SEPTEMBER 2024

RESEARCH ON WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC BUDGETING AND ACCESS TO LOAN AND CREDIT FINANCING

FOR CHRISTIAN AID ZIMBABWE, WOMEN AND LAW IN SOUTHERN AFRICA (WLSA) AND ZIMBABWE COALITION ON DEBT AND DEVELOPMENT (ZIMCODD)

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BSP	Budget Strategy Paper
CA	Christian Aid
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
IBP	International Budget Partnerships
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MDA	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MFIP	Ministry of Finance and Investment Promotion
MFIs	Microfinance Institutions
MP	Member of Parliament
NFIS	National Financial Inclusion Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OBS	Open Budget Survey
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
RBZ	Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe
RDC	Rural District Council
WLSA	Women and Law in Southern Africa
ZIMCODD	Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from a study on 'Women's Participation in Public Budgeting and Access to Loan And Credit Financing In Zimbabwe.' The study areas of investigation are Gokwe North, a rural area, and Tafara and Mabvuku, urban wards in Harare.

For purposes of systematic analysis, the study is delimited into two sections, Section A and B. Section A focuses on women participation in the public budgeting processes and section B deals with women access to loan and credit financing. For purposes of mainstreaming vulnerability and inequality, the study focused on vulnerable communities and hence a deliberate strategy to include young and elderly women, women with disabilities, women in the informal sector and women in rural settings.

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- To conduct an analysis of the level of women's participation in public budgeting processes and access to credit and loan financing in Gokwe North, Tafara, and Mabvuku.
- To identify and document the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that hinder women's active participation in public budgeting and access to credit and loan financing in both rural and urban settings.
- To design and propose targeted interventions to enhance women's participation in public budgeting and improve access to credit and loan financing.

Study Key Findings

- Women in Zimbabwe face significant barriers to financial inclusion and effective engagement in public financial processes. Study statistics show acutely low knowledge of the budgeting process among women respondents, with only 11.2% aware of the national government budgeting processes and cycle.

- Women exhibit low access to pre-budget documents (only 6.9% accessed the BSP.

- Minimal participation in budget consultation meetings (41.4% participated in pre-budget consultations.

- Limited access to budget review statements (only 14.8% accessed financial statements, and audit reports (20.3% accessed audit reports for 2022.

- In both rural and urban areas, the barriers to accessing loans and credit financing are complex and multifaceted, encompassing socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. These challenges hinder women's economic empowerment and limit their ability to engage meaningfully in financial and public decision-making processes.

- Socio-cultural norms play a significant role in limiting women's participation in public budgeting and access to financial resources. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often relegate women to peripheral roles in both household and community decision-making processes. These norms contribute to the low levels of awareness and involvement in budgeting and financial activities.
- The study established that women in both rural and urban areas lack collateral, such as land ownership, which is crucial for securing loans.
- Limited financial literacy and inadequate access to financial services hinder women's ability to navigate and utilize available financial resources effectively.
- Institutional gender biases and systemic barriers within financial institutions lending practices and bureaucratic hurdles impede women's access to loans and participation in budgeting processes.

Study Recommendations

Addressing the above barriers requires a multi-faceted approach. The study strongly posits a set of actionable recommendations that can be implemented by government agencies, banks and financial institutions, civil society (CSOs) and development partners to enhance women participation in public budgeting and improve access to loans and credit facilities. These recommendations are:

- Budget documents must be made more accessible in formats that encourage women's participation in public budgeting, especially in underserved regions.
- The inclusion of women in budget consultations should be mandated to ensure their perspectives and needs are fully represented in fiscal policy decisions.
- Digital platforms and social media should be utilised to inform and engage women in budget processes, overcoming geographical barriers, particularly for those in rural areas.
- Gender-responsive budgeting should be institutionalized to ensure fiscal policies equitably address women's needs and promote their participation in economic decision-making.
- Targeted financial literacy programmes should be implemented to equip women, particularly in rural areas, with the skills necessary to engage effectively with financial institutions and access credit.
- Financial products should be tailored to the specific needs of women in the informal sector, offering flexible terms that address issues such as lack of collateral and fluctuating incomes.
- Legal reforms should focus on strengthening women's property rights and lending practices to improve their access to credit and overcome institutional biases.
- Public-private partnerships should be promoted to expand women's access to financial services, entrepreneurial support, and financial products that meet their specific needs.

- Reform land policies in order to prioritise equitable land ownership rights for w
women to use land assets as collateral when seeking loans from financial ins

- Improve financial literacy - women in rural areas, must be empowered with th
needed to engage with financial institutions effectively.

- Develop financial products tailored to the unique needs of women, especiall
sector.

- Strengthen collaborative initiatives between government agencies, financial i
organisations, and local communities because they are vital in fostering an
for women's economic empowerment.

1

INTRODUCTION

The study survey focused on households as the sampling unit. The sample size was calculated at 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level.

A government budget is "a national financial plan covering expenditures and receipts' usually for a period of one year. It outlines the major sources of revenue and how much such revenues are to be expanded as well as the overall budget surplus or deficit and how the budget deficit will be financed. It is therefore, a planning, policy, political, and economic tool" (AFRODAD 2008).1 This study, therefore seeks to firstly, examine the involvement of women in public budgeting processes within the Zimbabwean context, and secondly investigate the extent of access to credit and loan financing mechanisms among women, and thirdly, analyse the barriers, challenges, and opportunities encountered by women in securing financial resources for entrepreneurial ventures, business development, and their socio-economic empowerment. The study further explores the intersectionality of gender dynamics, socioeconomic factors, policy frameworks, and institutional structures influencing women's participation in budgetary decision-making and their access to financial resources.

The study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the current status, gaps, and potential strategies to enhance women's inclusion in budgetary processes and improve their access to credit and loan financing for sustainable development and gender equality. The analysis will lead to actionable recommendations for policy and practice changes that can be implemented by government agencies, banks and financial institutions, CSOs and development partners to enhance women participation in public budgeting and improve access to loans and credit facilities.

1.1 Background and Context of the Study

The Government of Zimbabwe has committed to the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),**[2] and this study focuses on Articles 7, 13, and 14, which seeks to eliminate discrimination in political and public life, economic and social life, and address the specific challenges faced by rural women. This study, evaluate the extent of government commitment through the lens of women's participation in macro-economic governance, specifically in public budgeting processes and access to loan and credit financing. The focus areas for this study are Gokwe North, a rural district in the Midlands Province, known primarily for cotton production, Tafara and Mabvuku, low-income urban suburbs of

1 AFRODAD 2008: Economic Literacy Training – Gender Budgeting and National Budget Module
2 https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women

Harare. Gokwe North has experienced a sharp decline in cotton markets, adversely affecting the local economy and women's economic opportunities. In contrast, Tafara and Mabvuku are characterized by high levels of informal trade, with most women engaged in low-income, informal economic activities. These areas represent critical zones where the empowerment of women through macro-economic governance could significantly impact their livelihoods.
In Zimbabwe, women are generally marginalised in economic governance and socio-political life. Despite the government's commitments under CEDAW, systemic barriers such as patriarchal norms, limited access to education, and insufficient representation in decision-making positions continue to impede women's full participation. Economic policies and financial systems often overlook women's contributions and needs, relegating them to peripheral roles and informal sectors with limited economic security and growth potential.

The bankable position of Zimbabwean women is undermined by these socio-political dynamics, which restrict their access to critical resources such as land and credit lines. Despite this, women have demonstrated resilience and potential as key economic actors. Studies show that women are more likely to reinvest their earnings into their families and communities, promoting broader socio-economic benefits (Munyanyi[3], 2014, Mbiro and Ndlovu, 2021)[4]. Empowering women through improved access to financial resources and inclusive economic governance can thus unlock significant growth potential for the country.

Article 7 of CEDAW emphasizes the importance of eliminating discrimination against women in political and public life. This includes ensuring women's equal rights to participate in governance and decision-making processes, such as public budgeting. This study analyzes the government's efforts to facilitate and enhance women's participation in public budgeting processes in both rural and urban settings, assess the availability of pre-budget documents, inclusion in consultation meetings, and access to budget statements and audit reports. **Article 13** of CEDAW addresses economic and social life, underscoring the need for equal access to economic resources, including credit and lending facilities. This aspect is crucial for the women of Gokwe North, Tafara, and Mabvuku, where access to financial resources can transform economic opportunities and empower women to contribute more significantly to the local economy. The study examines the barriers these women face in accessing credit and loans, such as lack of collateral, financial literacy, and gender biases within financial institutions.

In addition, **Article 14** of CEDAW specifically pertains to rural women, recognising the unique challenges they face and the necessity for their participation in development planning. Given Gokwe North's rural context, the study explores how the government has implemented measures to involve rural women in macro-economic planning and budgeting, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met. The decline in cotton markets in this region further highlights the need for diversified economic opportunities and support for women.

The study concludes by providing policy recommendations that can enhance women's participation in public budgeting and improve their access to credit and loan financing. These recommendations when adopted and implemented do promote gender equality in financial

3 Munyanyi, W, Women Financial Inclusion in Zimbabwe: A Descriptive Comparison of Rural and Urban Populaces, International Journal of Education and Research Vol. 2 No. 6, 20

4 Mbiro, K.A, and Ndlovu, T, Impact of women's participation on village savings and loan on children's nutritional diversity in rural Chimanimani in Zimbabwe, 2021. Downloaded from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/ Date 27/05/2024

access and empower women to play a more active role in macro-economic governance, thereby fostering inclusive economic growth and development in Zimbabwe.

1.2 Methodology of the Study

Survey Design and Sampling

The study applied a sequential explanatory mixed method. Design and data were obtained using a survey, in-depth interviews and the review of literature. A mixed methods approach was essential for this study because it combines quantitative data to capture broad patterns and trends with qualitative insights to understand personal experiences and contextual factors. This approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis, revealing both statistical relationships and the nuanced barriers women face. By integrating these methods, the study provides a deeper, more actionable understanding of the dynamics women participation in budgeting processes and access to loans.

The study focused on Gokwe North Rural District Council (RDC) in the Midlands Province and Tafara and Mabvuku High density suburbs in Harare Metropolitan, all of which are characterised by low-income populations. Gokwe North relies heavily on cotton farming, a sector that has suffered significantly due to a decline in global cotton prices, leaving many farmers struggling to sustain their livelihoods. Meanwhile, Tafara and Mabvuku are poor urban communities marked by high levels of informality, with many residents engaging in informal employment to make ends meet. These areas face numerous socio-economic challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to essential services, and high unemployment rates, reflecting the broader struggles of low-income communities in Zimbabwe.

The study survey focused on households as the sampling unit. The sample size was calculated at 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level. Key informants were purposively sampled on the basis of the role they play in national budget processes, the public fiscal management system and the banking and financial services as well as women community leaders. These key informants included among others, key staff and officials of the Parliamentary Budget Office, Public Accounts Committee, Ministry of Finance and Investment Promotion, Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development, Gender Commission, banking sector executives and development partners. Furthermore, at community level, grassroots women including women with disabilities were purposively sampled for them to share their experiences with the budgeting process and access to credit and loan facilities.

The target was to administer 280 questionnaires, translating into 140 households per each of the two study areas. The 280 households represent communities including grassroots structures for women, some of whom were engaged as key informants as indicated in the methodology. A total of 290 questionnaires/households were administered. For qualitative data, representatives from the Parliamentary Budget Office, Public Accounts Office, Ministry of Finance and Investment Promotion, Gender Commission, banking sector executives and development partners were interviewed (refer to tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Quantitative Data Sampling Table

STUDY AREA	TARGET HOUSEHOLDS	ACTUAL HOUSEHOLDS	MARGIN OF ERROR	CONFIDENCE LEVEL
Gokwe North RDC	140	145	5%	95%
Tafara and Mabvuku	140	145	5%	95%
Total	280	290	5%	95%

Table 2: Qualitative Data Sampling Table

KEY INFORMANTS CATEGORY	PURPOSE OF SAMPLING	SPECIFIC INSTITUTIONS/ GROUPS
Parliamentary Budget Office	Role in national budget processes	Officials
Public Accounts Committee	Role in public fiscal management system	Officials
Ministry of Finance and Investment Promotion	Role in enhancing public participation in national budget processes and access to loan and credit facilities	Officials
Gender Commission	Mechanisms of enhancing public participation in the public fiscal management system and access to loans and credit financing	Officials
Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development	Facilitating women participation in budgeting and loan and credit markets through policy and other interventions	Officials
Banking Sector Executives	Role in promoting inclusivity and equity in the banking and financial services	Executives
Development Partners	Monitoring government compliance with legislation and international best practices in promoting transparency and accountability, equity and inclusivity in public budgeting and access to loans	Representatives
Grassroots Women Organisations including Women with Disabilities	Experiences with budgeting process and access to credit and loan facilities	Community leaders and grassroots women structures
Academia	Academic reflections on women participation in public budgeting and access to loan and credit financing	Researchers and academics

1.2.2 Demographics of Study Participants

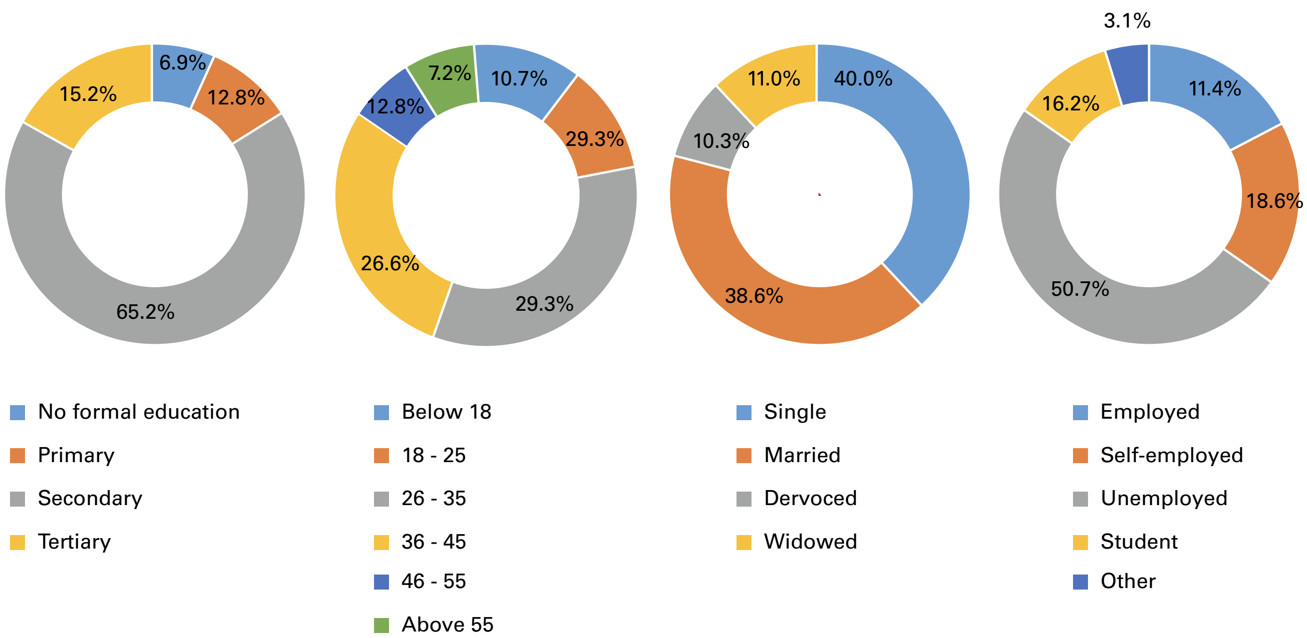
The distribution of respondents by age shows that the largest age group is 36-45 years, comprising 29.3% of participants. This is followed by the 26-35 age group at 26.6% and the 18-25 age group at 13.4%. The smallest age groups are those above 55 years at 7.2% and those below 18 years at 10.7%. The age distribution implies that the majority of respondents are in their prime working and productive years (26-45), which could indicate a higher likelihood of active participation in economic activities and decision-making processes.

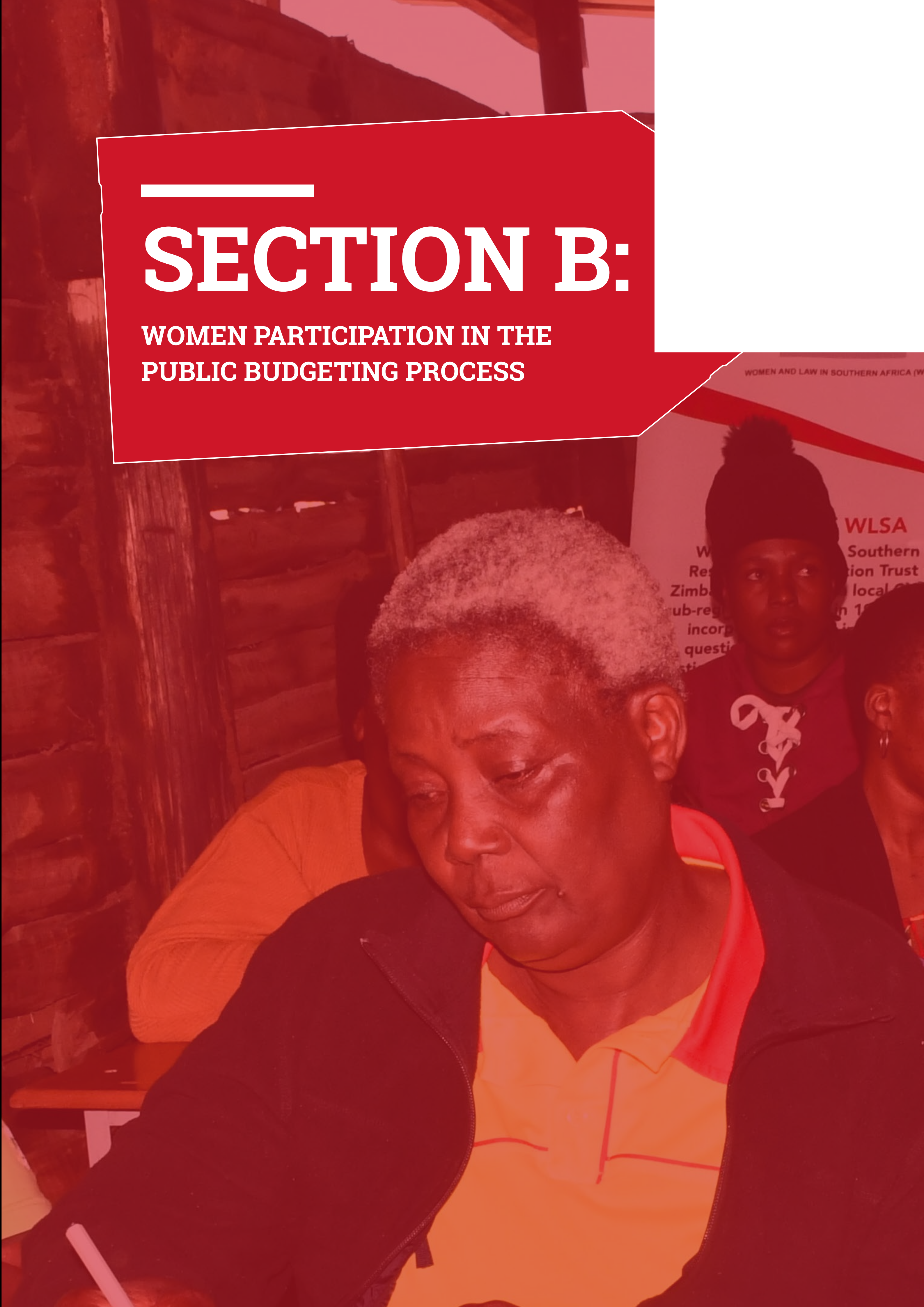
On distribution of respondents by qualification, the majority of study participants, 65.2%, have attained secondary education. This is followed by 15.2% who have tertiary education, 12.8% with primary education, and a smaller proportion, 6.9%, having no formal education. This suggests that most participants have a foundational level of education, with a significant minority pursuing higher education.

On the distribution of respondents by marital status, results show that 40% are single, 38.6% are married, 10.3% are divorced, and 11.0% are widowed. The high percentage of single and married respondents suggests a focus on issues pertinent to these groups, such as employment and family-related economic challenges, while the presence of divorced and widowed respondents highlights the need to address financial security and social support for these demographics. Only 0.7% of the survey respondents were male, while 2 males were consulted in KII.

Demographic data on occupation reveals that a majority (50.7%) of the study participants were unemployed, indicating a significant portion without stable income sources. Employed and self-employed individuals made up 11.4% and 18.6% respectively, highlighting a combined workforce representation of 30%. Students comprised 16.2% of the participants, suggesting a notable segment still in education. A small fraction (3.1%) fell into the 'other' category, encompassing those not fitting the primary occupational classifications. Lastly, demographic data shows that 11.2% of the respondents live with some form of disability. This is about 2% higher than the national average in terms of the 2022 census. This encompasses various types of disabilities, including visual, hearing, physical, intellectual, and emotional disabilities. The 2022 Population and Housing Census, indicates that approximately 9% of the population lives with some form of disability. The census results show that the prevalence of disabilities is slightly higher among women compared to men, and that rural areas have a higher percentage of individuals with disabilities compared to urban areas. (refer to figure 2 below).

Fig 2: Age, marital status, education level and occupation of study participants





SECTION B:

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE PUBLIC BUDGETING PROCESS

2

OVERVIEW OF THE ZIMBABWE NATIONAL BUDGETING PROCESS

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development is the main organ at the executive level responsible for initiating and managing the budget process

2.1 Legal and Institutional Framework of National Budgeting

This section looks at the legal and institutional context of national government budgeting in Zimbabwe. The key legal frameworks analysed here are the Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013 and the Public Finance Management Act 2015 (PFMA) and the supporting institutional frameworks.

2.1.1 The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013

The national budget process is enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Section 298 of the Constitution provides principles that guide all aspects of public finance processes and management in Zimbabwe. These include among others transparency and accountability, equity and inclusivity in public financial matters, sound public financial management and fiscal reporting and that public funds must be expended transparently. Furthermore, the constitution empowers Parliament to oversee state revenue and expenditure (Sec 299), outlines provisions for setting up of the Consolidated Revenue Fund to safeguard public funds and property (Sec 302) and establish the office of the Auditor General (Sec 309) to audit the financial performance of government entities and agencies. Fundamental to note is that the Constitution mandates the incorporation of gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that public finance policies address gender inequalities. It requires that budgeting processes consider the different needs and impacts on women and men. This ensures that financial allocations promote gender equity and inclusivity across all sectors.

2.1.2 The Public Finance Management Act 2015 Chapter 22:19

The PFMA specifies principles to be followed in processes involving the management of public funds. Section 7 (1)(a) of the PFMA identifies the duty of the Minister of Finance and Investment Promotion as that of developing and implementing macroeconomic policies as well as to supervise, monitor and coordinate the finances of Zimbabwe. 7(1)(b) of the PFMA gives the MFED power to advise the Government on the allocation of public resources between Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Furthermore, section 13 (1) and (2) of the PFMA explicitly spells out the functions of the Minister as that of management and disbursement of public resources, taking into consideration the monthly reports submitted to him or her. The whole budget process, including dates and key activities of a budget process are set in section 10(1) of the Public Finance Management (General) Regulations, 2019. However, whereas the

PFMA contains mechanisms to enhance public participation in the public fiscal management, it lacks comprehensive mechanisms for gender budgeting, which aspect should be considered in the current reform of the Act.

2.1.3 The Role of Parliament in budget formulation and implementation

In compliance with Section 28 (5) of the PFMA, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development seek parliamentary discretion in the preparation and formulation of the national annual budget through the appropriate Portfolio Committee of Parliament. Furthermore, the Portfolio Committee is mandated to conduct public hearings to solicit the views and opinions of stakeholders to allow for inclusivity and equitable representation. Section 141 of the Constitution compels that Parliament facilitate public involvement in its legislative and other processes and in the processes of its committees as the process ensures that stakeholders are consulted about budgets being considered by Parliament. **The Parliament of Zimbabwe carries out budget consultations in all the provincial capitals and other selected areas based on resource availability.**

2.2.4 The Executive's role in Zimbabwe's budget making process

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development is the main organ at the executive level responsible for initiating and managing the budget process. The Ministry of Finance when crafting a budget, issues a pre-budget strategy paper that sets out the formal budget framework to be followed in the preparation of budget proposals by line ministries. Nevertheless, all government line ministries are also required to submit ministry requirements and point of views perceived as fundamental in relation to the issues covered in the Budget Strategy Paper. The BSP facilitates an understanding of the macro-fiscal situation as it provides an update on both international and domestic economic developments outlook to year end as well as projections for coming year. Further, the Minister is required to publish the Annual Budget documents on the internet on the same day when Annual Budget documents are presented to Parliament and also make available the documents to the public in printed format as soon as is practicable as depicted in the Public Finance Management (General) Regulations, 2019 (Statutory Instrument 135 of 2019) and Section 11(2) of the Public Finance Management (General) Regulations. **Following the proximity of social media, it has generally been observed that the national budget is also widely circulated on various social media platforms such as twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp on the same day that it is presented.**

2.1.5 Auditor General's office and the budget making and implementation process

Section 309 of the constitution provides for the establishment and functions of an Office of the Auditor-General whose main duty is to audit the accounts, financial systems and financial management of all departments, institutions and agencies of the government in order to safeguard public funds and public entities. The functions of the Auditor-General are also stated in Section 83 of Public Finance Management Act, which requires annual reports and audited financial statements of state organs and constitutional entities to be produced. These reports should show financial performance of the state organs; particularly relating to losses arising through instances of unauthorized expenditure; irregular expenditure and wasteful expenditure; as well as recoveries and write-offs. Furthermore, section 46 of the Regulations, require all Accounting Officers of Ministries, Public Entities and Constitutional Entities to retain all financial information relating to one financial year for three years in their original form after the audit report for that financial year has been tabled in Parliament.

2.1.6 Role of Civil Society in the Zimbabwe budget process

Civil society organisations remain a critical player in promoting fiscal transparency as they play a critical role of providing independent research, opinions and perspectives on various policy aspects of the National development. This includes analysing the impacts of the budget on various interest groups such as women, youth, children and people with disabilities, among others. Civil society organisations are also involved in civic education on the importance of participation in budget outreach, as well as demystifying the highly technical budget language versions into citizen version budgets for easier understanding by ordinary citizens. Civic society also ensure the improvement of policy and allocation decisions by bringing different perspectives as well as creativity to budget debates. ZIMCODD led open budget surveys for years 2019 to 2023. The open budget survey is a measure of public sector budgets based on the three pillars: budget transparency, public participation and budget oversight. The purpose of the surveys was to help understand national and local authority budgeting processes and suggest ways of increasing the participation of citizens throughout the budget cycle. ZIMCODD followed the survey with various interventions to strengthen community participation in national and local government budgeting processes.

2.1.7 Media and the budget process

Budget advocacy takes place in the public arena, where events are shaped a great deal by how the media in all its forms. An effective budget advocacy needs a media strategy. The media increase public awareness and change public opinion about the budgeting process as it presents and discusses budget and fiscal issues. The media has a fundamental role to play in ensuring that information related to public finance management is widely disseminated to reach out a wide range of audiences. It covers discussions by Parliamentary Portfolio Committees during budget consultations as well as post budget review processes, especially submissions from Ministries to various Portfolio Committees during the period following the announcement of the national budget.

Figure 3: Budget Calendar

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Preparation of Budget Strategy Paper Starts												
Ministries input into the Budget Strategy Paper												
Ministry of Finance sends the Budget Strategy Paper to Cabinet												
Ministry of Finance submits the Budget Strategy Paper to Parliament												
Cabinet approval of the Budget Strategy Paper												
Ministry of Finance issues Budget Call Circular												
Submission of Mid-Year Fiscal Review to Cabinet												
Ministries provide budget submissions to ministry of finance												
Ministry of Finance updates the macroeconomic and fiscal information and submits to cabinet												
Ministry of Finance completes review of budget submissions												
Ministry of Finance and other ministries hold budget discussions												
Ministry of Finance provides draft budget estimates to Cabinet												
Presentation of annual Budget to parliament												
Budget debate and approval /Publication of enacted budget												
Periodic Performance reports												

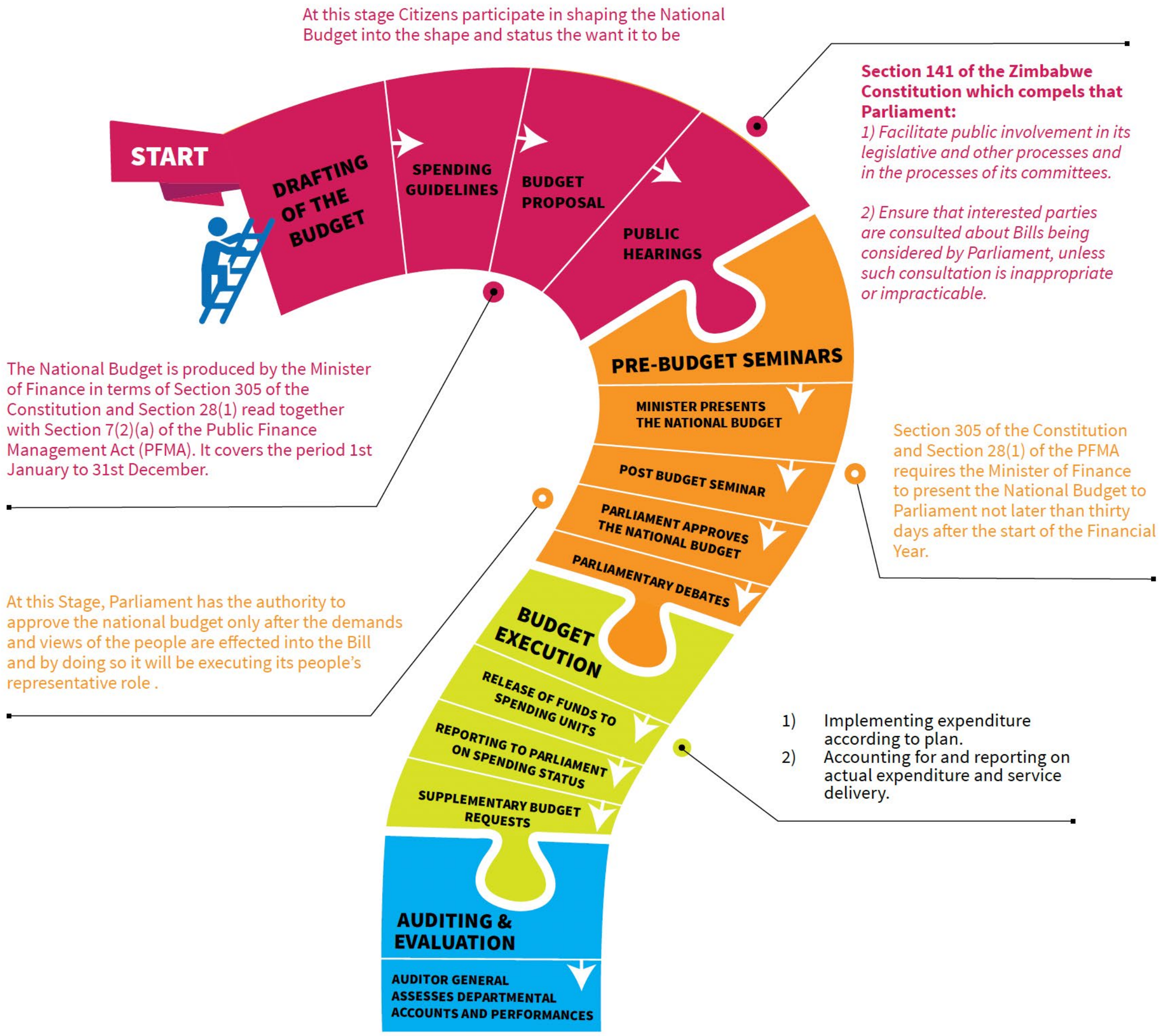
Source: Public Finance Management (General) Regulations, 2019

The national budget cycle, as provided for in Section 11(1) of the Public Finance Management (General) Regulations, 2019 can be presented as shown in Figure 1. The cycle involves the preparation of the Budget Strategy Paper, the issuance of the Budget Call Circular, Budget Consultations and Presentation of the National Budget to Parliament, followed by a mid-year fiscal review.

Figure 3: The National Government Budget Cycle

WANT TO KNOW NATIONAL BUDGET FORMULATION PROCESS?

HOW ABOUT WE PLAY A GAME OF THE NATIONAL BUDGET. LETS START.
Follow the arrows



BUDGETARY STAGE	KEY DOCUMENT
Drafting Stage	Budget proposal
Approval stage	Enacted Budget
Execution	Statutory reports
Audit	OAG Reports

Adapted from Citizen's Budget Guide (2019)

3

PRODUCTION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF PRE-BUDGET POLICY DOCUMENTS

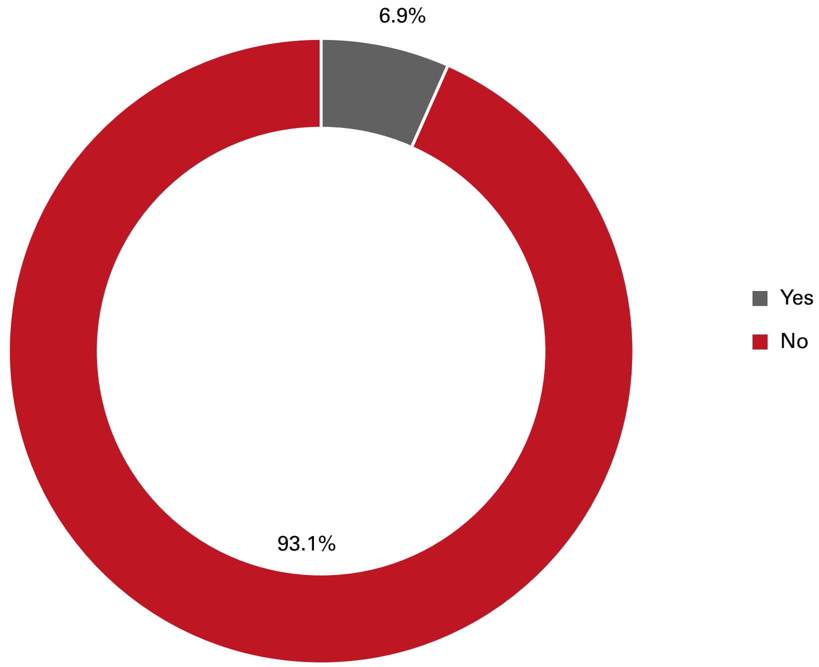
The study survey data shows, a mere 6.9% of respondents are aware of the BSP, with even lower figures in specific regions, 2.11% in Gokwe South and 4.71% in Tafara and Mabvuku.

3.1 Women's knowledge and access to the budget strategy paper

There is a significant gap in public knowledge and access to the Budget Strategy Paper (BSP). This underscores a critical challenge in public financial management and civic engagement. The study survey data shows, a mere 6.9% of respondents are aware of the BSP, with even lower figures in specific regions, 2.11% in Gokwe South and 4.71% in Tafara and Mabvuku. **This stark contrast is compounded by the overwhelming 93.1% of respondents who expressed ignorance of the BSP, indicating that a vast majority of the women remain uninformed about crucial budgetary frameworks that impact their communities.** The disparity in knowledge levels between urban (Tafara and Mabvuku) and rural (Gokwe South) areas suggests potential geographical and infrastructural barriers to information dissemination, which need to be addressed to foster more inclusive and participatory governance.

Furthermore, access to the 2024 BSP remains alarmingly low, with only 5.7% of respondents having accessed the document. This lack of access is reflected in the 94.3% of respondents who did not engage with the BSP for the period in question. The findings from the International Budget Partnership (IBP) 2023 Open Budget Survey (OBS) aligns with the issues identified in our survey. The OBS report reveals that Zimbabwe has a score of 22 on public participation, ranking significantly below the global average. This indicates systemic challenges in involving the public in the budgeting process. The OBS highlights that only a limited number of budget documents are made available to the public in a timely manner, and there are minimal opportunities for citizens to engage in budget discussions. These findings corroborate our survey results, which show that a vast majority of women, especially in rural areas like Gokwe South, are unaware of and unable to access BSP.

Figure 4: Public Knowledge and Access to the BSP



Representatives of CSOs (who were all female respondents) interviewed submitted that **low access to the BSP among women respondents arise from insufficient and ineffective mechanisms for promoting the BSP by the Ministry of Finance.** A feminist with a local NGO programming in Gokwe indicated that her programming experience on access to budget information reveals limited access that arise from a combination of factors including poor distribution channels, lack of digital infrastructure, and low levels of public engagement or awareness initiatives by the relevant authorities.

Consequently, this widespread lack of knowledge and access impedes women's ability to participate meaningfully in budgetary processes, thereby weakening the transparency and accountability of the budgeting system. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to enhance communication strategies, improve distribution networks, and actively engage communities to ensure that all citizens can access and understand critical government documents like the BSP. IBP (2019) views that one opportunity to influence the executive's budget proposal in countries that make available the Pre-Budget Statement is for civil society organisations to analyse these assumptions and use the findings to influence the parameters of the proposed budget especially gazing into the affairs of women and marginalized groups[5].

5 International Budget Partnership (2019), Open Budget Survey 2019. Downloaded from https://www.google.com/ Date 21/05/2024

By analysing Pre-Budget Statements, civil society organisations

- Establish themselves as a source of valuable information.
- Identify questionable assumptions and potential problems before the bu
- Generate evidence that can support advocacy.
- Support the ability of the public to participate in the debate by providi information.

4

WOMEN ENGAGEMENT DURING THE PRE-BUDGET STAGE

The survey results reveal that a substantial portion of women,

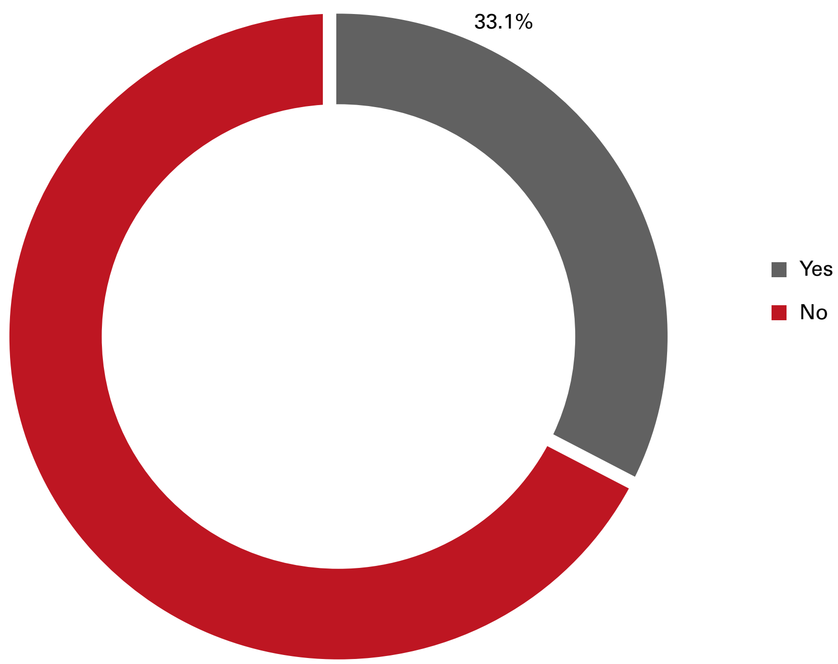
58.6%,

have not attended budget consultation meetings, with significant regional differences

4.1 Women knowledge of the national government budgeting process

The study survey results indicate a substantial knowledge gap among women regarding the national government budgeting process, with only 33.1% of respondents being aware of it. This knowledge disparity is even more pronounced when comparing rural and urban areas: a mere 11.2% of women in the rural Gokwe North reported having knowledge, contrasted with 21.8% in the urban suburbs of Tafara and Mabvuku. These figures suggest that geographical location significantly impacts access to information and educational resources related to government budgeting processes.(refer to figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Knowledge of National Budgeting Processes

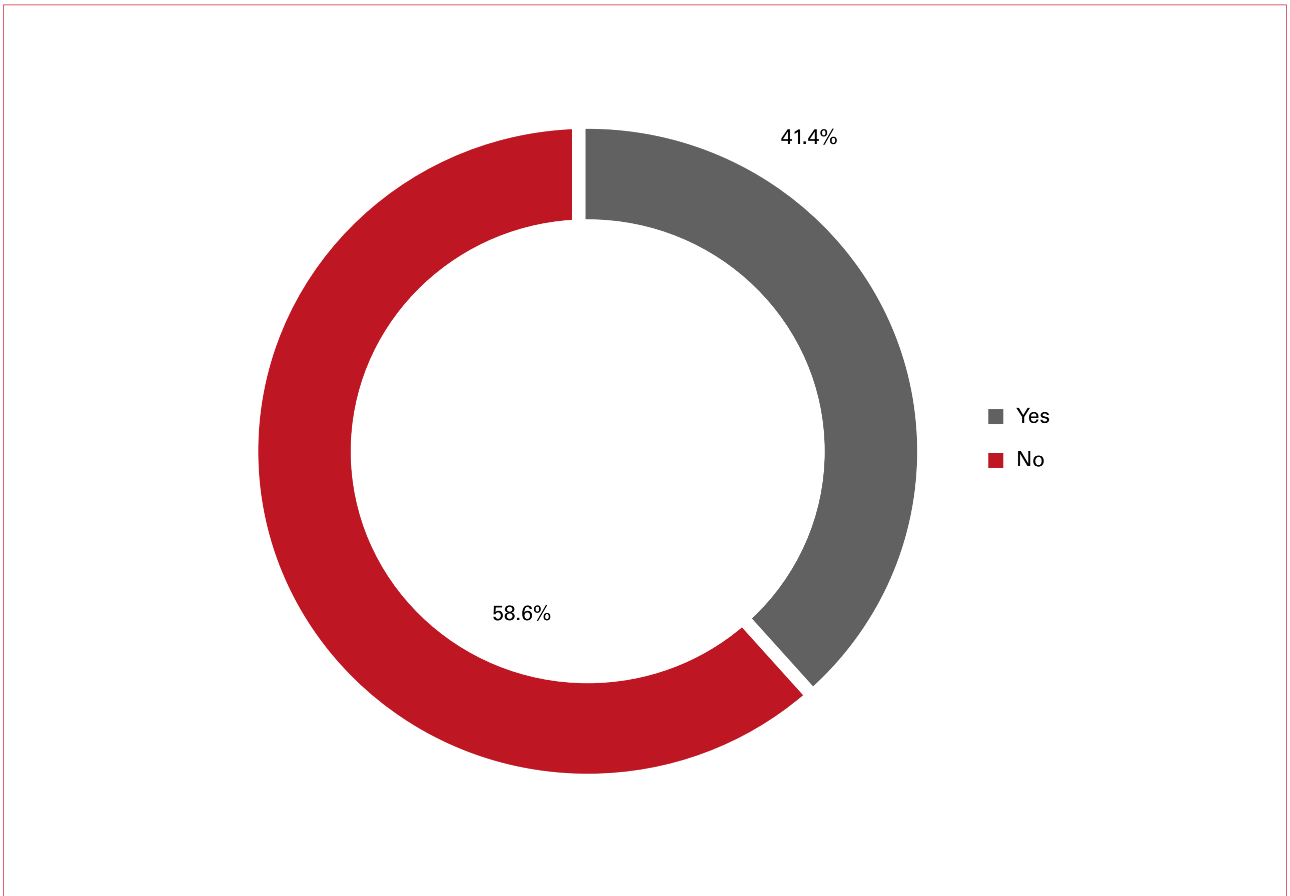


Representatives of CSOs interviewed interpreted the findings as a call to action for targeted interventions to address these disparities. **A local MP in Gokwe North noted that** "there is need for increased outreach and education efforts, through community centres and local leaders who can disseminate information effectively. Such outreach and education should include information on the legal and institutional frameworks for public budgets, processes and methods in developing the budget and the role and value of public input in the budgeting processes". In the same context a local political leader in Mabvuku submitted that, "for Tafara and Mabvuku, although knowledge levels are relatively higher, there is still a considerable portion of the population lacking essential information. CSOs argued for the leveraging of urban infrastructure, such as local government offices and community organisations, to provide workshops and training sessions. By addressing these gaps, it is possible to empower more women to participate actively in the national budgeting process, ensuring that their needs and perspectives are considered in national policy-making.

4.2 Women participation in national budget consultation processes

The survey results reveal that a substantial portion of women, 58.6%, have not attended budget consultation meetings, with significant regional differences. Only 11.2% of women in the rural area of Gokwe North have participated, compared to 30.2% in the urban suburbs of Tafara and Mabvuku (refer to fig 6 below). This indicates that women in rural areas face greater challenges in engaging with the national budgeting process which key informants attributed to factors such as limited access to information, logistical barriers, and fewer opportunities for civic participation.

Figure 6: Statistics on Women Participation in Budget Consultation Meetings



Academics interviewed interpreted these findings as indicative of structural inequalities that disproportionately affect rural women. They argued that these disparities hinder the ability of rural women to influence public spending decisions that impact their lives. By not attending these meetings, rural women miss out on opportunities to voice their needs and priorities, which can result in budget allocations that do not address the specific challenges faced by their communities. This lack of representation can perpetuate cycles of poverty and underdevelopment in rural areas.

Representatives of CSOs emphasized the need for targeted interventions to increase women's participation in budget consultations. **These range from the use of mobile outreach programmes, the establishment of local information centres, and the involvement of community leaders to disseminate information and encourage participation.** A local MP from Gokwe North and officials from the Ministry of Finance viewed the results as a call to improve the inclusivity of the budgeting process. **A Ministry of Finance official specifically proposed "policies to ensure budget consultations are held at times and locations that are accessible to women in both urban and rural areas as well as providing support services such as transportation and childcare during meetings."** Zhou et al (2016) buttressed these views, arguing that addressing these issues is crucial for creating a more inclusive and representative budgeting process, ensuring that the perspectives and needs of all women, regardless of their geographic location, are considered in national budget decisions[6].

4.3 Factors that motivate women to participate in budget consultation meetings

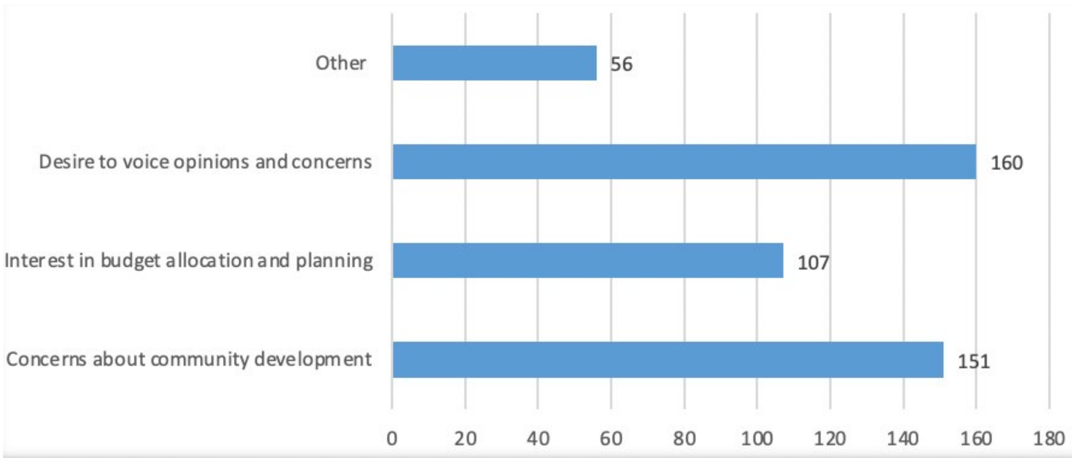
An analysis of the factors motivating women to attend budget consultation meetings reveals key insights into their participation. The most significant motivator, cited by 55.2% of respondents, is the desire to voice opinions and concerns. A feminist activist engaged as a key informant in the study pointed out that, "Women are motivated to participate in budget consultations because they want their voices heard and their concerns addressed. This desire for active involvement reflects their commitment to shaping decisions that impact their lives and communities." A local female employee of an NGO in Gokwe added that "This is particularly important for rural women, who bear extra burdens due to inadequate budget allocations, such as traveling long distances to fetch water and firewood. Their participation is crucial in advocating for resources that directly impact their daily lives and wellbeing." This indicates a strong inclination among women to actively engage in discussions and influence decisions impacting their community and lives.

The second most prominent factor, with 52.1% of respondents, is concerns about community development, highlighting the importance women place on the overall improvement and progress of their community. About 36.9% of the respondents expressed interest in budget allocation and planning, showing a substantial engagement in understanding and potentially influencing financial decisions and resource management. The "Other" category, representing

6 Zhou, G, Mukonza, R.M and Zvoushe, H (2016) Public Budgeting in Zimbabwe: Trends, Processes, and Practices. In Public Budgeting in African Nations, Routledge, New York

19.3% of respondents, includes a variety of unspecified motivations, suggesting diverse interests ranging from personal growth to specific local issues (refer to figure 7 below).

Figure 7: Factors Motivating Women to Participate in Budget Consultations



The analysis underscores that women are highly motivated to participate in budget consultation meetings when they feel their voices can be heard and their concerns can lead to tangible community development. To maintain and increase this engagement, a lecturer from Midlands State University, located in the same province with Gokwe, indicated that meeting organisers should prioritise creating opportunities for women to express their opinions and ensure these contributions impact community planning and budget allocation.

According to ZIMCODD (2022), women's participation in public forums is often driven by the opportunity to voice their concerns and influence decision-making processes, which aligns with the highest motivating factor identified in the figure above[7]. Similarly, OECD (2017) emphasises that inclusive participation in governance is crucial for empowering marginalised groups and ensuring that their specific needs and perspectives are addressed[8]. The significance of community development concerns, as highlighted by the data, is supported by the work of Zhou et al. (2016), argue that community-driven development initiatives are more successful when women are actively involved, as they bring unique insights and priorities to the table[9].

4.4 Barriers to women participation in pre-budget consultations

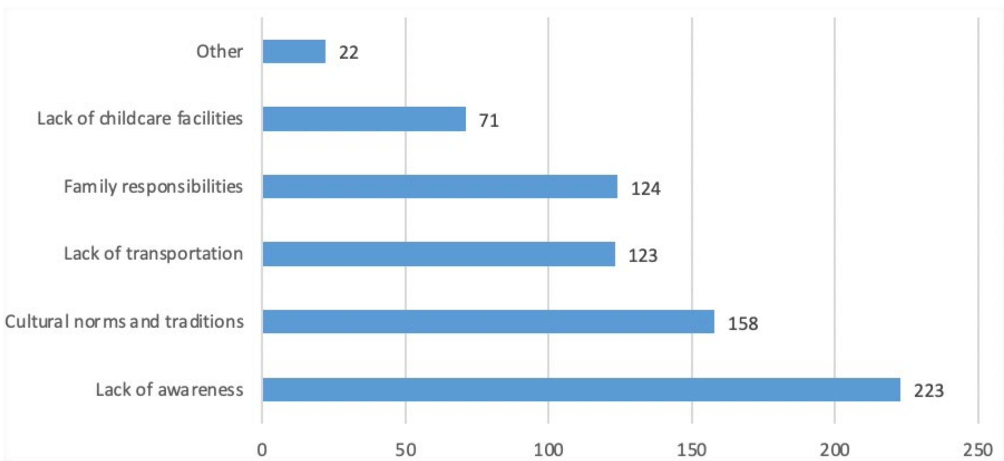
The study found out that there are several key barriers to women's participation in budget consultations. The most prevalent barrier, cited by 76.9% of survey respondents, is a lack of awareness about these meetings and their importance. **This underscores the need for targeted awareness campaigns and community engagement efforts to ensure women are informed and involved.**

7 ZIMCODD (2022). Budget Transparency Comparative Analysis: First vs Second Republic in Zimbabwe. Accessed online at: https://zimcodd.org. Date 17/05/2024
8 OECD (2017), Budget Transparency Toolkit: Practical steps for supporting openness, integrity and accountability in Public Financial Management. Downloaded from https://www.oecd.org/ on 15/05/2024
9 Zhou, G, Mukonza, R.M and Zvoushe, H (2016) Public Budgeting in Zimbabwe: Trends, Processes, and Practices. In Public Budgeting in African Nations, Routledge, New York

A female employee of the ministry responsible for women affairs in Gokwe noted that "lack of awareness about budget consultation meetings is a significant barrier for women's participation. For rural women, this is important as they often miss out on the opportunities due to inadequate information dissemination. Ensuring that these women are informed and involved through targeted awareness campaigns can empower them to advocate for resources and services that are essential for their daily lives." This is followed by cultural norms and traditions, identified by 54.5% of respondents, transportation issues, cited by 42.4% of respondents, family responsibilities, mentioned by 42.8% of respondents which calls for family-friendly policies and support structures such as childcare facilities. The relatively lower percentages indicating lack of education (0.7%) and ignorance (0.7%) as barriers still warrant attention, with experts recommending tailored educational initiatives and transparent communication (refer to figure 8 below).

Engagement with women community leaders revealed **the use of technical language in budget processes presents a significant barrier to effective participation for many women, particularly those in rural areas.** This challenge is prevalent among both urban and rural women. However, an official with the ministry responsible for women affairs indicated that the challenge is more pronounced in rural areas where educational levels are often lower and access to information is limited. **Technical jargon associated with budgets alienate uneducated women, making it difficult for them to engage meaningfully in budget discussions.** In the same context, a representative of a CSO in Harare indicated that even educated women may struggle with accessibility issues if budget documents and discussions are not adapted for those with disabilities. As articulated by the aforementioned, "there is a need for budget information to be translated into accessible formats such as braille and audio, and for the inclusion of sign language interpreters, to ensure that all women, regardless of their impairments, can participate fully and meaningfully in the budget process." As highlighted by the OECD (2017), meaningful participation requires not only access to information but also the ability to understand and use that information effectively, which is often hindered by complex technical language and insufficient accommodation for disabilities

Figure 8: Barriers to Women Participation in Budget Consultations



Academics interviewed emphasised the need for robust research and data analysis to identify underlying factors contributing to these barriers. **They advocate for evidence-based policy interventions and targeted strategies that address the intersectionality of gender, socio-economic status, and cultural contexts and highlight the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge exchange to develop effective solutions.** Civil society representatives stressed the necessity of grassroots mobilisation and community engagement as essential strategies for overcoming barriers. An official from a development organisation in Gokwe stressed the role of advocacy, awareness campaigns, and capacity-building initiatives to empower women and marginalised groups to participate actively in decision-making processes. This is supported by OECD (2017) that CSOs often act as intermediaries between communities and policymakers, advocating for inclusive policies and amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups[10].

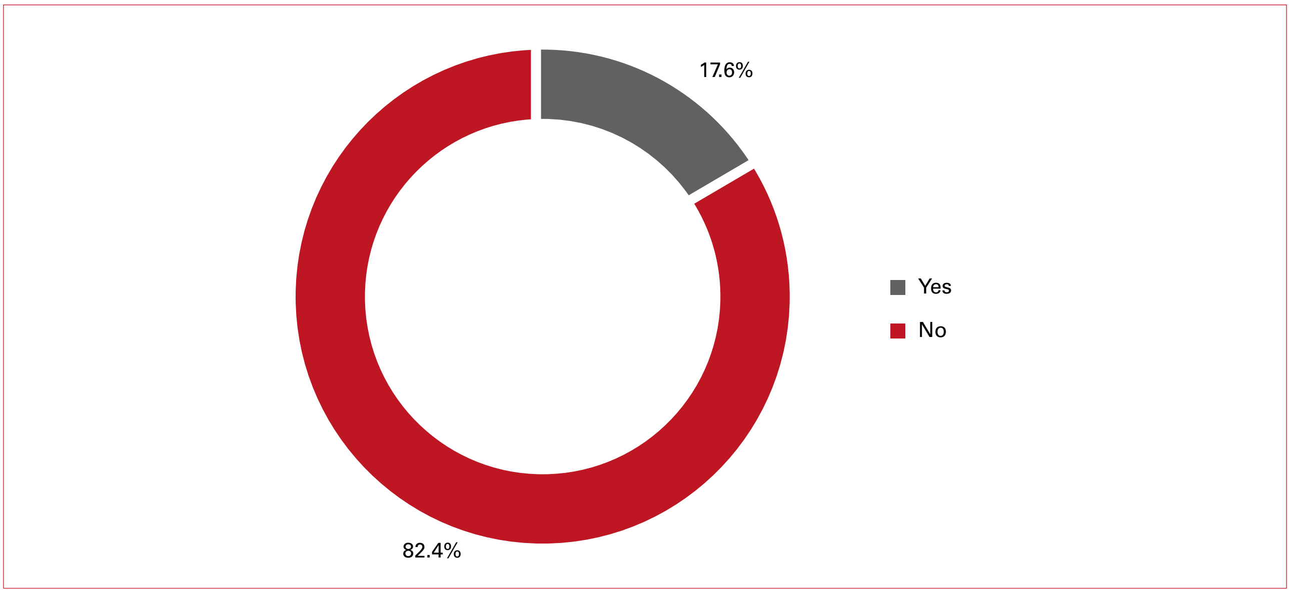
An MP in Tafara underscored the need for legislative reforms that promote gender equality and remove systemic barriers to women's participation in budgeting processes. MPs should thus advocate for gender-responsive budgeting practices and the allocation of resources to address specific challenges identified in the survey results. In Gokwe North, an MP highlighted the importance of parliamentary oversight and accountability mechanisms to ensure gender mainstreaming in budgetary decisions. Officials from the Ministry of Finance provided insights into policy implementation and budget allocation processes. They emphasised **the role of gender analysis in budgeting to identify and address gender disparities effectively**. Ministry officials identified **weak collaboration with other government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners to integrate gender perspectives into fiscal policies and budgetary frameworks.** A Ministry of Women Affairs official confirmed that indeed collaboration between the finance and women affairs portfolios of government to enhance the integration of gender budgeting remains very weak. The World Bank (2022) buttressed the importance of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress and measure the impact of interventions aimed at enhancing women's participation in budget consultations[11].

4.5 Efforts to encourage women to participate in budget consultation meetings

The study survey statistics on efforts to encourage women's participation in budget consultation meetings reveal a stark disparity, with 82.4% of respondents, particularly from the rural area of Gokwe North (67% from Gokwe north respondents and 15.4% from Tafara and Mabvuku), stating that they have not observed any efforts in this regard. Conversely, 17.6% of respondents, primarily from the urban areas of Tafara and Mabvuku (12% from Tafara and Mabvuku and 5.6% from Gokwe North), reported having observed some efforts to encourage women's participation. This data underscores the existing challenges in rural regions, where awareness and initiatives for women's inclusion in budget consultations appear to be lacking compared to more urbanised areas. Key informants from different sectors offer insightful perspectives on this issue. The various efforts identified include educational awareness on the importance of the budget consultation meetings. These include sending messages through social media platforms, text messages, messages at schools and churches.

10 OECD (2017) Ibid
11 World Bank (2022). Poverty grows amid COVID-19. Accessed online at https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/zimbabwe Date 22/05/2024

Figure 9: Efforts to Encourage Women to Participate in Budget Consultation Meetings



MPs from Gokwe North cited the lack of inclusive policy frameworks that prioritize rural communities' needs, including measures to enhance women's participation in budget consultations. **Their submissions pointed to the absence of targeted interventions, such as capacity-building programmes and outreach initiatives tailored to rural settings like Gokwe North.** In Mabvuku, an MP emphasised the role of legislative oversight in ensuring gender-responsive budgeting and the allocation of resources for women's empowerment initiatives in rural areas. **In the same context, academics interviewed highlighted the significance of evidence-based research and gender analysis to identify barriers specific to rural women's participation in budget consultations**. Their arguments related to the need for data-driven approaches that inform policy design and implementation, considering socio-economic factors, cultural dynamics, and access to resources in rural communities. CSO officials drawn from Residents Associations emphasised the importance of community mobilisation, advocacy campaigns, and stakeholder engagement to raise awareness and demand accountability for women's participation in budget consultations. This entails CSOs working towards building partnerships with local authorities, NGOs, and government agencies to ensure sustained efforts in empowering rural women and addressing the systemic barriers that hinder their meaningful engagement in decision-making processes related to budget allocations.

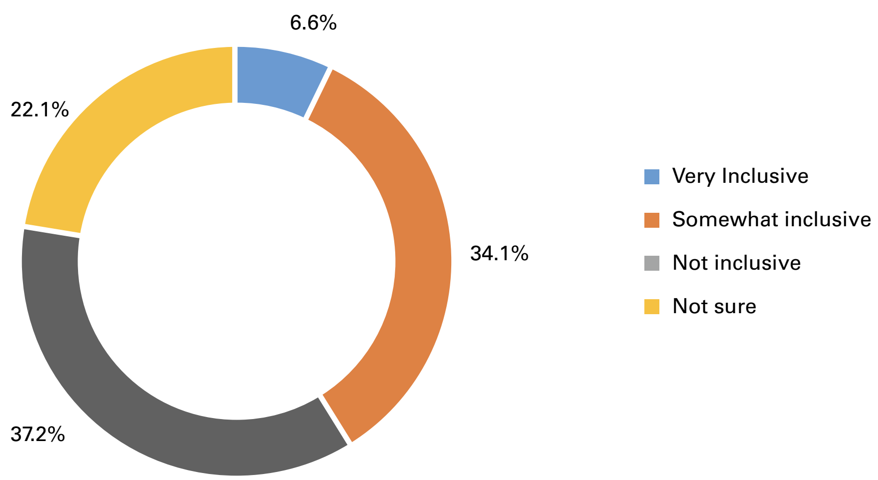
In buttressing the above views, ZIMCODD (2022) underscores the intersectionality of rural women's experiences, where factors such as poverty, lack of education, and limited access to resources compound their ability to engage effectively in public consultations[12]. These insights align with the survey findings, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that address the unique barriers faced by rural women, including awareness-raising initiatives, capacity-building programs, and the provision of accessible platforms for participation. By integrating gender and development issues, policymakers can develop more inclusive and effective strategies to encourage women's active involvement in shaping budgetary priorities and allocations, ultimately fostering greater equity and representation in decision-making processes.

12 ZIMCODD (2022) Ibid

4.6 Rating the inclusivity of the budget consultation processes towards women's voices and concerns

The study survey findings on the inclusivity of budget consultation processes towards women's voices and concerns indicate significant room for improvement. A substantial 37.2% of respondents feel that the process is not inclusive, suggesting that a notable portion of women perceive their voices and concerns are not adequately represented or considered. This sentiment is further complicated by the 22.1% of respondents who are unsure about the inclusivity, indicating a lack of awareness or understanding of the process. Meanwhile, 34.1% find the process to be somewhat inclusive, reflecting that while there are efforts being made, they may be insufficient or unevenly implemented. Only 6.6% of respondents believe that the process is very inclusive, showing that a small minority experience a high level of engagement and representation (refer to fig 10).

Figure 10: Inclusivity of Budget Consultation Towards Women's Voices



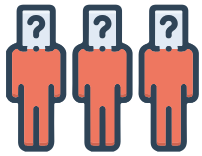
Representatives from CSOs argued that effective inclusivity necessitates capacity-building initiatives that empower women with the knowledge and skills to participate confidently in budget discussions. This underscores the importance of ensuring that consultation processes are transparent and accessible, with mechanisms for feedback and accountability to ensure that women's inputs lead to tangible changes in budget allocations and policies. Officials from the Ministry of Finance and MPs acknowledged the inadequacy of gender-responsive budgeting frameworks that actively seek to include women's perspectives. **A commissioner at the Gender Commission argued on the importance of institutionalising gender analysis in the budgeting process and ensuring that consultations are held at times and locations that are convenient and safe for women to attend.** The commissioner expressed concern on the absence of continuous monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of these consultations in genuinely reflecting women's voices and concerns.

Contextualising these findings within general expert views reveals several key insights. Experts in gender and public policy emphasize that genuine inclusivity in budget consultations requires more than just tokenistic engagement. **According to Mishra (2015), inclusivity involves creating spaces where women can actively participate and influence decisions meaningfully.** This requires deliberate strategies to address systemic barriers, such as socio-cultural norms, lack of awareness, and logistical challenges that often prevent women from engaging fully in public consultations[13]. Overall, while some progress has been made towards making budget consultations more inclusive, the survey results and expert views indicate that significant efforts are still needed to create a truly inclusive process. This includes addressing both structural and practical barriers to women's participation, ensuring transparency, and institutionalising mechanisms that guarantee women's contributions are reflected in budgetary decisions.

13 Mishra, P-R, (2015), Citizens participation in budget making process of the State of Odisha (India): Opportunities, Learnings and Challenges. Downloaded from https://journals.openedition.org. Date 23/05/2019

5

WOMEN ENGAGEMENT DURING BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION STAGE



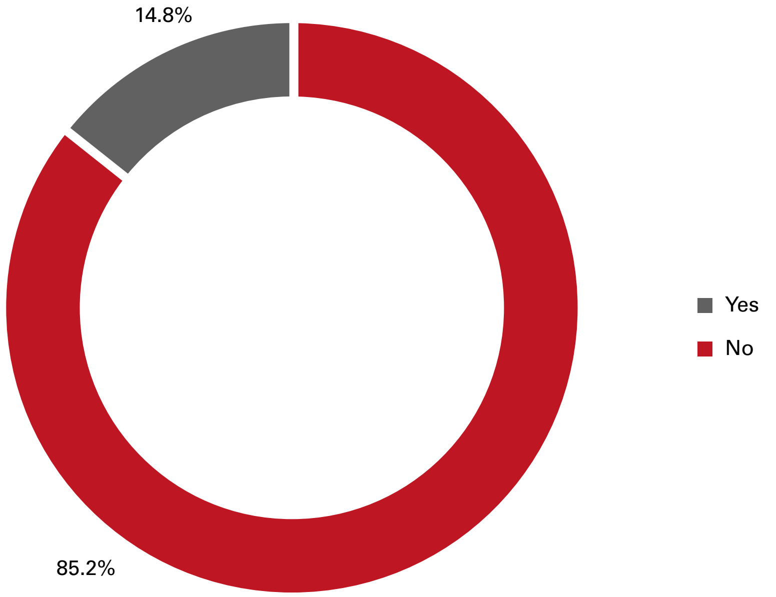
A substantial
85.2%
of respondents were not aware of the budget performance reports

This section analyses women access to, and their perceptions on the utility of budget performance reports

5.1 Access to documents highlighting government progress in implementing budgets

The survey findings on women's awareness and the perceived usefulness of budget performance reports reveal significant gaps and varying perceptions across the study areas. A substantial 85.2% of respondents were not aware of the budget performance reports, with 60% of these responses coming from the rural area of Gokwe North and 25.2% from the urban areas of Tafara and Mabvuku. In contrast, only 14.8% were aware of these reports, with a mere 5% from Gokwe North and 9.8% from Tafara and Mabvuku. This stark difference underscores the need for targeted awareness campaigns, especially in rural areas, to bridge the information gap and enhance women's engagement with budgetary processes. Despite the low awareness levels, a significant majority (82.8%) of respondents believe that understanding budget performance reports is crucial for effective community development. This belief is more pronounced in urban areas (45.8% from Tafara and Mabvuku) compared to rural areas (37% from Gokwe North). Conversely, 17.2% did not see the value in understanding these reports, with a higher scepticism observed in rural areas (11% from Gokwe North) compared to urban areas (6.2% from Tafara and Mabvuku). These findings suggest that while there is a recognised importance of budget literacy for community development, efforts must be made to increase awareness and comprehension among women, particularly in rural settings (refer to figure 11 below)

Figure 11: Awareness and Usefulness of Budget Performance Reports



Key informants provided valuable perspectives on these findings. The various segments of key informants interviewed indeed acknowledged that there is a huge gap on awareness and perceptions on utility of budget performance. Academics emphasise the role of education and targeted information dissemination to improve budget literacy among women. They argue for integrating budget literacy programmes into community education initiatives to empower women with the knowledge needed to engage in fiscal discussions and hold authorities accountable.

MPs raised concerns on the inadequacy of legislative measures that mandate the distribution of budget performance reports in accessible formats and local languages to ensure broader reach and comprehension. Gender experts from the Gender Commission and development partners argued based on their programming experiences the prevalence of gender-insensitive approaches in disseminating budget information and the importance of recognizing that women often have different information needs and access channels compared to men. An official of a Community Based Organisation (CBO) suggested the importance of leveraging technology and local media to reach wider audiences effectively.

In the same context, **Ministry of Finance officials emphasised the need for transparency and accountability in budget reporting, arguing that clear and accessible budget performance reports are essential for fostering informed public participation and trust in governmental processes.** In buttressing these perspectives, OECD (2017), underscored the importance of participatory governance and the inclusion of marginalised voices in budgetary processes[14].

14 OECD (2017), Budget Transparency Toolkit: Practical steps for supporting openness, integrity and accountability in Public Financial Management. Downloaded from https://www.oecd.org/ on 15/05/2024

They highlight that informed citizenry is crucial for effective oversight and
to better resource allocation and community development outcomes
views and scholarly insights contextualize the survey findings and sug
approach to improving women's awareness and understanding of
reports, ultimately fostering more inclusive and effective community d

6

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN POST-BUDGETING PROCESS

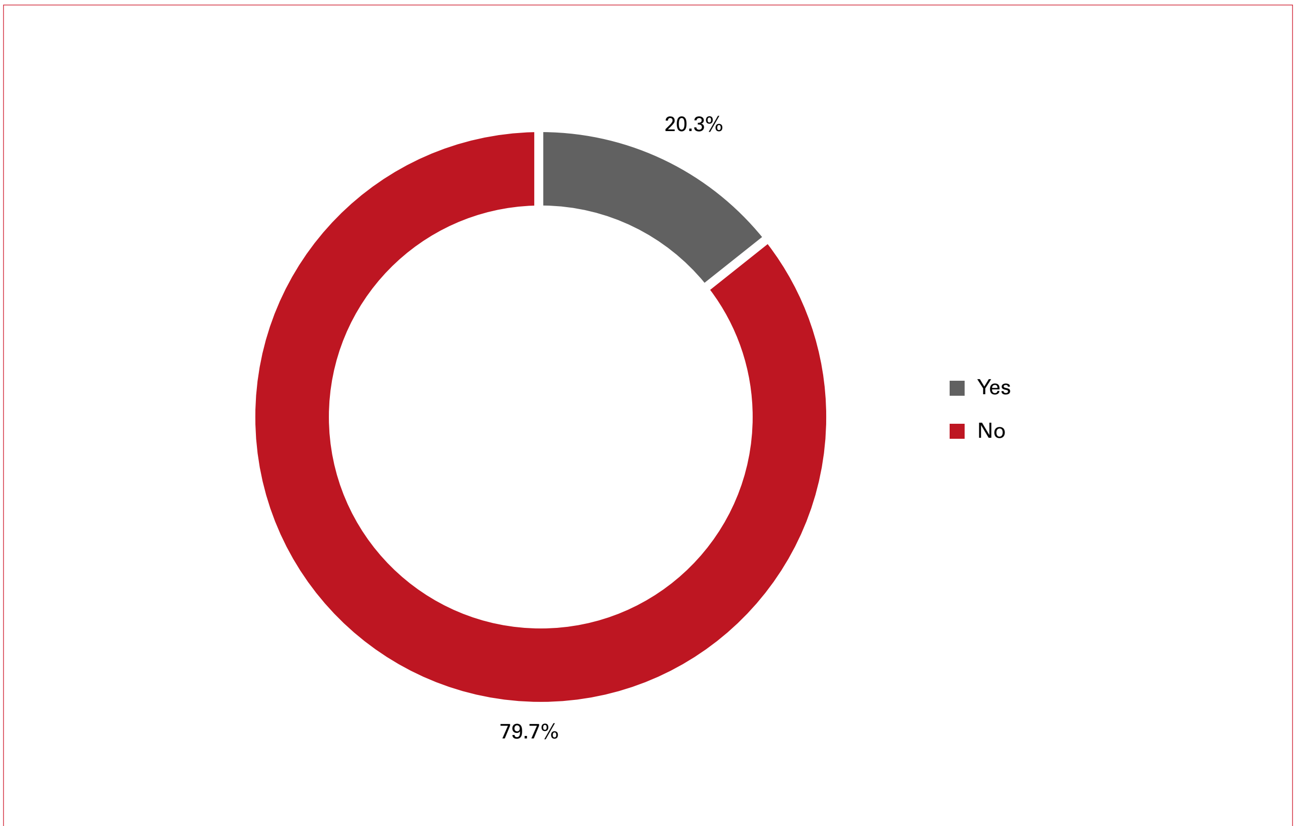
79.7%

were not aware of the production of audited financial reports, with 58% from Gokwe North and 21.7% from Tafara and Mabvuku

6.1 Women's knowledge of, and access to audited financial statements

The survey results show that a substantial proportion of the respondents, 79.7% were not aware of the production of audited financial reports, with 58% from Gokwe North and 21.7% from Tafara and Mabvuku. In contrast, only 20.3% were aware, with higher awareness in Tafara and Mabvuku (12.1%) compared to Gokwe North (8%). Additionally, 92.8% of respondents had not accessed audited financial statements, with the majority from Gokwe North (70%) and a smaller portion from Tafara and Mabvuku (22.8%). Only 7.2% had accessed these reports, including 2% from Gokwe North and 5.2% from Tafara and Mabvuku. These statistics highlight a critical need to improve awareness and access to audited financial reports among women, particularly in rural areas.

Figure 12: Women Awareness and Access to Audited Financial Statements



Academics interviewed attributed these results to low financial literacy a of programmes tailored to women's needs to enhance their understandi with financial reports. They suggested integrating financial educa initiatives and leveraging local leaders to disseminate information. This who expressed the importance of policy reforms that mandate the wide dissemination of audited financial reports. This will enhance transparenc and ensure that all citizens, especially women, can participate in fisc public officials accountable.

Gender experts from development partners and the Gender Comm need for gender-sensitive communication strategies to address the unique barriers women face in accessing financial information. These barriers include lower literacy rates, limited access to technology, and time constraints due to caregiving responsibilities. This eventually justifies the strategic value of interventions such as using multiple channels to reach women e.g. community meetings, local radio, and visual aids.

Ministry of Finance officials indicated that there is progressive development of the ministry's mechanisms of increasing availability of information though hampered by literacy and communication systems in rural areas. However, the ministry acknowledges that making audited financial reports accessible and comprehensible to all citizens is essential for fostering trust and informed participation and suggested summarising key findings in local languages and distributing them through community networks to reach a broader audience. Zhou (2016) **buttressed the above views and emphasizes the role of participatory processes in enhancing governance and ensuring that marginalized voices, including those of women, are heard and considered in decision-making**[15]. This suggests a comprehensive approach to improving women's awareness and access to audited financial reports, including educational initiatives, policy reforms, gender-sensitive communication, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. This approach aims to foster greater financial transparency, accountability, and inclusive community development.

92.8%

of respondents had not accessed audited financial statements, with the majority from Gokwe North (70%) and a smaller portion from Tafara and Mabvuku (22.8%)

15 Zhou et al. (2016) Ibid

7

RECOMMENDATIONS ON WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC BUDGETING

Allocate funding for training programmes aimed at empowering women parliamentarians and community leaders

7.1 Recommendations for Parliament (Parliamentarians. Parliamentary Budget Office and Public Accounts Committee)

- Enact laws mandating the publication and dissemination of pre-budget documents, budget performance reports, and audit reports in formats accessible to all citizens, including women in rural and urban areas.
- Introduce quotas or affirmative action policies that ensure a minimum percentage of women representatives in budget consultation processes at all levels of government.
- Strengthen parliamentary committees (Budget, Finance and Economic Development Committee; Women Affairs, Community, SME's Development Committee and the Women's Parliamentary Caucus) to monitor the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting.
- Request periodic reports from the Ministry of Finance on the measures taken to ensure women's participation and how their feedback is incorporated into the budget.
- Allocate funding for training programmes aimed at empowering women parliamentarians and community leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to engage effectively in budgeting processes.

7.2 Recommendations for government (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Gender Commission, Ministry of Women Affairs)

- Develop and implement strategies for widespread dissemination of pre-budget documents and performance reports through multiple channels, including community meetings, local radio, and online platforms.
- Ensure budget documents are available in local languages and formats that are easily understandable by all, particularly targeting women in both rural and urban areas.
- Organise budget consultation meetings at times and locations convenient for women, ensuring childcare facilities and safe transportation options to increase their participation.
- Partner with local women's organisations to mobilise women's participation in these meetings and gather their input effectively.
- Establish clear feedback mechanisms where women can voice their concerns and suggestions regarding budget allocations and expenditures.
- Regularly report back to communities on how their inputs have influenced the budgeting process.

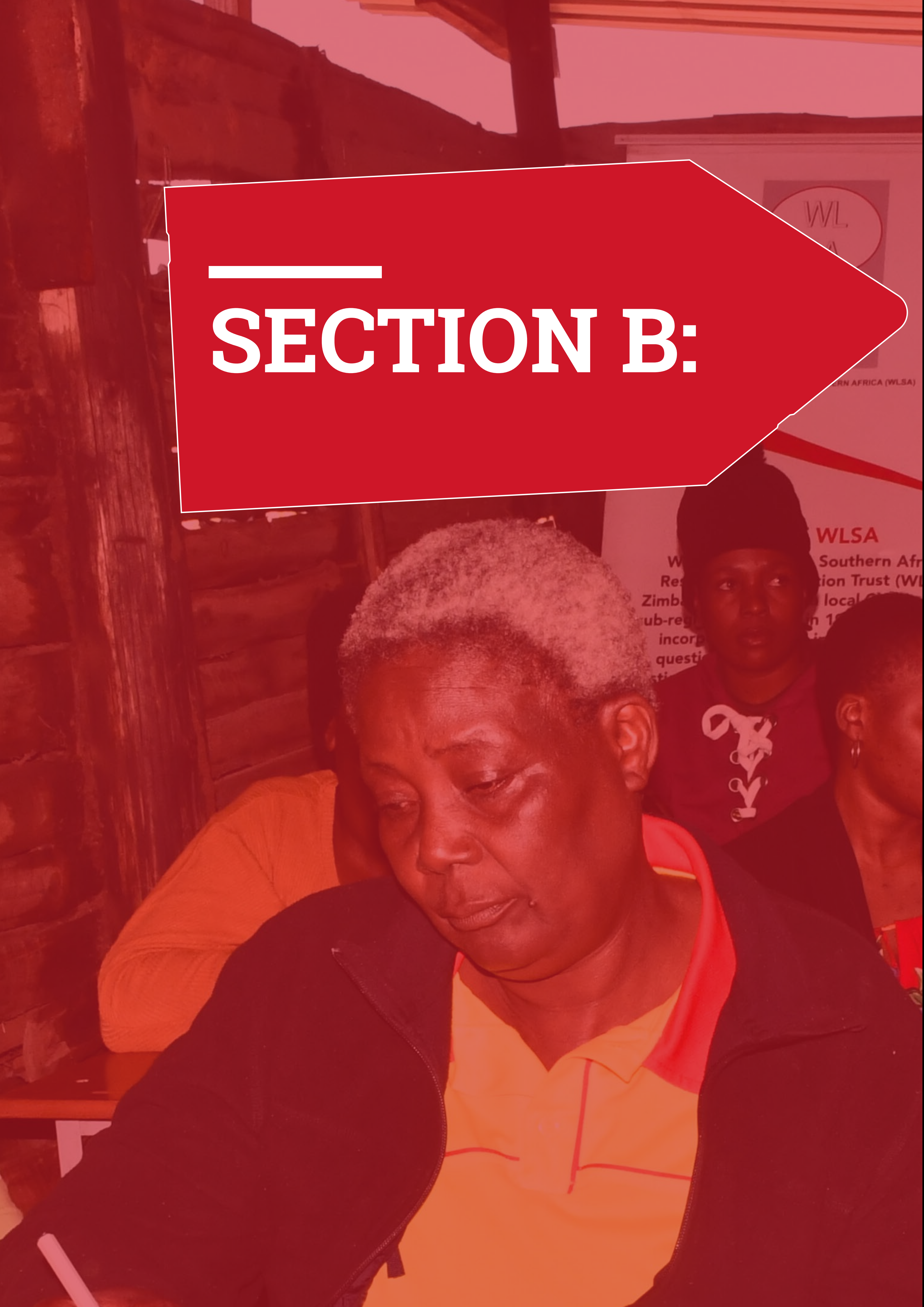
7.3 Recommendations for Civil Society, Banking Sector, Development Partners, Grassroots Women, Women with Disabilities, and Academia.

- Conduct grassroots campaigns to educate women about the importance of their participation in public budgeting and how they can get involved.
- Develop simplified educational materials that explain budgeting processes and the impact of budgets on community development.
- Advocate for greater transparency and accountability in the budgeting process through sustained lobbying efforts targeting both Parliament and the Ministry of Finance.
- Form coalitions with other civil society organizations to amplify the call for gender-responsive budgeting and ensure it remains a priority on the national agenda.
- Provide training workshops for women in Gokwe North, Tafara, and Mabvuku on budget literacy, advocacy, and leadership skills.
- Offer technical support to women's groups to enable them to analyze budget documents, prepare submissions, and effectively participate in consultation meetings.
- Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to enhance communication strategies, improve distribution networks, and actively engage communities to ensure that all citizens can access and understand critical government documents like the BSP. IBP (2019) views that one opportunity to influence the executive's budget proposal in countries that make available the Pre-Budget Statement is for civil society organizations to analyse these assumptions and use the findings to influence the parameters of the proposed budget especially gazing into the affairs of women and marginalized groups[16.]

Providing training workshops for women in Gokwe North, Tafara, and Mabvuku on budget literacy, advocacy, and leadership skills.

16 International Budget Partnership (2019), Open Budget Survey 2019. Downloaded from https://www.google.com/ Date 21/05/2024

SECTION B:



8

WOMEN ACESS TO LOAN AND CREDIT FINANCING

Overall,

41.7%

of the women surveyed have previous experience in applying for loans.

8.1 The Legal and Institutional Framework for Loan and Credit Financing in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's legal and institutional frameworks for loan and credit financing are structured to regulate the financial sector, protect consumers, and promote economic development, with a specific focus on inclusivity and gender mainstreaming. These frameworks encompass a range of laws, regulations, and institutions that govern the operations of banks, microfinance institutions, and other financial entities. The key frameworks include the Banking Act, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Act, the Microfinance Act, and various other regulations and guidelines issued by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) (refer table below).

TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF SELECTED LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR LOAN AND CREDIT FINANCING IN ZIMBABWE

FRAMEWORK	GENDER MAINSTREAMING PROVISIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
The Banking Act and Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Act	The Banking Act encourages financial institutions to adopt gender-sensitive policies and practices. urges banks to design financial products and services that cater for women.	There is need for a Policy gendered analysis before implementation, such as budget and Monetary policy statements. Develop Gender tracker for differential impact of policies on women
The Microfinance Act (Chapter 24:29)	The Act mandates MFIs to provide affordable and accessible credit to women micro-enterprises.. The Act also requires MFIs to report on their outreach to women and other marginalized groups, promoting accountability and ensuring that these institutions are meeting their inclusivity goals.	There is need to develop Gendered specific indicators for inclusive financing mechanisms Minimum benchmark for affirmative action MFIs need to produce and publicize their inclusivity reports

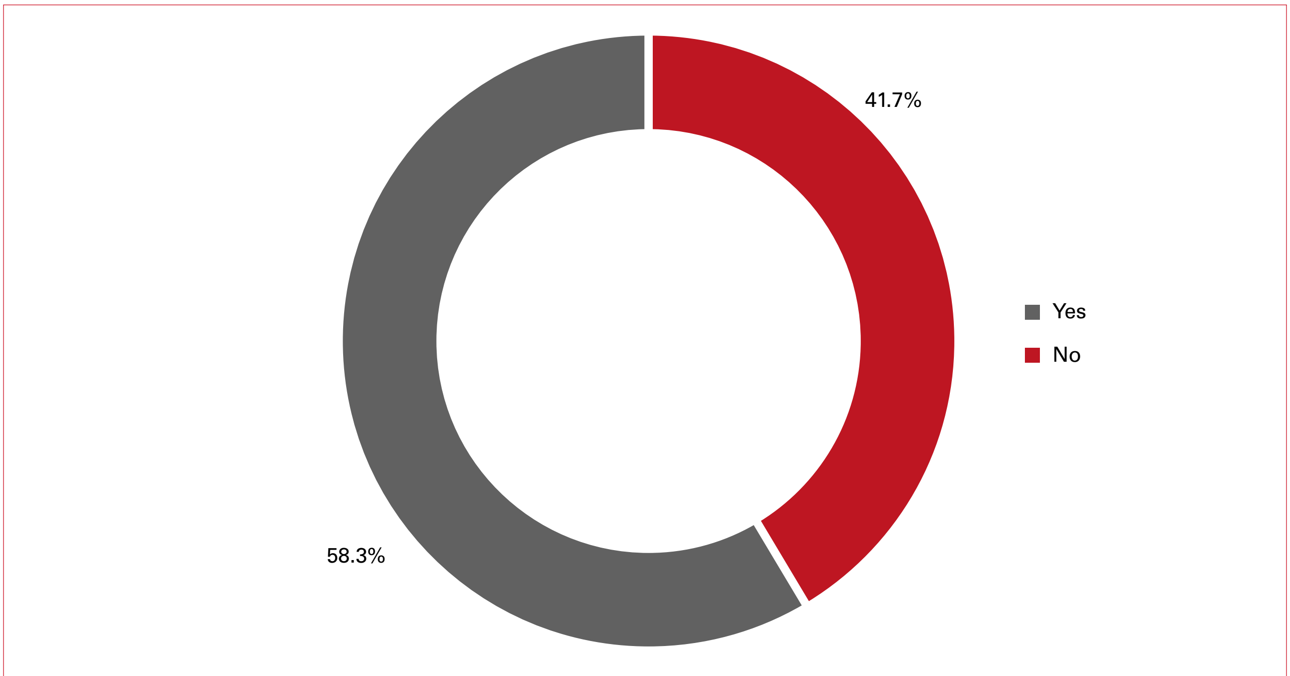
The Consumer Protection Act (Chapter 14:44)	The Consumer Protection Act (Chapter 14:44) is there to safeguard borrowers from unfair lending practices, predatory interest rates, and other forms of exploitation, especially of women. The Act requires financial institutions to disclose all relevant terms and conditions of credit agreements, including interest rates, fees, and repayment schedules, ensuring that consumers can make informed decisions.	Periodic monitoring and review of Act provision implementation is needed. Sensation workshops needed on the Act for women
Credit information systems	Credit information systems also play a critical role in the credit market by providing lenders with reliable data on borrowers' creditworthiness. For women, access to accurate credit information is crucial as it allows them to build a credit history, which can improve their chances of securing loans in the future.	Avail Credit Registry to ensure that women's credit information considered in lending decisions
Financial Inclusion and Developmental Policies	The Government of Zimbabwe, in collaboration with the RBZ, has implemented several policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing financial inclusion and expanding access to credit. The National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) is a comprehensive plan designed to address the barriers to financial access and to promote the use of financial services among marginalized groups, including women, rural populations, and small businesses. The strategy also emphasizes the importance of financial literacy and education, aiming to empower individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage their finances effectively. Infrastructural and logistical challenges in rural areas hinder the effective implementation of digital financial services and microfinance initiatives. Many rural women still lack the necessary technology and internet connectivity to benefit from digital financial services.	Policy monitoring and resourcing is needed Simplified information dissemination Address infrastructure and logistical barriers Harmonization of Government intervention at local authorities to central Government e.g. Town Councils, Rural District Councils Implementation of targeted initiatives such as training programs for women entrepreneurs and financial literacy campaigns are needed. More platforms to pool resources, access credit, need to be created

8.2 Women Perceptions on The Application Process

8.2.1 Previous experience in applying for loans

The study survey results reveal distinct disparities in the experiences of women applying for loans between the rural area of Gokwe North and the urban suburbs of Tafara and Mabvuku in Harare. Overall, 41.7% of the women surveyed have previous experience in applying for loans. Breaking this down, only 16.2% of women in Gokwe North have applied for loans, compared to 25.5% in Tafara and Mabvuku. On the other hand, 58.3% of women have no prior experience with loans, with a higher proportion in Gokwe North (38%) compared to Tafara and Mabvuku (20.3%) (refer to fig 13). Most loans in Gokwe North are utilised for agricultural purposes, reflecting the agrarian economy of the area. In contrast, loans in Harare's urban suburbs are used for a variety of purposes, predominantly to support small and informal business initiatives. This stark contrast in loan application experience can be attributed to the differential access to financial institutions, the nature of economic activities, and varying levels of financial literacy between these rural and urban settings.

Figure 13: Previous Loan Application Experience



Interview respondents highlighted different perspectives on experience and access to loans and credit financing. A female development worker in Gokwe North attributed the lower percentage of loan applications in rural areas as linked to the limited presence of financial institutions, which restricts women's access to credit. She further submitted that the reliance on subsistence farming reduces the immediate need for large financial investments, thus decreasing the demand for loans. An official with the Gender Commission added that cultural norms and lower levels of education further impede women's financial agency in rural areas. Conversely, in urban areas like Tafara and Mabvuku, the higher rate of loan applications can be attributed to better access to banks and microfinance institutions, higher levels of education, and a more diverse economic environment that encourages entrepreneurial activities. The urban economy's dynamism creates a demand for financial capital to support various business ventures, hence a greater inclination towards seeking loans. The above perspectives underscore the importance of contextual factors in shaping women's financial behaviors and highlight the need for tailored financial services and policies to address the unique challenges faced in different settings.

MPs highlighted significant infrastructural and cultural barriers in rural areas that impede women's access to credit. In urban areas, although access is better, an MP with the parliamentary caucus on gender submitted that women still face challenges such as high interest rates and strict loan requirements. She emphasised the impact of gender inequality and the need for targeted empowerment programs to educate women about financial management and advocate for more inclusive financial policies. Other officials from development partners stressed the importance of improving financial literacy and access to microfinance tailored to women's needs, especially in rural settings. Banking sector employees pointed out that while financial services are more accessible in urban areas, rural regions suffer from a lack of financial infrastructure and services tailored to agricultural needs. They recommended expanding microfinance and cooperative banking models that have proven effective in rural economies. This was supported by the academia who underscored the necessity for continuous research and data collection to better understand and address the unique challenges faced by women in different settings. These insights collectively highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to improve women's access to credit, involving infrastructural improvements, financial literacy programs, and policy reforms to foster an inclusive financial environment. In buttressing these results, Munyanyi (2014) submits that rural women often lack collateral, financial literacy, and mobility, which are essential for accessing formal credit[17] To further compound the situation, the scarcity of financial institutions in rural regions exacerbates these challenges.

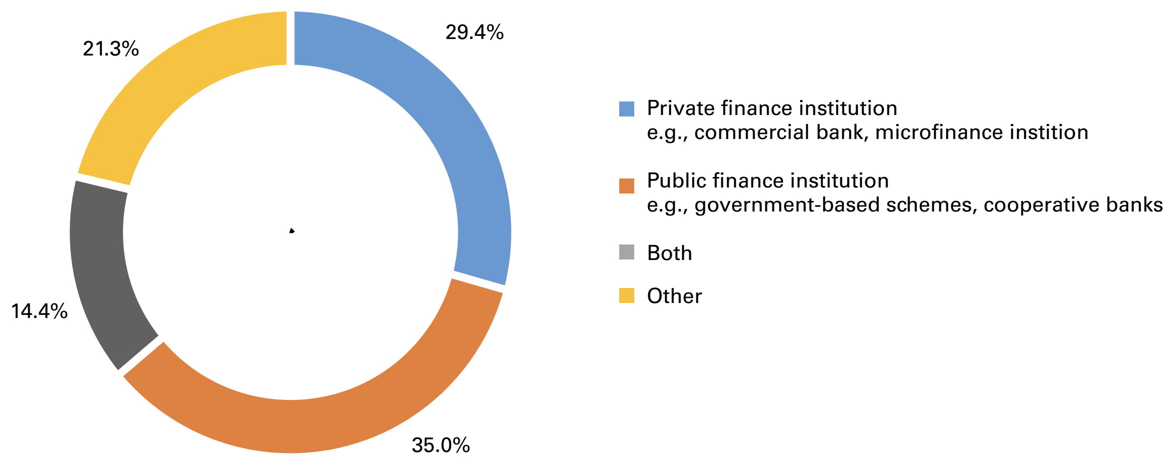
8.2.2 Analysis of financial institutions providing loans to women

Survey results show that 29.4% of women accessed loans from private institutions, including commercial banks and micro-finance institutions, 35% obtained loans from public finance institutions such as government-backed schemes and cooperative banks, 14.4% secured loans from both private and public finance institutions, and 21.3% accessed loans from other sources (refer to fig 14 below). The 'other' sources represent informal lenders, NGO supported schemes, peer-to-peer lending platforms, community development funds, social impact investors, crowdfunding platforms and others. The data indicates a diverse landscape of financial institutions providing loans to women, with significant participation from both private and public sectors. Private institutions are favoured for their flexibility and availability, while public finance institutions offer more favourable terms and targeted government-backed schemes. Public institutions with the highest preference (35%) often offer more favorable terms, including lower interest rates and more accessible loan conditions. Government-backed schemes likely contribute to this high percentage by targeting women's economic empowerment as a policy objective, making loans more accessible to women who might be excluded from private lending. The 21.3% reliance on alternative sources was largely perceived

17 Munyanyi, W, Women Financial Inclusion in Zimbabwe: A Descriptive Comparison of Rural and Urban Populaces, International Journal of Education and Research Vol. 2 No. 6, 2014

by key informant interview respondents as a reflection of gaps in formal financial institutions' ability to meet the needs of all women, possibly due to issues like accessibility, awareness, or trust in formal institutions.

Figure 14: Institutions Where Women Accessed Loans



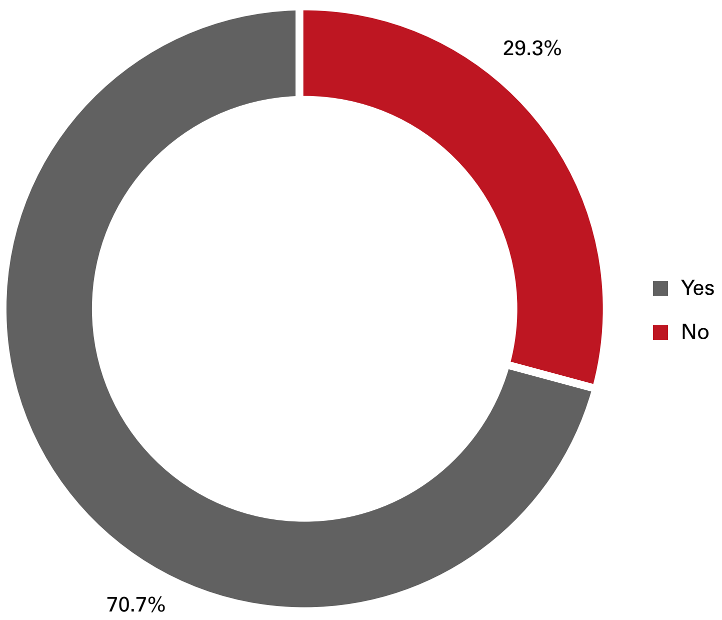
Insights from key informant interviews show that whereas, there is a significant percentage highlighting the reliance on private institutions, the barriers such as higher interest rates, stringent credit requirements, and collateral demands often associated with private lending limit broader access. Representatives from commercial banks and micro-finance institutions highlighted on-going efforts to tailor products to women's needs but acknowledged challenges such as risk assessment and collateral demands. More elaborately, officials from the Gender Commission and development partners pointed out systemic barriers such as socio-cultural norms and the lack of collateral, advocating for inclusive policies and financial literacy programs. Development workers specifically emphasized the success of government-backed schemes in empowering women but called for better monitoring and support systems, while MPs stressed the need for increased funding and legislative support to enhance women's access to credit. In contextualizing the results, Mbiro and Ndlovu (2021) argue that improving women's access to financial resources requires a multi-faceted approach, including policy reforms, financial literacy education, and targeted financial products18. Munyanyi (2014) concurs with the aforementioned view highlighting that women's economic empowerment through access to credit not only benefits individual borrowers but also contributes to broader economic development and societal well-being19. By addressing structural barriers and promoting inclusive financial practices, financial institutions can significantly enhance their support for women's economic participation and growth.

18 Mbiro and Ndlovu (20121) Ibid
19 Munyanyi (2014) Ibid

8.2.3 Success rate on loan application by women

The study survey results showed that only 29.3% of the applications were successful, while 70.7% were not (refer to fig 15). This disparity underscores the challenges faced by applicants in securing loans.

Figure 15: Loan Application Success Rate



From interviews with key stakeholders, including the banking sector executives, gender experts, development workers, Members of Parliament (MPs), and academia, wide ranging insights were gathered. Respondents from the banking sector noted that the stringent criteria and risk assessment processes often result in a high rejection rate for loan applications. Respondents from the Gender Commission and gender development employees highlighted that the influence of systemic factors such as unequal access to resources and financial literacy gaps disproportionately impact women, leading to lower success rates in loan applications. Development workers emphasized the need for tailored support and capacity-building initiatives to improve applicants' chances of success. In the same context, MPs acknowledged the issue, advocating for policy reforms and targeted interventions to address the underlying barriers.

In buttressing the above sentiments, Mbiro and Ndlovu (2021) underscored the need for a more inclusive and supportive financial ecosystem[20]. This should be reinforced by frameworks for addressing structural inequalities, providing targeted financial education, and implementing

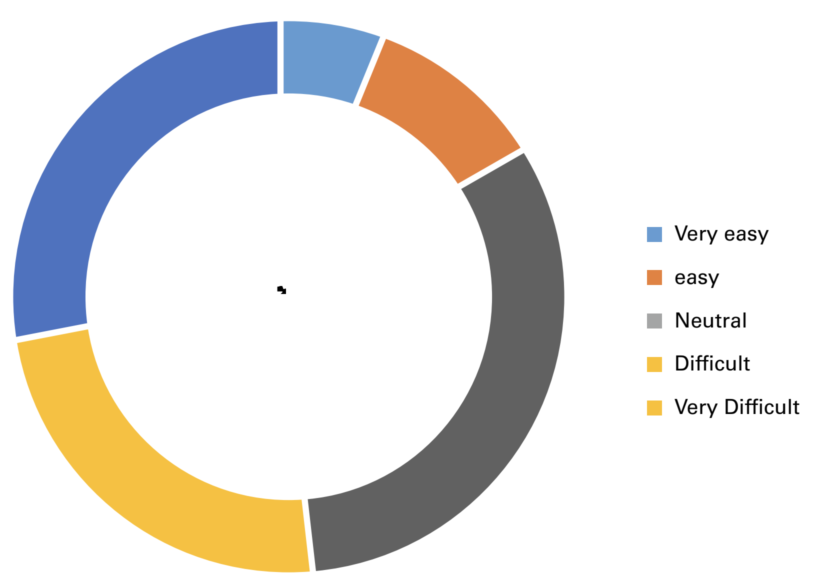
20 Mbiro and Ndlovu (2021) Ibid

fair and transparent lending practices. Low success rates have broader impacts on economic growth and missed opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation. policy practitioners and academics advocate for a holistic approach that combines policy changes, education, and collaborative efforts between financial institutions and stakeholders to improve the success rate of loan applications and promote financial inclusion for all.

8.2.4 Evaluating Respondents' Perceptions of Loan Application Process User-Friendliness

In evaluating the perceptions of women on the user-friendliness of the loan application process, the following statistics emerged: only 5.6% of respondents found the process very easy, 11.2% found it easy, 32% were neutral, 23.2% found it difficult, and 28% found it very difficult (refer to fig 16). These figures suggest that a significant majority of women face challenges when applying for loans, with over half of the respondents perceiving the process as difficult or very difficult.

Figure 16: Women's perspectives on the complexity of loan application processes



Key informant interviews with stakeholders provided deeper insights into these statistics. Banking sector officials acknowledged that while efforts have been made to simplify the loan application process, **many women still encounter obstacles such as complex documentation requirements and lengthy approval times.** Gender experts from the Gender Commission pointed to socio-cultural factors and lower financial literacy levels among women as among other key factors exacerbating these difficulties. Development workers from Tafara and Mabvuku highlighted the absence of more accessible and supportive application processes and hence suggesting that tailored assistance and clearer guidelines could improve perceptions. Interviews with MPs revealed policy gaps for making financial services more inclusive and user-friendly for women, while academia stressed the importance of research and data-driven approaches to understand and address these challenges effectively. These findings were buttressed by scholars in finance and gender studies who underline their broader implications. Toro (2016) argues that the perceived difficulty of the loan application process can discourage women from seeking financial assistance, thereby limiting their economic opportunities and contributing to gender inequality[21]. In the same context, Mbiro and Ndlovu (2021) advocate for a holistic approach that includes financial education, the simplification of application procedures, and the development of gender-sensitive financial products[22]. Such measures could enhance the user-friendliness of loan application processes and promote greater financial inclusion for women.

8.3 Limitations to Women Access to Loans and Credit

The study established that access to loans and credit financing is crucial for economic empowerment, yet women in both rural and urban areas face significant barriers as revealed by the results. The challenges and limitations women face in accessing loans and credit financing in Gokwe North and Tafara and Mabvuku are complex and multifaceted, encompassing socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that includes policy reforms to ensure equitable land ownership, initiatives to improve financial literacy, and efforts to combat gender bias in lending practices. Additionally, there is a need for the development of financial products tailored to the unique needs of women, particularly those in the informal sector. By tackling these challenges, Zimbabwe can move closer to achieving gender equality in financial access, thereby empowering women to contribute more significantly to the economy. A summary of the major challenges and limitations to women access to loans and credit facilities

8.3.1 Socio-Cultural Barriers

The study noted that one of the most pervasive challenges women face is deeply rooted socio-cultural norms.

- In Gokwe North, traditional gender roles often restrict women's participation in economic activities. These norms dictate that men are the primary breadwinners, limiting women's opportunities to engage in business ventures that require capital. This cultural bias is not as pronounced in urban areas like Tafara and Mabvuku, yet remnants of such attitudes persist, influencing lenders' perceptions of women's creditworthiness.
- Young women and women with disabilities are signifanctly affected by socio-cultural barriers. These groups often face stigma and mistrust, with young women being viewed with suspicion and women with disabilities marginalized as objects of charity rather than as individuals with rights and capabilities. Such attitudes limit their ability to claim their rights and access financial services, further entrenching their exclusion from economic participation and empowerment.

21 Toro, B (2016), Rural Women and the Land Question in Zimbabwe: The Case of the Mutasa District, University of Fort Hare, Alice
22 Mbiro and Ndlovu (2021) Ibid

8.3.2 Lack of Collateral

Collateral is a significant requirement for obtaining loans from formal financial institutions. This loan requirement hinders women's access to substantial credit.

- In Gokwe North, land and property are typically registered in the names of men due to customary laws and practices. This lack of ownership restricts women's ability to offer collateral for loans.
- In urban areas, while women might have more opportunities to own property, the value and acceptability of their assets as collateral are often questioned by financial institutions, leading to loan rejections.

8.3.3 Limited Financial Literacy

- Financial literacy is another critical barrier. In rural areas such as Gokwe North, educational opportunities are limited, and women often have less access to financial education. This lack of knowledge about financial products, credit management, and business planning reduces their confidence and ability to approach lenders.
- Women in Tafara and Mabvuku might have better access to education and information, the study realised a gap in financial literacy that affects their ability to navigate the financial system effectively.

8.3.4 High Interest Rates and Unfavourable Loan Terms

- Microfinance institutions, which are often more accessible to women than traditional banks, tend to charge higher interest rates due to the perceived higher risk of lending to individuals without substantial collateral.
- In Gokwe North, this is exacerbated by the low profitability of rural businesses, making it difficult for women to service high-interest loans.
- Urban women in Tafara and Mabvuku encounter similar issues, especially those engaged in informal or small-scale businesses that are deemed risky by lenders.

8.3.5 Limited Access to Formal Financial Institutions

- In rural Gokwe North, the physical accessibility of financial institutions is a significant barrier. The sparse distribution of banks and microfinance institutions means women must travel long distances to access these services, which is both time-consuming and costly.
- In urban areas like Tafara and Mabvuku, while physical access is less of an issue, the bureaucratic processes and stringent requirements of formal financial institutions still pose significant barriers.

8.3.6 Gender Bias in Lending Practices

- Gender bias in lending practices remains a pervasive issue. In both rural and urban settings, loan officers and financial institutions often harbor biases against women, doubting their ability to repay loans or run successful businesses.
- This bias often manifests in the form of stricter scrutiny of women's loan applications or outright refusal to provide loans to women without male guarantors.

8.3.7 Informal Sector Dynamics

- large number of women in both Gokwe North and like Tafara and Mabvuku operate in the informal sector.
- This sector is characterized by its lack of formal records, making it difficult for women to provide the necessary documentation required by formal lenders. Consequently, women are often compelled to rely on informal lending sources, which can be exploitative and offer limited amounts of capital.

8.4 Recommendations on women access to loan and credit financing

8.4.1 Recommendations for Parliament (Parliamentarians. Parliamentary Budget Office and Public Accounts Committee)

- Enact legislation that promotes equitable land ownership rights for women. This could include amendments to land tenure laws to ensure women have equal access to land as collateral for loans.
- promote gender equality in financial access, through setting targets for women's participation in loan and credit programs.

8.4.2 Recommendations for government (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Gender Commission, Ministry of Women Affairs)

- Develop and implement programs specifically targeting women in rural and urban areas to improve their financial literacy and access to credit facilities.
- Work closely with banks and financial institutions to create gender-sensitive lending policies and products that cater to the unique needs of women borrowers.
- Conduct regular surveys and studies to assess women's access to loans and credit facilities, identify barriers, and inform policymaking and program development.
- Allocate sufficient resources and funding to support initiatives aimed at improving women's financial inclusion and economic empowerment.

8.4.3 Recommendations for Civil Society, Banking Sector, Development Partners, Grassroots Women, Women with Disabilities, and Academia

- Raise awareness about the importance of women's access to loans and credit financing through campaigns and advocacy efforts.
- Provide training and support to women's groups and cooperatives on financial management, loan application processes, and entrepreneurship skills.
- Monitor the implementation of gender-inclusive policies and programs, and advocate for accountability and transparency in lending practices.
- Review downwards high interest rates and remove unfavorable loan terms such as collateral for women to be able to access loans.
- Develop and promote financial products tailored to women, such as micro-loans for women in the informal sector or flexible repayment options.
- Offer workshops and training sessions on financial management and loan utilization to empower women with the necessary skills to access and utilize credit effectively.

9

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it is evident that there are multifaceted barriers hindering women's economic empowerment. Socio-cultural norms, economic disparities, and institutional gaps intersect to create formidable obstacles for women inclusion and active participation in public finance decision-making. To bridge these gaps and pave the way for greater gender equality in financial access and budgeting participation, a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach is imperative. Women's limited access to pre-budget documents, low participation in budget consultation meetings, and inadequate access to budget statements and audit reports indicate a clear need for enhanced transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in public financial management. In relation to access to credit and loans, policy reforms must prioritize equitable land ownership rights for women, ensuring that they have secure assets that can be used as collateral for loans. Simultaneously, initiatives aimed at enhancing financial literacy among women, particularly in rural areas, are essential to empower them with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate financial systems effectively and make informed financial decisions.

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