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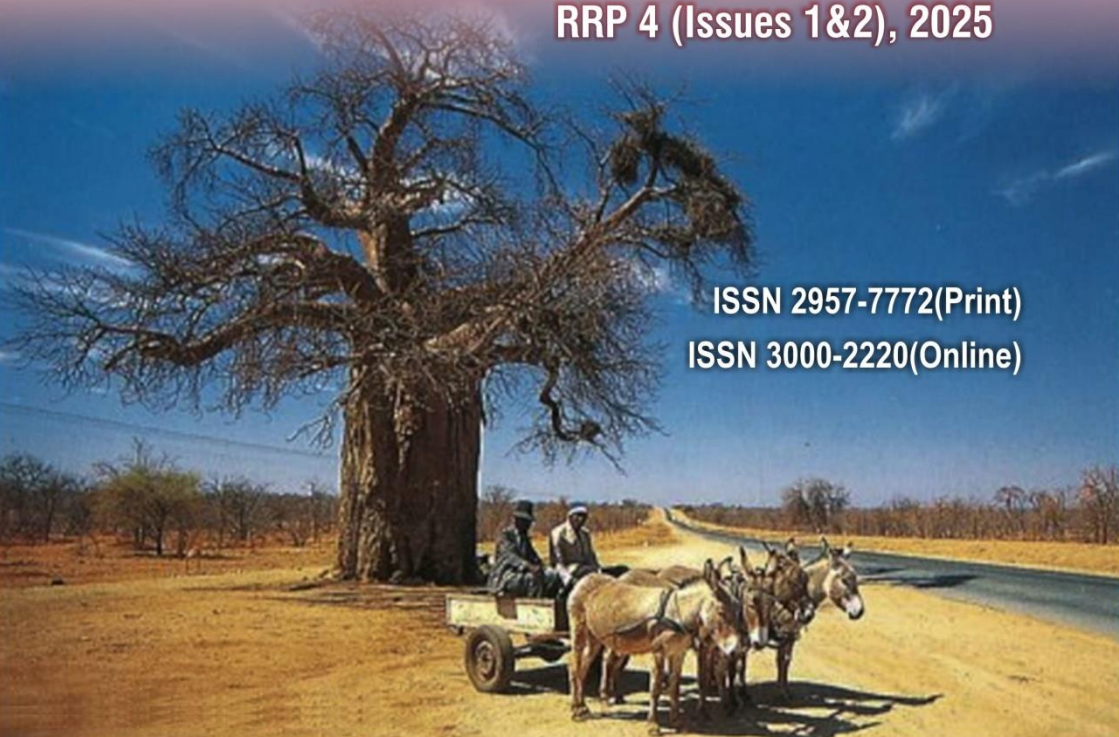

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About the Journal

JOURNAL PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Review of Rural Resilience Praxis is* to provide a forum for disaster risk mitigation, adaptation and preparedness.

CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

Sociologists, demographers, psychologists, development experts, planners, social workers, social engineers, economists, among others whose focus is that of rural resilience.

JOURNAL SPECIFICATIONS

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SCOPE AND FOCUS

As much as the urban territory is increasing by each day, the rural economy, especially in many developing countries, still retains a great proportion of the extractive and accommodation industry. Retaining some space as rural remains critical given the sectors role in providing ecosystem services to both wildlife and humanity. In this light, rural resilience as practice beckons for critical studies especially in the face of the ever-threatening extreme weather events and climate change that then impact on the livelihoods and lifestyles of the rural communities. Review of Rural Resilience Praxis (RRRP) comes in as a platform for critical engagement by scholars, practitioners and leaders as they seek to debate and proffer solutions of the rural sector and trying to champion the philosophy of the right to be rural. The issue of conviviality between the different constituencies of the sectors, compiled with the competing challenges of improving rural spaces while also making the conservation and preservation debates matter is the hallmark of this platform of criticality. The journal is produced bi-annually.

Guidelines for Authors for the Review of Rural Resilience Praxis

Articles must be original contributions, not previously published and should not be under consideration for publishing elsewhere.

Manuscript Submission: Articles submitted to the *Review of Rural Resilience Praxis* are reviewed using the double-blind peer review system. The author's name(s) must not be included in the main text or running heads and footers.

A total number of words: 5000-7000 words and set in 12-point font size width with 1.5 line spacing.
Language: British/UK English
Title: must capture the gist and scope of the article
Names of authors: beginning with the first name and ending with the surname
Affiliation of authors: must be footnoted, showing the department and institution or organisation.
Abstract: must be 200 words
Keywords: must be five or six containing words that are not in the title
Body: Where the authors are more than three, use *et al.,*
Italicise *et al.*, *ibid.,* words that are not English, not names of people or organisations, etc. When you use several authors confirming the same point, state the point and bracket them in one bracket and in ascending order of dates and alphabetically separated by semi-colon e.g. (Falkenmark, 1989, 1990; Reddy, 2002; Dagdeviren and Robertson, 2011; Jacobsen *et al.*, 2012).

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In the reference list, use the following guidelines, religiously:

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Rural Community Resilience in Zimbabwe: The Gaps, Myths and Realities

THEBETH RUFARO MASUNDA[1] AND CHRISTINE CHAWHANDA[2]

Abstract

The article explores various views and complexities of rural community resilience in Zimbabwe. Although rural communities are often praised for their resilience in the face of adversity; the complexity of this resilience is frequently misunderstood or oversimplified. The study employs a systematic review approach to ensure rigor, transparency and replicability in examining rural community resilience in Zimbabwe. The review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. A set of inclusion and exclusion criteria guided the selection process. Peer-reviewed articles and reports focusing on rural resilience in Zimbabwe, particularly in the context of climate change, socio-economic challenges, governance, indigenous knowledge systems, gender dynamics and development interventions, are included. The article highlights the critical role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in building rural community resilience in Zimbabwe. Although traditional knowledge is often overlooked in modern resilience-building strategies, an integrated approach that combines both traditional and modern methods is essential for sustainable resilience-building. Such an approach challenges common myths about rural communities suggesting that they are overly reliant on external aid yet, in essence, they have strong social networks and community solidarity which play a crucial role in enhancing resilience, demonstrating the significance of social capital in problem-solving and adaptation. Despite the importance of local knowledge and expertise, the literature indicates that rural community participation in disaster and climate resilience planning remains limited. Most strategies are designed and implemented

[1] Department of Community and Social Development, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2832-6892.
[2] Department of Community and Social Development, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5198-2580

by external stakeholders with minimal local involvement, threatening the long-term sustainability of resilience initiatives. To address this, the study recommends inclusive participation, ensuring that all stakeholders are actively involved in every stage, from problem identification to implementation and evaluation. Strengthening local ownership of resilience strategies is crucial to their success and sustainability.

Keywords: *capacity building, resilience building, community development, food insecurity, poverty, sustainability*

INTRODUCTION

Rural communities are often commended for their resilience in the face of adversity. However, the depth and dynamics of this resilience are frequently misunderstood or oversimplified. Regardless of their vital role in the country's socio-economic fabric, significant contribution to agriculture, cultural heritage and environmental stewardship, Zimbabwe's rural communities continue to experience various incidences of disasters and shocks. These challenges are caused by factors ranging from socio-economic to colonial legacies and environmental factors. Many rural households in Zimbabwe are exposed to shocks since their livelihoods depend on the increasingly deteriorated natural resource base. Hence, the continued witnessing of high incidences of socio-economic disruptions due to climate change (Sithole *et al.*, 2023). Given their high dependence on agro-based and rain-fed agriculture, households are exposed to the high frequency of poverty and food insecurity due to the effects of climate change (Nyahunda *et al.*, 2020). Such is causing a significant reduction in agricultural and economic productivity. Individuals and households in rural areas have, over the years, devised various strategies to reduce the impacts of climate change. It is, therefore, imperative to evaluate the resilience strategies employed in rural communities to ascertain their effectiveness and existing gaps.

In the face of climate change and a dwindling economy, the country needs a strong resilience framework and an understanding of coping strategies in place to deal with uncertainties so that approaches can be devised to close the existing gaps and improve people's well-being. Burkett (2001), cited in Nyahunda *et al.* (2020), observes how enhancing resilience is synonymous

with reducing society's risk to climate change given that resilience plays a critical role in reducing risks associated with climate change in society. With the predicted increase in climate change, the mainstreaming of disaster risk management in development planning becomes key in preserving all development gains attained over the years (Chirisa, 2021).

CONCEPTUALISING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

In recent years, community resilience has emerged as a central feature of disaster and emergency planning and recovery plans during periods of shocks. The concept of community resilience has been defined differently, depending on the context. When describing resilience. some focus on social aspects, while others focus on economic characteristics, and some on environmental features. However, in general, community resilience has been defined as the response of a system to a shock and its ability to return to its former state in terms of form and function (Bwerinofa *et al.*, 2022). The same is presented by Steiner and Atterton (2014), who define it as the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and re-organise while undergoing change so that it can remain with the same function, structure and feedback. In essence, it entails the ability to bounce back from a disaster, while others regard it in terms of adaptation, transformation and changing the system in response to shock and stress. It is, therefore, the ability of a community not only to deal with adversity, but also to gain strength as a result of it (Kulig *et al.*, 2008). In defining community resilience, some researchers focus on the processes through which resilience is built, while others focus on the outcomes or ways in that negative consequences are avoided, and others focus on the attributes of those involved (Bwerinofa *et al.*, 2022).

In general, community resilience explains how communities address adversity. Kulig *et al.* (2008) argue how community resilience can be viewed as both a theoretical framework and a social process explaining community responses to external forces that threaten stability and sustainability. As a theoretical framework, it provides an explanation on how communities operate as a collective, while as a social process, it is explained in terms of how communities change as their circumstances are altered. It is argued that

resilience, as a process, is influenced by variables such as proactive community members, ability to use community problem-solving processes and the presence of community leadership (*ibid.*). Such is the political context which also looks at how state authorities and stakeholders assume responsibility for care and support to ensure stability, sustainability and adaptive livelihoods in the face of adversities within communities.

Bwerinofa *et al.* (2008) observe how the concept of resilience is emergent from social, political and historical conditions which have a bearing on the community or system involved, hence cannot be designed by external forces. Rather, it can be built from within by looking, ensuring that coping and response strategies are constructed by different people but rooted in cultural context. Steiner and Atterton (2014) observe how community resilience is regarded as the existence, development and engagement of community resources/capitals by community members to thrive in an environment characterised by change, uncertainty and unpredictability. They emphasise that community resilience is not all about maintaining certain characteristics, rather, it includes adaptive capacity to stress and change and transform into a more desirable state. As such, community resilience should be regarded as a continuous process that enables a community to thrive despite ongoing changes in the socioeconomic environment.

Rural communities in Zimbabwe face diverse challenges caused by different factors, including colonial legacies, socioeconomic dynamics and environmental factors. These challenges are more pronounced in food insecurity, water scarcity and loss of livestock (Nyahunda *et al.*, 2020). Given that most rural livelihoods are agro-based and with the effects of climate change already witnessed, uncertainty surrounding agricultural production becomes a major challenge for rural communities. The Government of Zimbabwe, like many other governments in the region, regards climate change as one of the major threats which affects the potential to attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Zimbabwe is particularly vulnerable to climate change and climate sensitivity due to its heavy dependency on rain-fed agriculture which automatically results in reduced

agricultural and economic productivity, leading to increased poverty levels (Nyahunda *et al.*, 2020; Chirisa, 2021).

Poor rural households are highly exposed to shocks since their livelihoods are highly dependent on an increasingly deteriorating natural resource base. In the face of climate change and the dwindling economy, the country needs a strong resilience framework and understanding of how rural livelihoods can sustainably cope with uncertainty. It is, therefore, important to evaluate the current resilient strategies adopted in rural communities to ascertain their effectiveness in enhancing people's well-being. Chirisa (2021) observes how disaster and risks are becoming phenomenal in the rural landscape of Zimbabwe. With a predicted increase in climate change effects, the mainstreaming of disaster management in development planning is key in preserving development gains.

Ndlovu *et al.* (2020) argue that 37% of the Zimbabwean population receives adequate rainfall for rain-fed agriculture, whereas about 90% of the population relies on this practice. For decades, rain-fed agriculture has sustained Zimbabwe's food security, industrialisation and development. However, this has, in recent years, been impacted negatively by prolonged droughts and other shocks resulting from climate change. Many people have lost considerable numbers of livestock with some left with none. The persistent droughts and food insecurity over the years have attracted dependency on humanitarian agencies running food aid programmes, turning Zimbabwe, once the bread basket of Africa into a food basket case (Nyahunda *et al.*, 2020; Ndlovu *et al.*, 2020).

Ncube *et al.* (2018) argue that climate projections indicate an increase in the severity, duration and frequency of drought in most parts of the world. In Zimbabwe, rural communities are the most affected, impacting negatively on their economies and food security. Due to these climate change-induced droughts, Zimbabwe's agricultural production has been affected resulting in livelihood depletion due to crop failure, loss of livestock and food insecurity. Although the impacts of climate change are experienced by many, if not all

across the globe, different levels of vulnerability determine the impacts of drought for an individual, household and communities at large (*ibid.*). Ndlovu and Mjimba (2021) share the same sentiments as they argue that although drought is experienced by various communities, the impacts vary depending on the response capacities of the affected entities. Socioeconomic impacts vary from one society to the next, from one gender to the other, with less developed societies and women being more vulnerable and succumbing to disasters more. In Zimbabwe, the effects are more pronounced in rural communities that depend on rain-fed agriculture the most (*ibid.*).

Rural women are affected by drought the most as they have the least capacity and resources to cope with the impacts of drought and climate change due to gender-stereotyping and customary laws that shape African societies (Ncube *et al.*, 2018). Due to the gender roles assigned to them, women suffer more during periods of droughts than their male counterparts. Their gender roles require them to ensure that families are fed, there is access to the general upkeep of the household yet they are assigned an inferior rank on the social ladder. Regardless of their expected duties and responsibilities, they have the least capacity and resources to cope with the impacts of drought and climate change. In their study on the influence of gender on drought risk reduction Ndlovu and Mjimba (2021) observe how some communities are entrenched in traditional patriarchal values where males are dominating and solely responsible for decision-making processes which determine the allocation and use of household resources and family wealth. As such, women have little or no contribution in such decision-making process.

Ncube *et al.* (2018), in their study that analysed the vulnerability and coping capacities of rural women to drought in Zvishavane, Zimbabwe, argue that cultural regulations restrict women from enjoying other benefits as men do. They argue that gender roles and responsibilities are socially constructed and are imbued in power relations where women's vulnerability can be determined by the community and household composition. The manner in which household assets are controlled determines rural women's vulnerability and

coping mechanisms. Women have little or no say in the allocation of household resources and can depend only on what is given to them.

Although women are the ones who directly face the wrath of droughts when they set to ensure that their families are fed, the decision-making process which determines the use of family assets such as cattle to mitigate the impact of drought, typically remains with men (Ndlovu and Mjimba, 2021). Cattle disposal, is therefore, not common although it has the potential to avert the effects of drought and other economic challenges. While the government and other stakeholders advise destocking during periods of drought, individuals are reluctant to sell their cattle to mitigate the adverse socioeconomic impacts of drought even when the cattle are also threatened by the same drought. In the African context, cattle play a significant social and religious role that disposing of them is the last resort for any household. In rural settings, wealth is measured in terms of livestock ownership, especially cattle owned. Cattle have a strong social-cultural value as it signifies a highly esteemed social status (*ibid.*; Bwerinofa *et al.*, 2022). Other than the general economic benefits, livestock, especially cattle play, a significant role in African Religions as a means of connection with ancestors. It is believed that the presence of a kraal is appeasing to the ancestors as a culturally potent symbol of an ideal African homestead. (Ndlovu and Mjimba, 2021). As such, reducing the herd of cattle at a homestead is regarded by some as being insensitive to traditional expectations.

Given the limited role of women in family and household decision-making, destocking to mitigate the adverse impacts of drought in rural areas remains a challenge. Ndlovu and Mjimba (*ibid.*) regard this as the cattle complex holding syndrome and is linked to social gratification as compared to economic benefits. Many rural farmers adopt the wait-and-see attitude when it comes to disposing of cattle, as some believe destocking in periods of drought destabilises the market and can lead to the undervaluing of cattle. This undervaluing of livestock and limited government capacity to intervene to prevent the exploitation of farmers exacerbates the reluctance to sell livestock despite chances of drought-linked losses (Jaka *et al.*, 2018).

In Umzingwane, Zimbabwe women own cattle but they have very little or no control over their use (Ndlovu and Mjimba, 2021). Women are not at liberty to dictate how their cattle are managed since men are the sole decision-makers concerning family assets. The same is witnessed with regard to crop production as crops produced under women's names are for household consumption and those produced in the name of men are cash crops for the market. By so doing, the financial capacity of women becomes limited since they do not get any surplus from their produce. Such biases weaken the ability of rural women to adapt to climate change. With the predicted increase of the effects of climate change, gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction initiatives become inevitable to enhance gender considerations in the decision-making process. It is only when women are deliberately empowered to have control over the resources and decision-making processes that their contribution and impact in drought risk reduction practices become meaningful. It is, therefore, important that institutions consider some patriarchal norms and values to ensure women's emancipation since vulnerability and exposure to a hazard have different effects, depending on the individual/system's ability to mitigate the exposure and withstand the impacts.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To ensure rigour, transparency and a replicable review process, the systematic review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines to identify published articles on rural community resilience (Moher *et al.*, 2009; 2015). A comprehensive list of search terms related to community resilience, the gaps, myths and realities was developed to identify articles for review. This was conducted to identify peer-reviewed articles, reports and grey literature relevant to rural community resilience in Zimbabwe. The search was carried out across multiple academic databases namely, Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, JSTOR, Cochrane Library and Google Scholar. Grey literature sources included reports from organisations, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Zimbabwean government publications. The search strategy combined keywords and phrases using Boolean operators. The key terms include "rural community resilience" and "Zimbabwe", "Indigenous knowledge" and "rural resilience" and "Zimbabwe", "climate change

adaptation", "rural community adaptation" and "rural areas" and "Zimbabwe", "challenges" or "gaps" or "myths" and "community resilience" and "Zimbabwe", "sustainable development" and "rural Zimbabwe". The search included only articles that were published in English from January 2015 to January 2025 to capture the most relevant and recent developments.

The articles identified from the search of the databases were screened according to inclusion and exclusion criteria. The database search was conducted using the period January 2015 to January 2025 and used the following inclusion criteria: indexed articles; published in peer-reviewed journals written in English; theoretical and empirical articles; articles that have the term "community resilience" in the title and/or keywords; available in its full version, articles that focused on rural communities in Zimbabwe; studies that explored resilience in the context of climate change, socio-economic challenges, or governance; articles or published reports on indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), and gender dynamics, or development interventions concerning resilience. Subsequently, abstracts were analysed, considering the following exclusion criteria: duplicate articles; "Grey literature" - book chapters, news, technical papers, comments, editorials, dissertations and theses published outside the period between January 2015 and January 2025; and studies that did not have objectives related to indicators of rural community resilience, that is, studies that focused on urban areas or countries outside Zimbabwe, articles without clear relevance to resilience and articles without accessible full texts.

The initial search yielded 1 100 sources. After duplicates were removed, the final total of articles reviewed was 900. Two researchers independently screened the resulting articles by title and abstract for eligibility. After screening, 880 articles were excluded and 30 articles were reviewed in their entirety to determine eligibility. Two researchers independently read the articles and met to discuss and clarify the exclusions and the divergences and reached a consensus. After discussion, two were excluded because they were internationally based, and the remaining 28 articles were included in the review. Finally, the selected articles were read in full and the extraction of data was stored in Excel spreadsheets. See Figure 1 for a PRISMA diagram of the search.

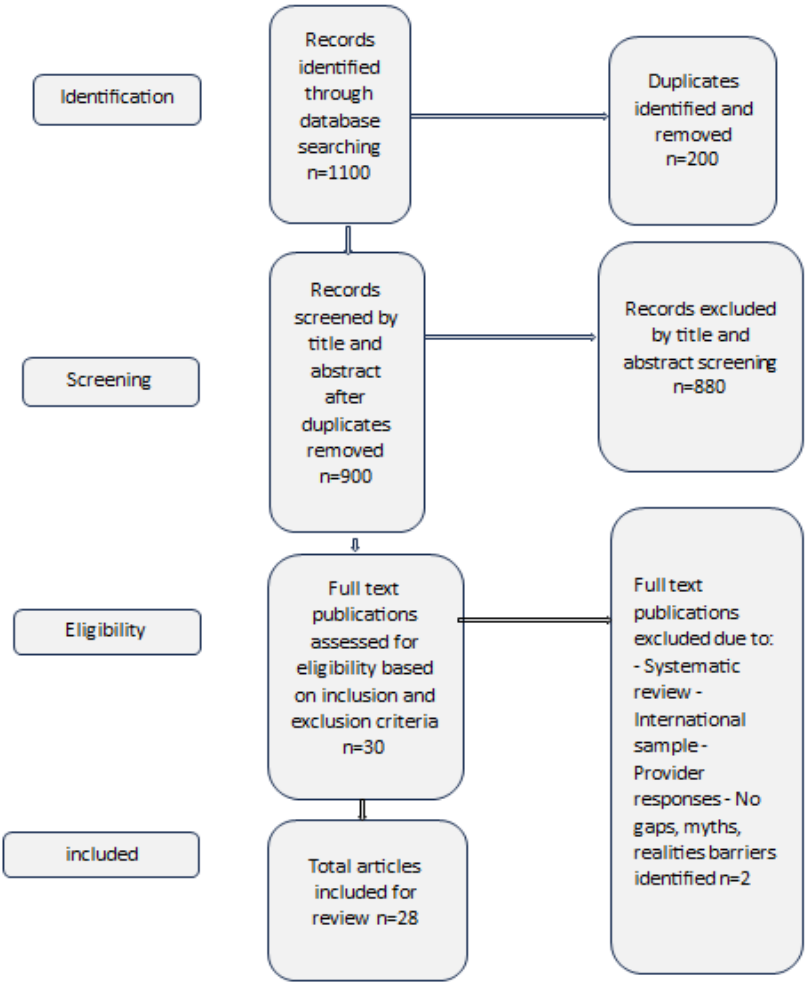

Figure 1. *PRISMA diagram of systematic search* (Page *et al.*, 2021)

Data from the eligible studies were extracted. The two authors participated in data extraction, creating a data set reflecting all 28 selected articles. The data extracted from each article were double-reviewed and two authors independently extracted data from the articles to ensure consistency. For each article, the authors identified the year of publication, the study design, the methodology used, the study site, the key findings about rural community

resilience, identified gaps, myths and realities regarding rural community resilience in Zimbabwe and identified article limitations and implications. Content Analysis was used to analyse the data and the following thematic categories emerged: gaps in rural community resilience, myths about rural community resilience and the realities about rural community resilience. In addition, findings were grouped or categorised into sub-themes, such as indigenous knowledge, gender dynamics, climate adaptation and socio-economic challenges.

The quality of included studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) which evaluates the methodological rigor of qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods studies (Hong *et al.*, 2018). Studies were scored across five criteria: appropriateness of design, data collection, data analysis, clarity of research objectives and relevance of findings. Only studies meeting a minimum quality threshold (scoring ≥3 out of 5) were included in the final analysis to ensure robust conclusions. The review acknowledges potential limitations, including publication bias and the exclusion of non-English studies that may have omitted relevant findings published in local languages. The complexity of resilience as a concept may also result in varied interpretations across studies which could affect the synthesis of findings. As the study involved secondary analysis of existing literature, no ethical approval was required. However, all data were sourced from publicly available and credible sources, ensuring adherence to academic integrity standards.

FINDINGS

The majority of the sources were empirical research articles (n=27) and an organisational report (n=1). The studies used a qualitative research design (n=28). Data were extracted from the 27 articles and one report and the gaps, myths and realities discussed within the articles are organised and presented as themes and sub-themes. Three main themes emerged, namely gaps in knowledge and practices.

The studies reveal that there are gaps in knowledge and practices as people's understanding regarding community resilience differs and is influenced by varying factors. The reviewed articles indicate several critical gaps that hinder

the understanding and enhancement of rural resilience in Zimbabwe. Authors from 18 of the articles included in this review argue that IKS play a crucial role in rural Zimbabwe. They acknowledged the importance of IKS in agriculture, water management and disaster preparedness. In rural communities in the Chimanimani district, indigenous knowledge was used in managing climate change-induced and disaster shocks (Nyahunda, 2024). The communities reported informally employing the IKS and practices on land use, disaster management, climate change adaptation and water management, which are models for building disaster and climate resilience. For instance, in Chimanimani district, people use IKS in the form of noticing animal behaviour, tree phenology, wind direction and the colour of the sky to forecast weather conditions (Nyahunda *et al.*, 2024) One of the articles reviewed found that indigenous knowledge and social relations were critical to resilience building against COVID-19, especially on the development of COVID-19 treatments (Bwerinofa *et al.*, 2022). However, authors of two articles highlighted that IKS have often been disregarded and overlooked in studies in formal resilience-building frameworks (Chanza and De Wit, 2016; Chanza, 2020).

> …rural communities use traditional medication such as *murunjurunju* or *muvengahonye* (Cissus quadrangularis) for livestock wound management which is not part of scientific knowledge to help the farmers build a science-based innovative resilience mechanism… *(Matunhu, Mago and Matunhu, 2022*:*5).*
>
> …We have the knowledge that is cross-cutting in solving our diverse problems. In the absence of technological advances, we still use traditional medicines to treat crop and livestock diseases…. (Nyahunda, Nemakonde and Khoza, 2024:10284).
>
> … We still follow cultural practices, such as *doro reMakoto* (beer brewing for rain-making ceremonies). There is a level of moral order that contributes to the overall well-being of our communities. For example, cutting off big trees, throwing objects into water bodies and use of certain plants for firewood is prohibited… *(ibid.:* 10284-10285).

Several studies reviewed (n=11) show that women and youth are disproportionately affected by shocks such as droughts and food insecurity, but are rarely included in community resilience decision-making processes (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). In Chimanimani, it was found that inequalities that manifest along power dynamics, gender, social and political lines impede community resilience building (Nyahunda, 2024). Women were found to

occupy peripheral roles in societies compared to men and were excluded from key community resilience decision-making processes. While gender discrimination exists in rural communities, the reality is that women in rural Zimbabwe play a significant role in food production, household management and informal economies, making them central to resilience efforts (Murisa, 2018). Similarly, inequalities were reported between the youth and the senior citizens where local structures of community governance do not have youth representatives.

> …Even the bible says a house divided against itself cannot stand. I am saying this because we do not pull in the same direction in this community. We are not treated the same. Men and women are regarded differently. Community goals require inclusivity and equality and we are not yet there…. (Nyahunda, 2024:7).

Three of the reviewed articles show that a poor understanding of resilience and social dimensions of risks stands in the way of building disaster and climate resilience in rural communities (Rathnayake *et al.*, 2020; Imperiale and Vanclay, 2021). For instance, a study conducted in Chimanimani district found that community participation in designing and implementing disaster and climate resilience strategies is not yet a lived reality in the district (Nyahunda, 2024). The common thread in most discussions converged on acknowledging the presence of government and non-governmental agencies in supporting resilience-building initiatives. In their diverse operational goals, these organisations intend to support and stimulate community local-level action against natural hazards, climate change and disaster risks. However, studies establish that the organisations still follow a top-down approach. characterised by the implementation of premeditated resilience strategies that systematically exclude the insights, experiences, aspirations and beliefs of local people (Rathnayake *et al.*, 2020; Nyahunda, 2024). In most instances, communities are regarded as passive beneficiaries of diverse resilience-building initiatives, while their participation in designing and implementing such initiatives is limited (Rathnayake *et al.*, 2020).

> …Our participation in decision-making processes is very limited. We are here to rubberstamp some decisions that are not in line with our needs. In most cases, our views are ignored. We are only valued on issues to do with manpower…. (Nyahunda, 2024:6).
>
> … I admit that our approaches are half-baked and represent our views and not those of the communities. We need to scale up capacity-building and community

> participation in every process. Lack of full community participation is a concerning barrier that needs to be addressed…. *(ibid.).*

Resource constraints encompass the absence of key resources required to ensure the effective implementation of resilience strategies in communities (Banwell *et al.*, 2020). The resources include technology, human resources, financial resources, adequate disbursement of funding, institutional capacities and the availability of accurate information to inform decision-making (Imperiale and Vanclay 2021; Nyahunda, 2024). Of the articles reviewed, six articles and one report documented that for successful community resilience to transpire, there is need for infrastructural and technological support systems (Oxfam, 2019; Manatsa *et al.*, 2020; Imperiale and Vanclay 2021; Mutangi and Mutambara, 2021; Nyahunda and Tirivagarisi, 2021; Matunhu, Mago and Matunhu, 2022; Nyahunda, 2024).

> …To be resilient, one needs resources and this is a challenge in our communities. Without adequate resources, the aspirations to build disaster and climate resilient communities remains a dream…. (Nyahunda, 2024:5)
>
> There are many livelihood opportunities that we can pursue in these newly resettled areas. Regrettably, one significant obstacle to realising some of our goals is the underdevelopment of infrastructure. The roads are in terrible condition and have not been maintained in the last 10 years, making this farm inaccessible. Here, communication is difficult due to constant network issues. Even after being resettled for nearly 20 years, we still lack electricity. Without electricity, you are limited to nothing. (Nyathi, 2024:8).
>
> …We need to scale up the level of support for these communities because they have nothing when it comes to material and financial resources required for them to be resilient…. (Nyahunda, 2024:5)

MYTHS AND REALITIES SURROUNDING RURAL COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN ZIMBABWE

Articles reviewed indicate that there are various myths held by people regarding community resilience and these have some impacts on the welfare of rural communities. Several myths persist about rural resilience in Zimbabwe with the common belief being that rural communities are too dependent on external aid (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). Of the reviewed articles, eight highlighted that rural communities have strong social networks and community solidarity which are critical for enhancing community resilience (Mavhura, 2020). While aid plays a role, studies show that communities often

rely on self-help mechanisms, social networks and indigenous practices during crises (Mutasa, 2015). Thus, rural communities have inherent coping strategies which are often underestimated and effective resilience-building requires collaboration with communities and integration of indigenous knowledge. For instance, *Zunde raMambo* (communal granaries) is a practice that illustrates how communities pool resources for collective survival during calamities (Mavhura, 2017, 2020).

It is further indicated that locally-based action in disaster management is largely influenced by the form and strengths of social networks (Misra *et al.*, 2017) and the culture of the affected community (Appleby-Arnold *et al.*, 2018). It is believed that such local ties are important in strengthening community resilience and recovery from disasters (Islam and Walkerden 2017; Misra *et al.* 2017). Similarly, Chanza *et al.* (2020) revealed that the use of local networks and social capital can strengthen disaster management systems around early warning systems and early action. This is critical in rural communities where public response systems tend to be weak as epitomised by the case of Cyclone Idai responses in Zimbabwe (*ibid.*). Social capital is argued to be a critical arm of traditional institutions in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe. Social networks, especially in the rural areas help the rural population to cope with food supply shocks and stresses (Matunhu, Mago and Matunhu, 2022:5).

The majority of the key informants (90%) agreed the *Zunde raMambo* scheme is still necessary as a local initiative to cushion food insecure households. They explained that the *Zunde raMambo* scheme was more sustainable than food-for-work programmes from government and food handouts from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Mavhura, 2017:6).

> …Yes, the government is playing its role, but we have a sense of responsibility as we do not want to be always spoon-fed. We are masters of our destiny. Our unity is our strength and we have always demonstrated that during floods and cyclones… (Nyahunda, Nemakonde and Khoza, 2024:10283).

It is often assumed that all rural communities in Zimbabwe have similar resilience capacities and challenges. All the reviewed articles highlight that rural communities exhibit differentiated resilience based on access to resources and external networks, challenging the notion of homogeneity.

However, resilience varies significantly based on geographic, cultural and economic factors (Scoones, 2021). Consequently, rural communities are diverse, requiring context-specific interventions. Mavhura *et al.* (2015) examined the diversity and complexity within rural communities in the country. The study found that rural areas in Zimbabwe are not homogeneous, but rather consist of diverse social, economic and cultural dynamics.

Rural communities in Zimbabwe employ varied livelihood strategies that reflect their diverse socio-economic contexts (Muzenda-Mudavanhu, 2016; Simelton and Naess, 2018; Scoones *et al.*, 2019; Chiweshe, 2020). Some communities rely heavily on agriculture, while others depend on remittances, small-scale mining, or informal trade. This diversity affects their ability to adapt to challenges such as droughts, economic instability and land degradation (Scoones *et al.*, 2019). For example, communities in arid regions such Masvingo and Matabeleland, rely on livestock and drought-resistant crops, while those in areas with better rainfall, such as Mashonaland, engage in maize farming. Similarly, families with members working in urban centres or abroad often have better coping mechanisms during economic crises, while those in isolated rural areas lack such support systems (Chiweshe, 2020). This highlights how remittances create socio-economic differentiation within rural communities, thereby contributing to varied resilience outcomes. Similarly, rural communities with better infrastructure (roads, irrigation systems and markets) and stronger local governance structures tend to demonstrate higher resilience (Moyo and Chambati, 2017). These distinct adaptive strategies highlight the heterogeneity in resilience, thereby disproving the myth of uniformity (Simelton and Naess, 2018).

While gender discrimination exists in rural communities, the reality is that women in rural Zimbabwe play a significant role in food production, household management and informal economies, making them central to resilience efforts (Murisa, 2018).

DISCUSSION

The article documents community resilience in the rural areas of Zimbabwe, particularly looking at the gaps, myths and realities. The findings show that IKS are excluded in resilience-building frameworks, yet they play a crucial

role in building rural resilience to health and climate shocks. This buttresses findings from other studies where IKS is reported to have been overlooked and disregarded in formal resilience frameworks, resulting in underutilisation of local expertise (Chanza and De Wit, 2016; Chanza, 2020;). Consequently, there is insufficient integration of traditional practices with modern resilience strategies. Resonating with these findings, a study based on real-time recording and reflection of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic found that indigenous knowledge and social relations were critical to resilience-building against COVID-19, especially on the development of COVID-19 treatments (Bwerinofa *et al.*, 2022). The study witnessed differentiated local practices of adaptation, innovation and resilience building in communities that is not utilised in the health system.

In congruency, it was established that rural communities in the Chimanimani district possess invaluable and indispensable indigenous knowledge which is crucial in managing climate change-induced and disaster shocks (Nyahunda, 2024). The communities informally employ the IKS, hence the need to integrate IKS in formal resilience-building frameworks. In Chimanimani district, people use IKS in the form of noticing animal behaviour, tree phenology, wind direction and the colour of the sky, to forecast weather conditions (*ibid.*). This informs their farming preparatory measures, highlighting the importance of IKS and their potential contribution when incorporated into models for building disaster and climate resilience.

Several studies reviewed (n=11) show existing gender and age gaps in rural resilience-building. Findings show that women and youth are disproportionately affected by droughts and food insecurity, but are rarely included in community resilience decision-making processes (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). In Chimanimani, it was found that inequalities which manifest along gender and power dynamics, impede community resilience-building (Nyahunda, 2024). Women occupy peripheral roles in societies compared to men and are excluded from key community resilience decision-making processes. Thus, patriarchal dominance is still pervasive in most rural communities, thereby inhibiting collective community resilience (Nyahunda and Tirivangasi 2020).

Similarly, inequalities were reported between the youth and the senior citizens where local structures of community governance do not have youth representatives, for example, in Chivi south and Mzingwane districts (*ibid.*). These inequalities in the rural communities determine who has access to resources, information and decision-making. Thus, the prevailing inequalities create huge disparities and derail the community's collective efficacy required in building community resilience (Nyahunda and Tirivagarisi, 2020;2021; Zhou *et al.*, 2020; Nyahunda, 2024). This also translates to exclusion of vulnerable groups, for example, women as key agents in crafting resilience measures despite their wealth of experience in natural resource management and the environment. Thus, in Zimbabwe, community resilience programmes lack gender-sensitive and youth-focused programmes.

What can be extrapolated from the findings of the study is that lack of resources reinforces the vulnerability of rural households and put their ability to devise resilience strategies to disasters and climate change at stake. Of the articles reviewed, six articles and one report documented that for successful community resilience to transpire, there is need for infrastructural and technological support systems (Oxfam, 2019; Manatsa *et al.*, 2020; Imperiale and Vanclay 2021; Mutangi and Mutambara, 2021; Nyahunda and Tirivagarisi, 2021; Matunhu, Mago and Matunhu, 2022; Nyahunda, 2024). The availability of these resources is crucial in providing early climatic warning information and weather forecasting. Hence, they are important resources relevant for building community resilience and fostering the ability to respond to natural disasters. Infrastructures that can promote community resilience and adaptation to climate change include irrigation facilities, water catchments, boreholes, schools, quality roads, health care facilities and transport systems. Despite their importance, these infrastructures are lacking or are inadequate in rural communities of Zimbabwe (Matunhu *et al.*, 2022).

Additionally, while Zimbabwe faces increasing climate-related challenges such as droughts, heatwaves and erratic rainfall, rural communities often lack access to climate-smart technologies, including, carbon capture and storage, drones to monitor crop health and soil moisture censors (Manatsa *et al.*, 2020). Oxfam (2019) reveals that although districts such as Chimanimani had their disaster risk management strategies in place, they failed to appropriately

respond to Cyclone Idai due to resource limitations. As a result, infrastructure gaps, including poor road networks and inadequate healthcare facilities, exacerbate vulnerabilities in rural communities. Development policies often fail to address infrastructural deficits in rural areas, leaving communities ill-prepared for shocks (Mutangi and Mutambara, 2021). In addition, resilience-building efforts in rural communities are hampered by the lack of robust, localised data to monitor vulnerabilities and progress, attributed to insufficient data systems for tracking resilience indicators at the community level (Chikodzi, 2021).

Findings show that it is a myth that rural communities depend on aid when, in reality, locally-based action in disaster management is largely influenced by the form and strengths of social networks (Misra *et al.*, 2017) and the culture of the affected community (Appleby-Arnold *et al.*, 2018). It is believed that social capital in the form of local ties and networks is important in strengthening community resilience and recovery from disasters (Misra *et al.* 2017; Islam and Walkerden, 2017). Similarly, Chanza *et al.* (2020) reveal that the use of local networks and social capital can strengthen disaster management systems around early warning systems and early action. This is critical in rural communities where public response systems tend to be weak as epitomised by the case of Cyclone Idai responses in Zimbabwe (*ibid.*). Given the delays in formal responses by the government and other external relief agencies, the practices of local actors, although spontaneous and largely uncoordinated, provide an opportunity to strengthen and leverage social capital offering insights into the design and development of disaster management regimes at the community level.

Another reality established in literature is that organisations continue to implement premeditated resilience strategies that do not reflect the insights, experiences, aspirations and beliefs of local people. The exclusion of communities in the decision-making process is attributed to organisations regarding communities as passive beneficiaries with limited or no participation in designing and implementing of resilience-building strategies and projects. This serves as barrier to building resilience for communities.

It is often assumed that all rural communities in Zimbabwe have similar resilience capacities and challenges. All the reviewed articles highlighted that rural communities exhibit differentiated resilience based on access to resources and external networks, challenging the notion of homogeneity. However, resilience varies significantly based on geographic, cultural and economic factors (Scoones, 2021). Consequently, rural communities are diverse, requiring context-specific interventions. Mavhura *et al.* (2015) examined the diversity and complexity within rural communities in the country. The study found that rural areas in Zimbabwe are not homogeneous, but rather consist of diverse social, economic and cultural dynamics. This emphasises the importance of understanding the unique characteristics and challenges faced by different rural communities in Zimbabwe to effectively promote resilience and sustainable development. Recognising and addressing the diversity within rural communities promotes the designing of interventions and policies tailored to meet the specific needs of each community, ultimately enhancing their resilience in the face of various challenges.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The article highlights the importance of IKS in building rural community resilience. However, it is noted that indigenous knowledge is often disregarded and overlooked in modern resilience-building strategies. As such, there is underutilisation of local expertise and limited integration of traditional practices with modern resilience-building strategies. Given that most of these traditional strategies were tested and worked back in the day, there should be an integrated rural community resilience-building approach, where traditional and modern approaches are adopted for ensuring sustainable resilience-building in rural Zimbabwe. Such an approach becomes crucial in demystifying some held general myths about rural communities. The study has indicated that there is a general myth that rural communities depend more on external aid. However, such a myth is disproved by the availability of social networks and social solidarity which are available in communities and these are critical for enhancing rural community resilience-building. Social capital is a strong component of rural communities that allows members to come together and find solutions to problems they face as a collective. It should, however, be noted that rural communities are heterogeneous. Their challenges and resilience capacities differ as they depend on various factors. It

is, therefore, important to understand each community's unique characteristics so that strategies specific to that community are devised. It is for such reasons that local knowledge and local expertise play a critical role in rural community resilience-building. Regardless of the importance of local knowledge and local expertise, literature indicates that community participation in designing and implementing disaster and climate resilience strategies in most rural communities in Zimbabwe is not yet common practice. Most of the planning and implementation is done by outside stakeholders, with minimal participation of locals themselves. Such has the propensity of compromising the sustainability of strategies, given that local communities meant to benefit from such initiatives, lack ownership. Development strategies become sustainable if the beneficiary has a sense of ownership of the initiative. It is, therefore, recommended that all stakeholders should be equally involved in all stages from problem identification to implementation and evaluation. Meaningful participation should include stakeholders from governments, non-governmental organisations and the local people themselves, the rural community, for resilience-building strategies to be sustainable.

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