

MEASURES TO REDUCE WOMEN VULNERABILITY AND STRENGTHEN THEIR RESILIENCE AND IN ZAMBIA

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Abstract

Resilience is the ability of individuals, households, communities and institutions to anticipate, withstand, recover and transform from shocks and crises. In a crisis situation, people require interventions that bolster their ability to overcome the worst impacts of the crisis and return to a path of sustainable prosperity. Women fall victims of harassment, isolation, rape, violence to mention but a few (Carlson, C and Klimek (2012). Therefore, women resilience and vulnerability need to be addressed. Creating resilience involves investing in the capacities and resources abilities of those women most affected by a crisis so that they can eventually deal with their intermediate and long-term needs. The resilience approach recognizes people in need as active and creative agents and empowers them towards greater ownership of their own lives through rapid employment generation, life skills training and inclusive governance. Thus, the objective of this study is to investigate mitigation measures that can reduce women vulnerability. The aim is to create a viable path away from the need for direct assistance and toward self-sufficiency and sustainable human development for all affected women. Building resilience is not just desirable; it is economically, socially and politically imperative.

Key words: Resilience; vulnerability; mitigation; sustainable; prosperity; Resilience

Vulnerability- being exposed to the risk of being attacked or harmed either physically or emotionally. Resilience – the ability to bounce back to a reference state after a disturbance, maintain and function despite disturbances.

Measures – steps taken

Prosperity – good life, success etc.

Introduction - Some scholars such as Garmezy undertook research on resilience. Prior to Garmezy's work, most research on trauma and negative life events looked at areas of vulnerability, investing the experiences that make people susceptible to poor life outcomes (or be troubled).

Sometimes, women are wrongly judged as being weak because of the way they look at issues in life. Such a trend leaves them susceptible to physical and emotional stress. The situation of a woman may sometimes be likened to that of a refugee who undergoes harsh conditions that leave him/her emotionally traumatized. For instance, in a traditional African society, a woman in general and wife in particular are expected to remain silent as a way of being submissive to men. It is this silence that leaves a scar in a woman. This is well elaborated in one of Nigerian movies, 'SCARRED' where a father rapes his own daughter who fails to disclose what the father has done. There is a lot in my view that contributes to women vulnerability in society. It is with this in mind that this study investigates possible ways women can be helped to lead lives that will lift them from trauma experienced through hostile life experiences. The aim is to come up with measures which will help women become resilient and prosperous. This will help fill up the gap highlighted above.

Resilience is the ability to become strong and healthy or successful again after something bad happens (misfortune). Basing on what has been said about what women undergo in life which strip them of their identity, measures to alleviate vulnerability caused by different vices must be put in place.

Having experienced abuse of different types, low educational expectations, hunger violence, unemployment, harassment, isolation, rape, physical trauma, and many others, women need to be assisted in many ways so that they slowly adjust and move away from such vices that are retrogressive (Carlson, C & Klimek (2012); Goodman 2004; Betameourt et al (2015); and Sherwood & Liebling Kalifani (2012).

In order to come out of vulnerability, a number of measures undertaken by the nation, NGO, stake holders as well as individuals have been highlighted.

Review of Literature

Overwhelmingly, so much has been written about risk and protective factors of vulnerability in general. Appropriate intervention strategies have also been documented. Most writers, however, have paid much attention to women as being the major victims of sexual, physical and psychological abuse.

Roselidah (2002) for instance, investigated the causes of gender-based violence in a refugee settlement in Northern Uganda where the results indicated that such violence emanates from traditional divisions of labour; women possessions mostly confined to low value assets such as cooking utensils, jerry cans and food. This is a source of conflict in a home in Uganda. In my view, that is a domestic conflict where a poor woman becomes victim. Such a situation, therefore, can be combated by probably empowering women with resources which can be of various types so that they can contribute in the running of a home.

Significant proofs about how women are prone to vulnerability are many. This was highlighted in the introduction. God's Bids of Word also highlighted the oppression faced by women in the pre-colonial era. Women were deprived of their ability to speak on matters including the society as a whole. This kind of treatment women received is a clear reflection of Marxist ideology in which according to (Dipio :168), women were looked down upon, sexually abused and reduced to selling their bodies for a living like Penda in the novel. However, Sembene tries to raise women to a higher spectrum by considering them as equally important. The aspect of raising women to higher spectrum is resilience. It is an indication of adjustment in one's life.

The situations of women vulnerability is not a new trend in Zambia. Similar experiences of women in Zambia are almost stories of the day in the media. Some women become vulnerable in Zambia so much that they resort to (drinking), alcohol intake. What must be realized is that drinking as a way of solving your problem affects your health in one way or another. In *Zambia Daily Mail* volume 21, number 126 of Wednesday, July, 26, 2017, Doris Kasonde confirms this by that alcohol abuse affects reasoning. This being the case, it is high time something was done to help women who face such challenges in Zambia. Of course, there are measures to curb certain vulnerabilities women undergo.

The call to lift up women who are traumatized to higher levels in life should be a concern and responsibility of every human being. Wariingu and Wangeri for instance, in 'Devil on the Cross' dramatize qualities of women which were hitherto unknown to society. She mobilizes the women and is the spokes person in the strike action. When they arrive at the outskirts of Dakar, Penda lets them know that:

“the soldiers can't eat us. They can't even kill us.....

Don't be afraid; our friends are waiting for us in Dakar; we will

(Ousmane 201).

Similarly, women in Zambia have demonstrated some situations where they feel woman folk have been mistreated in one way or another. Such a move undertaken by women is a step towards women resilience. It is a fight for a good (right) course. A good example can be vulnerability of women starting from marrying them off as young girls. To stop such a practice, in Zambia Daily Mail, volume 21 number 176 of Wednesday July 26, 2017 page 9, Priscilla Mwila exposes the launch of Youth Fund Development in partnership with the global fund for children has launched a project dubbed ‘ Girl empowerment to contribute towards the fight against early marriages in Chibombo District. This is a situation prevailing in Zambia which in my view is a step in the right direction.

On another development, in Times of Zambia, Monday, May 29, 2017 page 13 where Charity Moonga emphatically talked about skills that can be gained for jobs in the ICT sector calling for girl or women involvement. This is an indication that there is also need to encourage critical thinking and innovation within the education system and ways to join extracurricular activities to stimulate new ways of thinking.

In Achebe’s Antihills of Savannah, Beatrice is the fulcrum of social change right in the nucleus of socio-political schema. She becomes the source of motivation, inspiration and encouragement. To this, the political conscience is awakened (Kolowole, 1997). It is therefore, cardinal to put measures in place particularly for women so as to boost their motivation, inspiration and encouragement or be resilient.

Research Methods and Study Participants

Participants were selected randomly so that both males and females participate in the interviews and focus group discussion. Since the information required represent Zambia as a country, views from different tribes were captured. Data were collected from different categories of people reliable to provide the required information. That is, from both formal and informal sectors. The study was a combination of corpus and qualitative since the researcher was interested in finding out the types of vulnerabilities women undergo and how they can be helped. Documents were consulted in order to learn other types of vulnerabilities that may not be there in Zambia and what measures can be put in place to help affected women lead normal lives after harsh experiences that they have had in the past.

The researcher also reviewed different print newspapers, reports and journals and other documents in order to collect recent incidences of women vulnerability and possible ways of them coming out of them. Focus groups discussions conducted involved basically women who could speak on behalf of the woman folk from different walks of life.

The research was anchored on selected variables which included poverty, marginalization, death, low esteem disabilities. The findings were overwhelming in that a lot of brilliant ideas came out from participants in order to curb the problem of vulnerability as will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs,

Key findings and discussions

This research was based on types of vulnerability and measures that can be put in place to help those affected come out of trauma. Resilience is the ability of individuals, households, communities and institutions to anticipate, withstand, recover and transform from shocks and crises. It is worth mentioning that in a crisis, people need interventions that bolster their ability to overcome the worst impacts of the crisis and return to a path of sustainable prosperity since vulnerability is state of being exposed to the risk of being attacked or harmed either physically or emotionally.

Vulnerability results from “poverty, exclusion, marginalization, and inequalities in material consumption”)’Riodan (2002:369). “the conditions determined by physical, social, economical and environmental factors or processes which increases the susceptibility of the community to the impacts of the hazards (ISDR, 2994:7).

Majority of the participants/discussants ranked poverty as number one source of vulnerability in women. The respondents indicated that poverty leads to early marriages which lead to unstable relationships. Others said that unemployment has forced many into poverty, and as such, they are desperate for social and economic protection. The research further revealed that poverty brings about frustration in families and marriages in particular. For instance, the moment the husband abandons his marital home, the wife would tolerate the behavior thinking that one day her husband will come but to no avail. The respondents submitted that this poses danger to the couple’s marriage life. The wife in particular lives with regret. To such a situation, it was emphasized that the affected woman should not despair but seek help from the elders, the church as well as the community itself. The researcher’s view

on this was that a woman who undergoes such experiences should not despair but seek support from community and should believe in the power of God the Almighty. However, this does not mean that God works miracles where no efforts are put. Most importantly, identity depends on each other to survive even in adversity.

Additionally, parents who because of being poor resort to marrying their daughters in order to earn a living or survive, should put such to a halt as this may lead them to appear before the courts of law. In my view, such parents should encourage their children to be involved in community activities which can help them attain skills and empower them with resources to start their own businesses. Most of the provinces in Zambia today have Youth Skills Centres where various skills are taught. One respondent gave an example of the 'Tasila Lungu Empowerment Program' which is meant to uplift vulnerable women who were the backbone of the family in every community. The example cited is in line with the article in the Daily Nation, Thursday September, 21,2017, entitled, '40 Women Get Financial Boost' by Tasila Lungu Nkoloma Ward 1 Counsellor Metro/13. Indeed, this is an intervention that can positively lift vulnerable women to higher heights.

Similarly, Sobai Imboila expressed the same sentiments concerning early marriages in Times of Zambia, Wednesday, June 6 2017 where she emphasized the need to empower girl child to end early marriages in North-western province. Parents in my view should be punished for marrying their daughters at early stage simply because they have failed to provide what they need or have failed to control peer pressure which ruin their young ones as well as not appreciating the value of education the girl child.

The research also revealed that marginalization is yet another risk factor. Women who have been sexually abused, have low educational expectation, are HIV positive or have their own mischievous behavior are often times marginalized by society. One respondent emphasized that such affected women should not despair but lead positive life as well as developing self-efficacy in dealing with problems. There is also citizen Economic Act number 9 of 2006 that aims at uplifting the targeted citizens who have suffered marginalization. There is an assurance of improved investigative skills which should or can be put in place to rid of marginalization in Zambia (Times of Zambia, Wednesday, May, 24 2017 pages 3 and 10).

Death or separation from family or witnessing death of a family member or rape cases leave scars as earlier indicated that need healing with time. Therefore, such incidences are risk factors which need to be dealt with at all levels in the life of a traumatized woman. Majority of the respondents emphasized on counseling as the first measure to be put in place in order to help the affected. Thereafter, financial support is given in form of soft loans. It appears that majority of the women welcome such an intervention.

A serious encouragement was reflected in Times of Zambia, Friday, July, 21 2017 page 9 in the article, 'Being Widowed is no end of everything' by Jajlm Soulibly. Such a noble awareness is an indication that there are lots of cases before the Zambian Courts of law concerning widows, orphans and would be beneficiaries of the estate of the deceased. This is so in that in African societies, women whose husbands die become victims of property grabbing from relatives of the man leaving the orphaned children with nothing to claim. The courts of law should sternly deal with such cases so that the affected women do not remain destitutes.

What came out from the focus group discussion, and of course newspaper prints were that there is also low esteem from women themselves. Such a variable arises from disappointments, harassment, abuse of different types and generally failure in life. Every affected woman should develop positive thinking meaning that understanding that setbacks are transient and that you should have abilities and skills to combat the challenges you face. All what is required is for the one affected to be optimistic. In order to be resilient, a woman facing hardships should maintain hopeful look during difficult times. Determination counts. The researcher feels that even if women accept to be a weaker sex, it is better not to lose hope in difficult times as positive attitudes produce positive results. Believing in one self is the self esteem that should allow a woman to be strong in order to be counted.

It was strongly expressed by the discussants that not all mitigating measures should be put in place by sympathizers who may come to the aid of vulnerable women in form of friends, family members, non-government organizations, community and or the country as a whole. The mentioned categories of people can help lift up women with different challenges if the women themselves believe in themselves as people who are capable of doing what other people do.

In line with the risk factor of low esteem in women, it is prudent to say that there is need to reduce it at all costs. Stephen Kapambwe narrated of Nosiku Masese, a woman who has conquered the world by

making slippers in Kabwata of Lusaka, Zambia. According to her, she never thought that one day she would be an employer of someone as the case is today. An encouragement to all women from the researcher is that believing in oneself is all we need in order to adjust easily when faced with adverse conditions. Desperation is not the solution. What is amazing about this is that it takes an individual woman to develop high esteem and not following what other individuals think about you.

The fourth variable that was prominent during the discussion was aspect of disabilities. Women with many or certain disabilities should not sit back and allow vulnerability to take control of their entire life. There astonishing situations reflected about women with disabilities do far much better than those without. One respondent expressed concern that women with disabilities should accept the way they are and that they should believe in being fit in doing daily activities in the best way they can. To her, disability is not inability. A good example of such is that of Times of Zambia, Tuesday, March, 21 2017 where an article of a woman who became resilient by believing in herself that she could do something regardless her mental state. This was an article entitled 'How one \woman beat her mental illness by helping others. This happened in Australia it was reported that Jessica remained focused despite her mental illness.

Generally, it is believed that people with disabilities seem to be frustrated individuals in society. The researcher believes that what has been mentioned is not a good generation on which a scholar can base an argument. This is evidenced in earlier indicated of Jessica. The story goes to say that earlier on, Jessica was disheartened and devalued. What she did was to quit her government job. This enabled her to launch, 'Enabled Empowerment Consultancy' that help people with disabilities to find jobs.

To reduce all the risk factors stated above, affected women from different angles must be willing to learn, apply what they have learnt and adjust. This means that they should be willing to work hard on their own without being forced by anybody. Zambia being one of the developing countries should encourage her own people particularly women to participate in income generating ventures that are funded by some organizations or partner countries. For women to be financially independent, they should engage themselves in small scale entrepreneurships. This is evidenced by how microfinance reduces gender inequality in developing countries by Quanda Zhang Alberto Pruso in Times of Zambia of Monday, September 25, 2017



In the above picture we can see how microfinance enables poor women to engage in income generating activities that in turn help them become financially independent hence alleviating poverty levels of women.

Conclusion

The variables identified involving women as victims are prevalent, and seem to be on the increase in Zambia. For this reason, they need to be addressed as a way of paving way for resilience. Poverty, marginalization, death, low esteem and disabilities have been ranked as the common risk factors that affect women in one way or another. The research identifies five of the major variables that expose women to vulnerability: poverty, marginalization, death, low esteem and disabilities. A number of measures have been suggested as ways of introducing resilience in women. These include encouraging the vulnerable women to seek support from family, friends and community for support; at the same time such women should be empowered with resources to start their own businesses such as financial boosts available in Zambia. The study highly recommends counseling and appropriate education to be given to vulnerable women as well as discouraging marginalization at all costs as it is already covered in Citizen Economic Act number 9 of 2006. It was also emphasized that improved investigative skills should be put in place in order to get rid of marginalization. Property grabbing should be discouraged. In fact, the research recommends courts of law to institute stern measures to property grabbers. All in

all, women who are vulnerable should develop positive thinking which enables one to withstand any challenges faced no matter how harsh they may be. High esteem is a value that should be embraced regardless of condition. By so doing, resilience in women will be attained through sense of purpose, positive beliefs in one's abilities, embracing change, being optimistic, nurturing one self and developing problem solving skills.

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