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The purpose of the *Kuveza neKuumba - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Design, Innovative Thinking and Practice is* to provide a forum for design and innovative solutions to daily challenges in communities.

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A Comprehensive Support Programme Integrating Mental Health Services, Community Support and Climate Adaptation Strategies Enhancing the Well-Being and Stability of Child-Headed Households Using Epworth Community, Zimbabwe, for Reference

TAFADZWANASHE JAMES MAGAVUDE [1]

Abstract

The study examines the welfare of child-headed households in the context of climate change in Zimbabwe. The increasing severity of climate change impacts, such as erratic weather patterns and droughts, has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of these families, who are already facing significant challenges due to the absence of adult caregivers. The study aims to identify and analyse the psychosocial challenges faced by child-headed families because of climate change. The study employs the qualitative approach, utilising in-depth interviews with child-headed families, community leaders, and social workers to gain a deep understanding of the psychosocial challenges they face. Findings reveal that climate change-induced environmental stressors significantly affect the mental health and social dynamics of these families, leading to increased anxiety, social isolation, and difficulties in managing household responsibilities. It is concluded that targeted interventions are necessary to address these psychosocial impacts and support the resilience of child-headed families. The study recommends the designing of a comprehensive support programmes that integrate mental health

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services, community support, and climate adaptation strategies to enhance the well-being and stability of these vulnerable families.

Keywords: marginality, vulnerable, social protection, resilience, support

INTRODUCTION

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns (United Nations, 2022). Despite agriculture being a cornerstone of Zimbabwe's economy, contributing 60% of raw materials for the industrial sector, 15-20% to Gross Domestic Product, and 40% to exports (ZUNDAF, 2011), the sector is facing significant challenges. Erratic rainfall patents and rising temperatures are causing a decline in crop yields that exacerbates poverty and food insecurity in the country. This growing crisis intensifying the vulnerability and economic hardship of less privileged groups that include child-headed households. In Zimbabwe, these households heavily rely on crop production as they are not absorbable in work environments particularly those that infringe their Constitutional rights (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). As crop production fails to adapt to these climatic changes, child-headed households are particularly hard-hit, as they rely heavily on agriculture for their livelihood and survival.

Child-headed households face severe challenges, particularly in countries, like Zimbabwe, where erratic weather patterns and agricultural decline exacerbate food insecurity and poverty (Chihiya and Chikoko, 2023). Chiredzi North, located in the South-Eastern Lowveld of Zimbabwe, is among the communities most affected by severe climate-related challenges. Prolonged droughts and erratic weather patterns have led to significant declines in agricultural yields that serve as the primary livelihood for many rural households in the region. These

climate impacts have heightened vulnerabilities, particularly for child-headed households who are already facing considerable hardships that include food shortages, lack of education and poor medical care.

This study explores how climate change affects child-headed households in Zimbabwe. The ensuing discussion will review existing literature on the impact of climate change on vulnerable populations, particularly child-headed households. Gaps in understanding the psychosocial effects on children will be identified. Research methodology will be outlined identifying the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques employed. The study will also present and discuss findings on the psychosocial challenges faced by child-headed households in Zimbabwe. The proposed recommendations for policies and interventions to mitigate the effects of climate change on these households will be proffered.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is underpinned by Resilience Theory, propounded by Norman Garveyite, (1991). The theory offers a valuable lens for understanding how child-headed households may adapt to cope with the psychosocial impacts of climate change. Carlson et al. (2012) define resilience as the ability of an entity to recover from the adverse effects of a natural or manmade threat. Resilience Theory is guided by four main principles crucial for understanding how child-headed households cope with climate change (Van Breda, 2018). The first component is anticipation that involves preparing for potential hazards. This may be done through early warning systems and climate education. Absorption measures to mitigate and manage the impacts of climate stressors should be taken. This may include such efforts as building resilient infrastructure for the children, resource management, and adaptation that encompasses immediate actions to address current impacts and long-term

changes to improve future resilience. Recovery is the final core component of the theory that focuses on restoring normalcy and re-establishing stability towards climate change induced effects.

In this study, resilience is measured by how a child would respond to the adverse effects of climate change. Resilience Theory focuses on the capacity of individuals and systems to withstand and recover from adversity, emphasising the dynamic processes involved in managing stress and fostering adaptation (Garmezy, 1991). Resilience Theory is particularly relevant for understanding how child-headed households in Zimbabwe cope with the psychosocial impacts of climate change, given their existing vulnerabilities due to the absence of adult caregivers. Resilience Theory is particularly relevant for analysing how child-headed households navigate the psychosocial impacts of climate change due to their pre-existing vulnerabilities from the absence of adult caregivers. By focusing on the dynamic interplay among anticipation, resistance, response, and recovery, the theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and enhancing the ability of these families to withstand, and adapt to, climate-induced stressors (Van Breda, 2018). This approach underscores the importance of proactive community support, effective coping strategies, and targeted recovery efforts in bolstering the resilience of child-headed households. By addressing both protective factors and risks, Resilience Theory informs the development of interventions that integrate mental health services, community support, and climate adaptation strategies, ultimately aiming to improve the overall well-being and stability of these vulnerable families facing on-going climate challenge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The ensuing discussion addresses several key themes related to the vulnerabilities faced by child-headed households in the face of climate change. The review examines global climate changes,

outlining how dynamics such as rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns directly impact these households. This will help in shedding light on how climate change intensifies existing vulnerabilities among child headed-households at a global level. The discussion also review climate change-related challenges faced by child-headed households and possible solutions to these.

Temperatures are projected to continue increasing in the coming decades at a global level (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021). According to the IPCC report of 2021, the global mean temperature is expected to rise by approximately 1.5°C to 2.0°C by the end of the 21st century. This temperature rise is expected to result in several challenges that include more frequent and severe heatwaves, shifts in precipitation patterns, and disruptions to ecosystems and agriculture. Christensen (2007) postulates that warming is very likely to be larger than the global annual mean warming throughout the continent and in all seasons, with drier subtropical regions warming more than the moister tropics. Annual rainfall is projected to likely decrease in much of Mediterranean Africa and the northern Sahara, with a greater likelihood of decreasing rainfall as the Mediterranean coast is approached. Rainfall in Southern Africa is likely to decrease and the phenomenon will increase the vulnerability of disadvantaged populations that include child-headed households. These groups face heightened vulnerabilities due to their limited capacity to adapt to, and cope with, climate-related stresses (Chikoko and Chihiya, 2023).

In terms of precipitation, subtropics and tropics, including regions such as the Mediterranean, the Sahel, and parts of the south-western United States, are expected to experience decreased rainfall and more frequent and intense droughts. In many areas, extreme weather events, such as intense storms,

floods, and droughts, are becoming more common, due to the warming of the atmosphere and changes in atmospheric circulation (IPCC, 2021). In Southern Africa, rainfall is projected to decline across much of the winter rainfall region and along the western margins (Christensen et al., 2007). The increased unpredictability of rainfall and the growing frequency of droughts and floods will place additional burdens on vulnerable groups, thereby undermining their ability to secure basic needs and maintain livelihoods. The intersection of climate change and water scarcity poses a severe challenge to vulnerable populations, particularly in regions like Zimbabwe. As climate change accelerates, regions are experiencing increased water stress that significantly impacts children, especially those in child-headed households. The 2021 UNICEF report emphasises that 1 billion children are exposed to high or extremely high-water stress, a condition made worse by the climatic shifts occurring in many parts of the world. In Zimbabwe, child-headed households are particularly affected as children, already tasked with caregiving roles, face the additional burden of securing water for household needs. The pressures of water scarcity exacerbate their daily struggles, increasing the risks of poor hygiene, malnutrition, and illness.

UNICEF's 2021 Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) report highlights the severe and pervasive impact of climate change on children worldwide. The report emphasises on the critical issue of water scarcity and vulnerability as the cause of concern. According to the report, approximately 1 billion children are exposed to extremely high-water stress, reflecting significant pressures on water resources in their regions. Of these, 739 million children face extremely high-water scarcity, indicating a dire shortage of available water for essential needs (UNICEF's 2021). For child-headed households, the effects of water scarcity are exacerbated by their already challenging circumstances. These children who are responsible for

managing household duties, while still in their formative years, experience the compounded burden of extreme water stress (Chikoko and Chihiya, 2023). The lack of access to sufficient water not only threatens their basic health and hygiene but also increases their daily struggles to meet their family's needs. The pressures of securing clean water amidst extreme climate conditions further intensify the difficulties faced by these young heads of households, making them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Burke *et al.*, 2018).

Agriculture being the cornerstone of Zimbabwe's economy, contributes 60% of the raw materials for the industrial sector, 15-20% to the GDP and 40% to exports (ZUNDAF, 2011). However, the on-going decline in crop yields due to rising temperatures exacerbates poverty and food insecurity, placing additional strain on child-headed households. These children, who already shoulder the responsibilities of managing their households, face heightened challenges as agricultural failures undermine their ability to secure sufficient food and income. In Zimbabwe, erratic rainfall and prolonged droughts over the past three decades have severely disrupted the agricultural sector that is vital for many communities' households (Manyeruke, 2013). Children in Zimbabwe heavily rely on crop production, as they are not absorbable in environments, particularly those that infringe their Constitutional rights (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). As crop production fails to adapt to these climatic changes, child-headed households are particularly hard-hit, as they rely heavily on agriculture for their livelihood and survival.

Climate change presents several health-related challenges, particularly on vulnerable population such as child-headed families (Christensen, 2007). Effects of climate change, such as rising temperatures and increased droughts, result in water shortages, subsequently leading to poor hygiene and

malnutrition. In countries like Iraq, Syria and Yemen**,** the situation is worsened by on-going conflicts that make it difficult to provide adequate healthcare and nutrition to children (Al-Madhoun, 2020). Extreme heatwaves are becoming more frequent and severe, leading to heat-related illnesses. For the majority of child-headed households, lack of access to protective and safe spaces makes the problem more complex.

Displacement is another most pressing climate-related danger affecting child-headed households, particularly in regions that are prone to extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, storms, and rising sea levels (Christensen, 2007). Cyclone Idai, for instance, struck central Mozambique in 2019 with devastating force and resulted in the displacement of numerous families, including many headed by children. Cyclone Idai was one of the worst to hit the region in over a decade and affected over 1.85 million people that resulted in at least 1,000 deaths and significant damage to infrastructure, homes, schools, and healthcare facilities (UNICEF, 2019). Among those most affected were child-headed households, who not only faced the trauma of losing their caregivers but also took on the dual responsibility of managing both household duties and the care of younger siblings in the aftermath of the disaster (Dembedza et al., 2023).

Climate change is exacerbating economic strain and the severity of droughts across Africa, with child-headed households being among the most vulnerable. According to Christensen (2007), Africa is expected to experience substantial warming due to climate change, with rising temperatures being very likely across the continent. This warming trend brings with it a range of environmental challenges that include reduced rainfall and severe water shortages. This phenomenon directly affects the agricultural sector that many families rely on for their livelihood. For child-headed households, the economic consequences of these climatic changes are particularly severe

(Chihiya and Chikoko, 2023). These households often depend much on small-scale agriculture for their income, food and overall survival. When crops fail and livestock perishes due to prolonged drought conditions, child-headed households face significant economic and food insecurity challenges (Chidarikire, 2024). With no adult caregivers to turn to, these children take on the heavy responsibility of caring for their younger siblings and managing the household, often with limited resources. This leaves them vulnerable to malnutrition, lack of access to education, and an increased risk of health issues, further exacerbating their vulnerability in the face of climate-induced hardship.

The compounded vulnerabilities faced by child-headed households due to climate change call for targeted interventions. Child-headed households often lack the adult figure necessary to guide the household through economic hardships and climate-related disasters (Currie and Deschênes, 2016) This can increase vulnerability to economic shocks and poor coping strategies. Since these children are tasked with managing households under harsh climatic conditions, they require support systems that can help them mitigate, and adapt to, the impacts of climate hazards. Given the complexity of the particular challenges faced by child-headed households, there is an urgent need for tailored support mechanisms that consider the dual burden these children bear in terms of survival and caregiving. Pacheco, (2020) advocates for specific child protection interventions that focus on both the economic survival of child-headed households and the social safety nets needed for caregiving, especially when children take on the burden of raising siblings.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was employed for this study to explore the psychosocial effects of climate change on the

welfare of child-headed households in Zimbabwe, with a particular focus on Epworth (Teherani, 2015). The study utilised the exploratory research design to gain a deep understanding of the psychosocial effects of climate change on the welfare of child-headed households. This study design was chosen to bring out emerging issues with regards to the welfare of child-headed households amidst climate changes. The study specifically targeted all child-headed households in Epworth. This community was selected as it has several child-headed households. Purposive sampling was utilised to select a total of twelve (10) household participants from the target group. The study also purposively selected three (3) key informants, one from the Department of Social Development, one being a community leader, and one from the International Rescue Committee. Key informants were selected to provide high level perspectives and comparative insights on the issue under study (Lokot, 2021). Convenience sampling was also used to select six (6) community members who participated through both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). To gather comprehensive data, the study employed several qualitative data collection instruments that are in-depth interviews, FGDs and key informant interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with the community members to obtain detailed information about the psychosocial effects of climate change on the targeted children. An interview guide with open-ended questions was used to ensure coverage of all relevant topics and facilitate rapport-building with the participants. Two FGDs (FGD) were also conducted with six to eight children from the target group. The researcher acted as the facilitator, ensuring equal participation and encouraging open dialogue among the group members. FGDs allowed for exploration of shared experiences and collective views, providing a deeper understanding of the psychosocial effects of climate change within the context of child-headed households. To gain a broader perspective on the issue, key informant interviews

were conducted with professionals and community leaders (Lokot, 2021). These informants included representatives from the Department of Social Development (DSD), local community leaders, and individuals involved in disaster mitigation efforts in Epworth. The data collected were analysed using thematic content analysis. This method enabled the identification of recurring themes and patterns related to the psychosocial effects of climate change on child-headed households. The analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by these children and the coping mechanisms employed in response to climate-induced adversities.

The study followed all ethical guidelines necessary to conduct research. The researcher sought for consent from the Department of Social Development, community leadership and the children to conduct the study. Due to the sensitive nature of this study, the researcher assured all participants of confidentiality. Other ethical considerations observed in this study include respect of participants' dignity ensuring maximum compliance with ethical review boards.

FINDINGS

Findings by Magavude (2023) reviewed that Epworth is identified as one of the high-density areas facing severe poverty, limited access to basic infrastructure and increasing crime. These challenges significantly affect vulnerable populations that includes child-headed households. In Epworth, such families often resort to survival strategies like child vending, begging, and informal labour due to the lack of adult support and harsh living conditions. The area is also highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which exacerbates issues like food insecurity, displacement, and loss of income. Given these compounded challenges, Epworth presents a critical case for understanding the intersection of poverty, climate change, and vulnerability, making it an essential focus for this study.

The study established that climate changes in Zimbabwe is mainly characterised by extremely challenging conditions such as high temperatures, low and erratic rainfall. Such conditions were said to be affecting children in a multi-faceted way (Chikoko and Chihiya, 2023). The majority of participants indicated that child-headed households are doubly-disadvantaged by virtue of being headed by minors and also challenging weather conditions. Studies reviewed that Epworth attracts a large number of economically marginalised households including child-headed households (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). The affordability of living in Epworth, combined with the lack of adult caregivers, significantly contributes to the prevalence of child-headed households and hence necessitated the need for this study. The ensuing presentation of findings therefore outlines the main challenges faced by child-headed households in Epworth and the suggested coping mechanisms.

Vulnerability to delinquent behaviour was found to be one of the key challenges faced by child-headed households in the face of climate change. The study highlighted that the absence of adult caregivers in child-headed households, compounded by climate change, increases the likelihood of children engaging in delinquent behaviours. Community members engaged for the study indicated that climate-induced hardships, such as extreme weather events like prolonged droughts, have strained community resources and support systems. Due to the lack of proper guardianship, child-headed households were said to be more susceptible to exploitation and manipulation by individuals who may coerce them into antisocial behaviour as a survival strategy. The lack of access to essential support services and the psychological toll of climate-related stress further contribute to engagement to delinquent behaviour.
One community member has this to share:

> "Some of the older individuals in the community exploit children because of their desperation. They use these children to carry out thefts or other illegal activities because they know the kids are more likely to comply when they are in such dire need."

Findings from a FGDs further reviewed that child-headed households in Epworth community are also increasingly vulnerable to other severe forms of exploitation, such pimping. It was established that this exploitation typically involves providing basic needs such as food or shelter in exchange for sexual services and it is facilitated by a power imbalance where the pimp exerts control over the child's personal and financial decisions.

One participant has this to say:

> "My brother it is so heart breaking sharing with you that some children taking responsibilities of families here in Epworth are coerced to sexual activities that are controlled by other elderly people who also benefit from the act."

Another participant added that there are several people who work as agents in exposing child heads to sex work.

The study also has established that children heading families in Epworth experience a significant lack of access to essential childhood activities such as play and recreational activities. The study has established that this deprivation contributes to increased feelings of sadness and a sense of emotional loss. Climate change stressors, such as persistent droughts, leave child-headed households without options but to continuously seek for survival through means such as street bagging. Key informants indicated that such children are force by the situation to elderly roles and abandoning their childhood activities.

One key informant said:

> "Child household heads are often unable to participate in normal childhood activities. Their loss of play and recreation significantly contributes to their pervasive feelings of sadness and despair."

The study has established that children often struggle with making informed decisions necessary for adapting to climate changes. Findings from community members revealed that children's cognitive development, particularly their ability to assess risks, weighing consequences and prioritising actions, is often limited compared to adults. It was gathered that children in Epworth struggle to understand the importance of preparedness as a way of mitigating climate change induced dangers. Resultantly, child-headed households are more affected by droughts as compared to other families.

One key informant has this to say:

> "Majority of children who are taking parental responsibilities do not have sufficient skills to implement safety measures to mitigate climate induced dangers such as preparing for droughts or conserving water. To my thinking, this further intensifies their vulnerability."

The study has established that climate-induced agricultural failures have led to severe food shortages, directly impacting the nutritional status of children in child-headed households. It was established that these households often survive through small-scale farming activities, thus persistent droughts have led to severe food shortages among the households. Results from a FGDs supported the above findings by revealing that due to food shortages, child-headed households are more prone to malnutrition as they do not have enough contingent plans.

Climate-induced dangers, such as hunger disrupts schooling for children. Key informants indicated that school regular attendance for children heading families is compromised by the pressure of supporting a family. The study further established

that these children spent most of their time doing menial jobs such a street vending raise income for their families.

Children shared the following sentiments,

> "We are dropping out of schools to work for our families. We do not have any other source of support and thus working everyday will enable us to bring food on the table."

The study revealed that child marriages have become a significant problem in rural Zimbabwe, largely due to the effects of climate change. Key informants highlighted that climate-related issues, such as frequent droughts and rising temperatures, have led to severe food shortages. These conditions are contributing to an increase in child marriages, particularly among children in Epworth. It was established that some children choose marriage as a way to escape food shortages in their homes. Others view this as children's strategy to gain the support and protection of an older guardian from other families.

Fadzai (a pseudonym), a 16-year-old, shared in an interview:

> "My sister was married at 14 due lack food in the family. I think her decision to get married was good because these guys were supporting us better."

FGDs results further supported the link between climate change and the rise in child marriages in Epworth . Participants noted that the economic pressures and food deficit caused by climate change are driving more children from child-headed households to resort to child marriages as a coping mechanism.

Child-headed households often experience increased psychological discomfort due to the lack of effective coping strategies in the face of climate change. Lack of access to support services was identified as one critical challenge faced by child-headed households that results in continued trauma.

Children from these households indicated that their daily experiences, such as sleeping without having any food, continuously remind them of their past bad experiences, such as loss of parents. The study established that in some cases, child-headed household heads are limited by their age to meet the eligibility criteria for assistance from government and non-governmental organisations owing to lack required documentation such as national identification. This exclusion from aid programmes leaves them without necessary resources and support, further increasing their vulnerability and contributing to their psychosocial distress.

From the FGDs conducted, it was observed that children are puzzled by their exclusion:

> "It's really hard for us here in Ward 26, Chiredzi North. The droughts have made it almost impossible to find enough food. Unlike others, we do not have anyone else to help us, so we have to do everything ourselves. We see other families getting help and it makes us feel envious and frustrated because we cannot get any support."

We focus on the key strategies that can alleviate challenges faced by child-headed households due to the impacts of climate change. A thorough exploration of both adaptive and coping strategies employed by these households will be discussed. The findings also highlight the critical role of the NGOs, local authorities and governmental departments in implementing sustainable strategies that can alleviate the burden on these vulnerable children. The study aimed to provide practical recommendations for improving the overall welfare of child-headed households.

The study established that provision of financial literacy skills plays a crucial role in mitigating possible dangers induced by climate change to child-headed households. Key informants were of the view that equipping children with essential money management skills, such as budgeting, saving and informed

spending, would enable them to better navigate the financial challenges exacerbated by climate-related events. It was further established that through practical, age-appropriate education and hands-on experiences, children learn to manage their limited resources more effectively, build financial resilience, and make informed decisions that enhance their ability to cope with and recover from climate-induced disruptions. Participants were in agreement that this proactive approach helps reduce the vulnerability of child-headed households and supports their long-term stability in the face of increasing environmental stressors.

Fostering positive parenting styles was found to be one of the best approaches for promoting resilience among child-headed households in the face of climate change and other challenges. The study gathered that nurturing supportive and effective parenting techniques equips older children who are heads of households with crucial skills to navigate challenging environments. The majority of participants suggested that positive parenting skills such as effective communication and setting clear expectations can help children manage stress and build strong family relationships.

From the FGDs conducted, the evidence was overwhelming that fostering positive parenting skills would promote strong resilience to climate change-induced challenges among child-headed households.

One of the participants said:

> "I think teachings teaching children skills for heading a family can improve their problem-solving abilities and decision-making skills, enabling them to better handle the responsibilities of managing a household and adapting to the pressures of climate change and many other challenges."

Findings of this study revealed that children should be constantly educated and alerted of potential environmental hazards. Community members suggested that local elders and

traditional weather watchers should constantly provide child-headed households with insightful weather forecasting methods and seasonal patterns that have been passed down through generations. Additionally, the study revealed that child-headed households should encouraged to follow community meetings and radio broadcasts on climate changes and advice thereof.
One community member had this to say:

> "Let us develop a habit of educating all children and caregivers on traditional signs of weather changes such as changes in animal behaviour or plant growth that can provide early warnings of extreme weather events."

Inclusion of child-headed households in community programmes was suggested to be among ways of reducing the effects of climate change to these families. Participants were of the view that child-headed households should be among critical decision making in communities. It was indicated that through meaningful involvement, children will be able to represent themselves. Key informants added that community programs should be designed in a way that accommodate child-headed households.

Findings also emphasised the need for stronger legal protections for children in child-headed households. Key informants indicated that the government and other relevant stakeholders should take necessary protective measures for child-headed households in the face of climate change. The study revealed the need for upholding the constitutional rights of all children, including those in child-headed households. It was established that legal frameworks should be reformed to ensure that children in these households are protected from exploitation and abuse during times of climate-related crises.
One key informant has this to say:

> "I think it is very critical that the government should take necessary measure to ensure health and safety of child-headed households in the face of climate change stressors."

One of the key findings of this study was that a multi-sectoral approach is essential in addressing the complex challenges faced by child-headed households in Epworth, Harare Metropolitan Province, as a result of climate change. The impacts of climate change, including frequent droughts, erratic rainfall, and environmental degradation, have compounded the existing socio-economic difficulties for these households, making them particularly vulnerable.

The findings suggest that a multi-sectoral approach that involves collaboration across various sectors related to child protection and climate change is critical. It was highlighted that since children in these households experience compounded challenges, their situation could not be easily improved by one sector alone. The participants recommended interventions that are holistic and integrated in nature. Key informants emphasised the need for local government, community leaders, and NGOs to work together towards implementing sustainable solutions that provide both immediate relief and long-term support.

DISCUSSION

The study established that child-headed households in Zimbabwe face numerous challenges that are exacerbated by climate change. These challenges are related to children's vulnerabilities, compounded by the effects of climate change and lack of adult supervision, as also noted by Christensen (2007). The study established that lack of a stable support system and the absence of positive adult role models in child-headed households limit their resilience in the face of climate change stressors. The findings align with Garmezy's (1991) Resilience Theory that holds that unavailability of conducive environments, inhibit resilience to shocks and stressors. The study also has established that due to climate change effects, such as droughts, child-headed household members are forced into anti-social behaviour, such as drug dealing and pimping. It

was revealed that children, particularly the family heads, force themselves in this kind of behaviour to raise income for the family. These findings are consistent with Cohen and Gifford's (2008) research on the psychosocial impacts of climate-induced displacement that shows that children in vulnerable contexts often experience increased susceptibility to negative behaviours due to disrupted family support systems. The study also highlighted several solutions to mitigate these challenges. Financial literacy skills and positive parenting have been identified as key strategies to enhance resilience to vulnerabilities. The importance of community-based interventions such as the inclusion of child-headed households in community programmes and education and awareness programmes on climate change, was emphasised. These solutions resonate with Adger's (2006) work on social resilience that suggests that fostering community inclusion and awareness-building can help buffer the impacts of environmental stressors. The research findings revealed that addressing climate change impacts requires robust policy reforms. These findings are consistent with UNICEF's (2020) recommendations that advocate for policy changes to prevent the effects of climate change among child-headed households. The study emphasises the importance of integrating resilience-building strategies into local policies and efforts to protect child-headed households from the negative impacts of climate change.

CONCLUSION AND THE PROPOSED INTERVENTION MODEL

The article has highlighted the myriads of psychosocial challenges faced by child-headed households in Zimbabwe due to climate change. The increasing frequency of environmental stressors that include erratic weather patterns and prolonged droughts has deepened the vulnerabilities of these already disadvantaged families. Through a qualitative inquiry, the has established that the absence of adult caregivers combined with the stressors of climate change has led to heightened anxiety, social isolation, and overwhelming household responsibilities

for these children. In response to these challenges, the study's findings emphasise that a multi-sectoral intervention is essential for providing comprehensive and sustainable support to these vulnerable families. It was also established among other strategies that child-headed households should be meaningfully involved in all matters regarding their welfare. The study also proposed the development of a comprehensive model aimed at addressing the multifaceted vulnerabilities of child-headed households. This model emphasises a structured intervention process that incorporates essential inputs such as community support, government policies, and active involvement from the households themselves. This intervention will not only address immediate psychosocial needs but also lay the foundation for sustainable resilience in the face of future climate challenges.

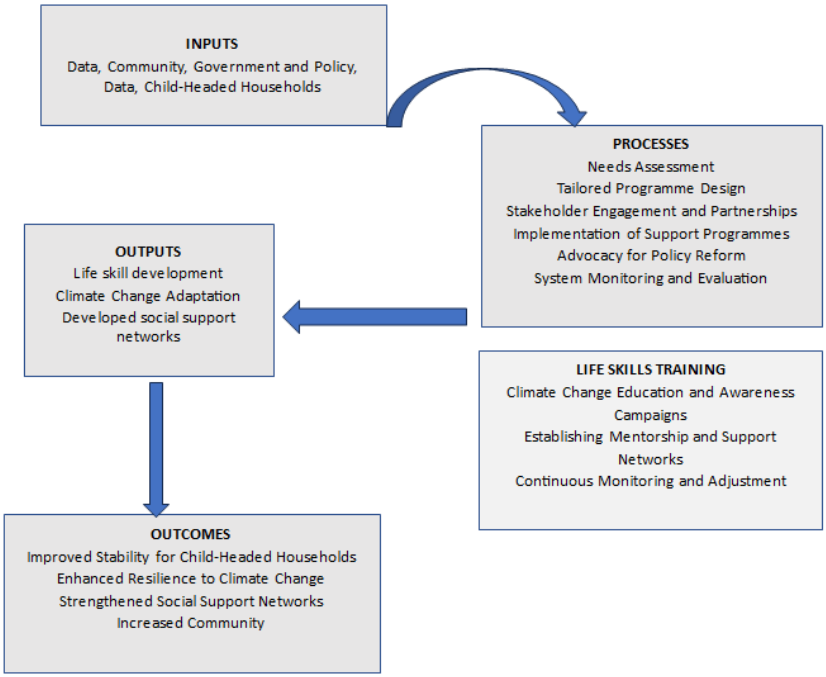

Figure 1: *The Climate and Community Resilience Model*

The proposed model aims to address the complex vulnerabilities faced by child-headed households in Zimbabwe due to climate change. It begins with essential inputs, such as data, community support, government policies, and direct involvement from child-headed households that form the foundation for a targeted intervention. These inputs are implemented through a structured process, including climate change education, the establishment of community mentorship and support networks, and continuous monitoring and adjustments. The expected outputs of this intervention include measurable results, such as the adoption of climate adaptation strategies and the development of stronger social support systems. In the long term, the model leads to significant outcomes, including enhanced resilience to climate change, strengthened social networks, and increased community integration, ensuring that child-headed households are better equipped to navigate the challenges they face.

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