acceptance and belonging were the driving forces behind youth participation. In terms of the environment, young people had made noticeable contributions to reforestation and gully reclamation, improving ecosystem services and repairing damaged landscapes. Economic effects included the production of assets, money and in certain situations jobs for other young people. Youth projects have enhanced intergenerational interactions, strengthened social solidarity among young people, and changed community perspectives on a social and cultural level. In terms of politics, they have created avenues for young people to interact with local government systems. Resource limitations, institutional and governmental impediments, enduring stereotypes and marginalisation exacerbated by gender for young women and worries about long-term sustainability were among the major obstacles that continued to exist.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This section offers a summary of the research findings, conclusion and recommendation for future study and practice. Firstly, it provides summaries of the study which comprised five chapters. The chapter concludes with recommendations for local governments, youth leaders themselves followed by suggestions for future research.

5.2 Summary

Using Chimanimani District Ward 15 as a case study, this study examined the effects of youth-led initiatives on community development. The study was inspired by the increasing awareness around the world that young people are crucial change agents, especially in situations where socioeconomic and environmental issues are present. The main objectives were to identify the types of youth-led initiatives that were implemented, assess their effectiveness in various developmental domains, and examine the barriers to their success.

Young participants, community leaders, NGO representatives and other significant stakeholders in Ward 15 were surveyed using semi-structured interviews, focus groups and direct observation as part of a qualitative case study methodology. The results showed a dynamic landscape of young engagement as described in Chapter 4. The adoption of climate-smart agricultural methods and environmental rehabilitation projects particularly reforestation and gully reclamation were the main initiatives found. The district's external NGOs provided the majority of the support for these initiatives.

These efforts were effective in a variety of ways in the sense that firstly they produced observable environmental results such more biodiversity and restored land. Significantly, social and cultural effects were also produced by them. Additionally, the programs demonstrated civic and political impact by giving young people a voice, a platform, and a remarkable ability for endurance and tenacity in the face of adversity. However, this participation presented some significant challenges. The study identified considerable obstacles that hindered full participation including severe resource constraints a heavy reliance on volunteer labour, institutional and policy barriers, social, cultural and gender-based barriers.

5.3 Conclusion of the study

Drawing directly from the analysed data presented in Chapter 4 the following conclusions are given in relation to the research's objectives.

Youth-led initiatives in Ward 15 are diverse and hybrid in governance. They operate across four domains. They make substantive contributions to community development outcomes by responding to the present environmental and economic issues. The popularity of gully reclamation and climate-smart agriculture demonstrates that young people are actively tackling the actual issues threatening their community's livelihoods rather than engaging in theoretical advocacy. Community-based projects are most successful when they directly meet the material needs of the participants, thus according to contemporary theories of collective action. They effectively mobilize local human, social, natural, physical and cultural resources. These beliefs are supported by this conclusion. The discovery that their fundamental motivator is economic necessity does not lessen their care for the environment rather does it reflects a complex worldview in which ecological health is viewed as essential to economic existence but this portrays a picture of practical, necessity-driven stewardship in contrast to ideas of adolescent environmentalism.

The acquisition of social capital and community legitimacy which serves as a vital prelude to wider developmental influence is the main foundation for these efforts' efficacy. The results clearly showed that the change in community recognition had the most effect. Youth efforts were underappreciated prior to this change but once they were acknowledged, their capacity to organise resources, sway decisions and carry out initiatives skyrocketed. This result is consistent with the social capital hypothesis, which holds that networks of reciprocity and trust are necessary for group action. This leads to the conclusion that planting trees or reclaiming hectares are not the only ways to gauge the success of youth-led development. Their capacity to renegotiate their social status and

change from marginalised people to valued community partners is the fundamental source of their efficacy. Their resilience and perseverance were important factors in obtaining this legitimacy, proving that persistent work, even with little funding, may produce significant social benefits.

3. Youth-led initiatives face systemic obstacles rather than just operational ones, which result from a mismatch between the inflexible institutionalised institutions of local governance and development and the dynamic, project-based reality of youth work. The results regarding sustainability issues, volunteer dependency and resource limitations indicate a systemic problem. Young people are expected to work within a project-based development framework that depends on short-term NGO funding while also encountering institutional obstacles that keep them from becoming long-term, sustainable entities, such as a lack of access to land tenure or local government budget lines. Although it shows how passionate they are, the reliance on voluntary effort produces intrinsic vulnerability. This result implies that the observed obstacles are not only a lack of things such as money or tools but also a lack of a supportive ecosystem that can incorporate their informal, dynamic activities into the formal organised systems of economic development and local administration.

5.4 Recommendations

The following suggestions are put forth for community development stakeholders in Chimanimani District Ward 15 and comparable situations, primarily based on the obstacles noted in the research findings.

5.4.1 Resolving material and equipment gaps and resource constraints

It is advised that local NGOs and the Rural District Council (RDC) set up a community-managed resource centre or tool-lending library in Ward 15 in order to get away from the dependency on simple hand tools and irregular supplies. This would lessen competition for

resources and guarantee that tools are maintained for long-term use by giving youth groups planned access to specialised equipment such as for gully reclamation and tree nursery upkeep. This should be combined with an open maintenance fund.

5.4.2 Overcoming dependency on volunteer labour and sustainability concerns

It is advised that youth organisations establish a structured benefit-sharing system in collaboration with supporting NGOs in order to reduce the high turnover and burnout that come with volunteering. A portion of harvest profits from demonstration plots or jointly managed land should be explicitly recognised as a revolving fund due to their participation in climate-smart agriculture. A totally volunteer-driven model can be transformed into a more sustainable, independent social enterprise by using this fund to pay operating expenses, give small stipends to lead young organisers, and reinvest the proceeds back into the projects.

5.4.3 Mitigating institutional and policy barriers

It is suggested that the Ward Development Committee (WADCO) explicitly co-opt youth representatives from these ongoing programs as voting members in order to address their exclusion from local governance processes. This is a structural shift that necessitates changing the WADCO's frames of reference rather than a symbolic gesture. In order to ensure that their projects are in line with and supported by the ward's official development agenda, this would give young people a direct conduit to influence local funding allocation and development planning.

5.4.4 Addressing social, cultural and gender-based barriers

It is advised that youth-led initiatives use a gender-transformative approach to project design in order to combat the cultural norms that restrict participation, especially for young women. This should go beyond merely promoting female involvement. For example, certain jobs such co-leadership positions could be assigned to women, and projects could be planned at times that take household duties into account. In order to properly address cultural resistance and secure

elder endorsement which is essential for legitimacy in Chimanimani the programs should also support organised intergenerational talks between youth and traditional authorities.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

This study opens several avenues for future investigation.

5.5.1 A Longitudinal study on sustainability

The sustainability issue was one of the main conclusions. Determining which internal and external factors, such as shifts in NGO funding and political stability have the greatest effects on the long-term viability and impact of these kinds of initiatives would be greatly aided by a long-term study that tracks the same youth-led projects for five to ten years.

5.5.2 Comparative analysis with other wards:

One ward was the subject of this study. By doing a comparative case study between Ward 15 and another ward in Chimanimani or another district one with different institutional obstacles or various levels of NGO assistance it would be feasible to pinpoint the exact conditions under which youth-led projects succeed or fail.

5.5.3. Investigating the dynamics of youth-NGO partnerships

The relationship with NGOs was found to be important yet potentially unstable. More research is needed to understand the power dynamics in these partnerships, especially in respect to the long-term effects of donor-driven agendas on the autonomy and local importance of youth-led initiatives.

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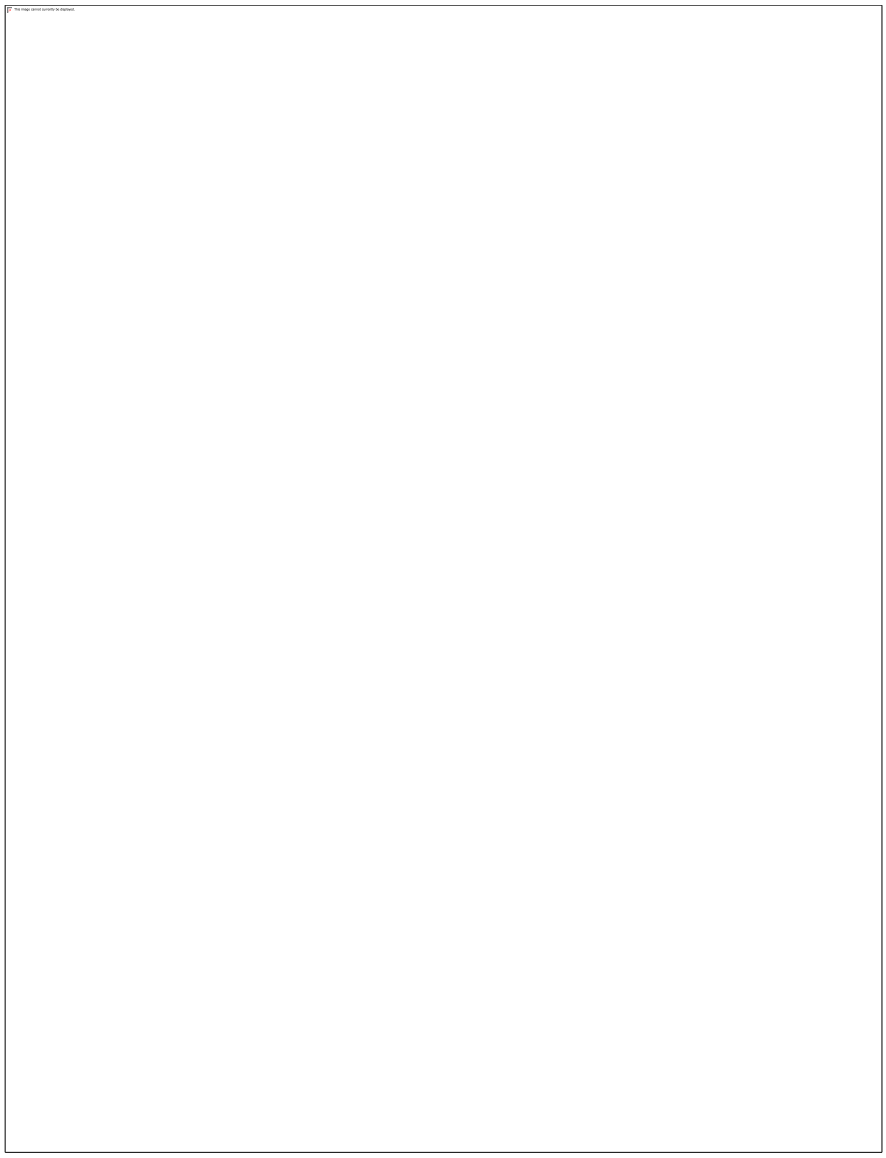
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APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF APPROVAL



APPENDIX 2: Structured questionnaire

CONSENT FORM

Hello, my name is Leane Rutendo Undenge. I am a Peace and Governance student at Bindura University of Science Education. As part of the requirements for my degree program, I am conducting a study entitled, "**Impact of youth-led initiatives in community development. A case study of ward 15 Chimanimani district.** Your expertise and insights will greatly contribute to the understanding of these issues. Participation in the research is voluntary and you can choose not to

answer any individual question or all the questions. Feel free to withdraw at any time and withdrawal from the research will not be held against you. If you agree to take part your identity will remain anonymous and your signature will illuminate your willingness to take part. This research is purely academic and no personal details will be captured and information will be treated as confidential. The interview will last approximately 20 minutes.

Please tick where applicable

Will you participate in the study? YES NO

Would you allow me to record your voice through the audio recorder? (This is strictly confidential and anonymity is guaranteed). YES NO

If yes then sign the consent form and proceed if no stop.

Is there anything you want to know before we start?

I have read the above and I understand the nature of the study. I am willing to participate and give my consent.

Participant's Signature……

Researcher's Signature……

SECTION A. Demographic Information

Name respondent ……
Age of respondent

- 0-17
- 18-35
- 36-60
- Above 60

Gender of respondent ……...

Section B: Nature and Organisation of Youth-led Initiatives

1. Are you aware of any youth-led initiatives in Ward 15?

a) Yes

b) No

2. If yes, which initiatives do you know of? (List)

3. How are these initiatives usually organized?

a) Formal groups (registered)
b) Informal groups (unregistered)
c) Partnerships with NGOs/government
d) Other (specify)

4. What motivates young people to start or join these initiatives?

a) Employment opportunities
b) Community service
c) Skills development
d) Peer influence
e) Other (specify)

5. What challenges do youth face in organizing these initiatives?

Section C: Role in Addressing Community Challenges & Resource Use

1. Which community challenges are youth-led initiatives addressing?

a) Unemployment
b) Education
c) Health
d) Environment
e) Other (specify)

2. How effective do you think youth initiatives have been in addressing these challenges?

a) Very effective
b) Moderately effective
c) Not effective

3. In what ways do youth initiatives use local resources?

a) Skills and talents
b) Land and natural resources
c) Cultural practices
d) Community networks
e) Other (specify)

4. What factors enable youth initiatives to succeed?

5. What constraints limit their effectiveness?

Section D: Conditions for Contribution to Community Development

1. Under what conditions do youth-led initiatives make the greatest impact?

a) Strong community support
b) Availability of funding
c) Collaboration with NGOs/government
d) Effective leadership
e) Other (specify)

2. How do elders and local leaders influence youth initiatives?

3. Can you share examples of successful youth-led initiatives in Ward 15?

4. What recommendations would you give to improve youth contributions to community development?

Section E: Additional Insights

1. How do gender dynamics affect participation in youth-led initiatives?

2. What visible changes have you noticed in Ward 15 due to youth initiatives?

3. How do you see the future of youth-led initiatives in this community?

APPENDIX 2: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

CONSENT FORM

Hello, my name is Leane Rutendo Undenge. I am a Peace and Governance student at Bindura University of Science Education. As part of the requirements for my degree program, I am conducting a study entitled, "**Impact of youth-led initiatives in community development. A case study of ward 15 Chimanimani district.** Your expertise and insights will greatly contribute to the understanding of these issues. Participation in the research is voluntary and you can choose not to answer any individual question or all the questions. Feel free to withdraw at any time and withdrawal from the research will not be held against you. If you agree to take part your identity will remain anonymous and your signature will illuminate your willingness to take part. This research is purely academic and no personal details will be captured and information will be treated as confidential. The interview will last approximately 20 minutes.

Please tick where applicable

Will you participate in the study? YES NO

Would you allow me to record your voice through the audio recorder? (This is strictly confidential and anonymity is guaranteed). YES NO

If yes then sign the consent form and proceed if no stop.

Is there anything you want to know before we start?

I have read the above and I understand the nature of the study. I am willing to participate and give my consent.

Participant's Signature……

Researcher's Signature……

Purpose: To explore group perspectives on barriers and enablers of youth empowerment in climate action and collective insights on strategies.

Target Participants:

Groups of youth led initiatives (5 participants per group), ideally from mixed backgrounds (school-based groups, informal youth associations, church groups, etc.)

FGD Structure

Introduction (10 minutes): Welcome, purpose of discussion, consent and confidentiality.
Main Discussion (60–75 minutes): Thematic questions, open dialogue encouraged.
Wrap-up (5–10 minutes): Summary and final thoughts.

SECTION A. Opening Icebreaker

Please introduce yourselves and share one activity or action you've taken (or witnessed) to address climate issues in your community.

Section B: Nature and Organisation of Youth-led Initiatives

1 Can you share some stories about the kinds of activities young people are involved in here?

2 When you think about how youth groups come together, what patterns or ways of organizing have you noticed?

3 What usually inspires young people to start something in the community?

4 How do youth groups manage to bring people together or gather resources?

Section C: Role in Addressing Community Challenges & Resource Use

5 What changes have you seen in the community because of youth-led efforts?

6 Can you describe a time when young people tried to solve a local problem?

7 How do youth groups make use of what is already available in the community?

8 What makes it easier for youth initiatives to succeed, and what makes it harder?

9 Can you think of examples where youth efforts didn't go as planned? What happened?

Section D: Conditions for Contribution to Community Development

10 From your experience, when do youth initiatives seem to have the biggest impact?

11 How do elders, leaders or other community members influence the work of youth groups?

12 Can you recall situations where outside organisations (like NGOs or government) helped youth initiatives?

13 What lessons can be learned from youth-led projects that worked well here?

14 If you were advising young people starting a new initiative, what would you tell them?

APPENDIX 4: Key Informant Guide

CONSENT FORM

Hello, my name is Leane Rutendo Undenge. I am a Peace and Governance student at Bindura University of Science Education. As part of the requirements for my degree program, I am conducting a study entitled, "**Impact of youth-led initiatives in community development. A case study of ward 15 Chimanimani district.** Your expertise and insights will greatly contribute to the understanding of these issues. Participation in the research is voluntary and you can choose not to

answer any individual question or all the questions. Feel free to withdraw at any time and withdrawal from the research will not be held against you. If you agree to take part your identity will remain anonymous and your signature will illuminate your willingness to take part. This research is purely academic and no personal details will be captured and information will be treated as confidential. The interview will last approximately 20 minutes.

Please tick where applicable

Will you participate in the study? YES NO

Would you allow me to record your voice through the audio recorder? (This is strictly confidential and anonymity is guaranteed). YES NO

If yes then sign the consent form and proceed if no stop.

Is there anything you want to know before we start?

I have read the above and I understand the nature of the study. I am willing to participate and give my consent.

Participant's Signature……

Researcher's Signature……

Section A: Nature and Organisation of Youth-led Initiatives

1 Can you tell me about some of the activities you've seen young people leading in Ward 15?

2 From your perspective, how do youth groups usually come together and organize themselves?

3 What kinds of motivations or circumstances have you noticed that push young people to start initiatives?

4 Could you share an example of how youth groups have managed to gather support or resources?

5 What kinds of difficulties have you observed when youth try to organize themselves?

Section B: Role in Addressing Community Challenges & Resource Use

6 Thinking about community challenges here, what stories come to mind about youth trying to respond?

7 Can you describe a situation where youth-led efforts made a difference in solving a local problem?

8 How have you seen young people make use of local resources whether skills, land or networks?

9 What circumstances seem to help youth initiatives succeed and what tends to hold them back?

10 Could you recall an instance where youth efforts didn't achieve what they hoped for? What happened?

Section C: Conditions for Contribution to Community Development

11 From your experience, when do youth-led initiatives seem to have the strongest impact on the community?

12 How have elders, leaders or institutions influenced the work of youth groups in Ward 15?

13 Can you share a story of when outside organisations (like NGOs or government) supported youth initiatives?

14What lessons do you think can be drawn from youth-led projects that worked well here?

15If you were advising young people starting something new, what guidance would you give them?