THE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF UNEMPLOYED RURAL WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF WOOLDRIDGE

by

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Port Elizabeth
January 2011
Noluntu Dyubhele
DECLARATION

I declare that

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is my own work, that all the resources used or quoted have been duly acknowledged by means of complete references, and that I have not previously submitted the dissertation for a degree at another university.

Noluntu Stella Dyubhele
ABSTRACT

Despite decades of gender research and public action by civil society, policy makers continue to neglect the role of women as breadwinners who work at improving the socio-economic conditions in rural areas such as Wooldridge, a traditional rural village in the Amathole district of the Eastern Cape Province. The apartheid system created an environment that continues to perpetuate both poverty and gender inequality in rural areas. Hence, rural women in Wooldridge still experience poverty, despite welfare benefits. They are located in a poverty-stricken area without basic infrastructure and with little or no access to economic assets. They use primitive methods and indigenous knowledge to develop survival strategies. This study argues that unemployed rural women in Wooldridge cannot survive without assistance from government. Indigenous knowledge and agricultural as well as non-agricultural activities are critical to household livelihoods in Wooldridge. These activities are an important route through which these rural women can escape poverty.

The primary objective of this research was to obtain a better understanding of how unemployed rural women survive in Wooldridge. Furthermore, the necessary conditions required to sustain livelihood in the rural areas were identified. This was mainly done to help alleviate the plight of rural women in Wooldridge and to improve the quality of life of the rural population. The aim is to generate a policy response to rural women that is economically development-oriented.

The study was based on five research objectives. The first objective was to identify the survival strategies of unemployed rural women in Wooldridge; the second to ascertain what can be done to alleviate the plight of rural women in Wooldridge. The third objective was to ascertain what has been
done to address the needs of rural women in the Wooldridge area by actors of development, such as
government and non-governmental organisations. The fourth objective was to identify the constraints
faced by unemployed rural women in Wooldridge in achieving food security and generating income,
with the last objective to make recommendations regarding policies that can enhance rural economic
development and assist unemployed rural women to reduce poverty.

The main finding in terms of the first research objective is that the survival strategies of unemployed
rural women are welfare benefits, the selling of assets, remittances, handicraft production and
vegetable gardens.

In terms of the second research objective, the main finding is that investment in human capital
through the empowerment of women will assist them in improving the quality of life of the Wooldridge
community. Empowerment involves skills and training, education and access to basic services,
expertise regarding credit, land, the growing of vegetables and income-generating projects.

The main finding in terms of the third research objective is that the Peddie Women Support Centre
that is located in the city centre of Ngqushwa does not have the capacity to reach out to rural areas.
Rural women in Wooldridge have not received responses to their plights from government or from
development practitioners. These actors of development play an important role in empowerment.

In terms of the fourth research objective, the main finding is that structural constraints hinder the
economic activity of rural women in Wooldridge. Government policy that encourages investment in
infrastructure using labour-intensive methods will eliminate service backlogs in underserviced areas
such as Wooldridge.

The main finding in terms of the fifth research objective is to ascertain the impact that new legislation
can have to ensure that rural women have the same access and entitlement to land and resources
as women from urban areas. Furthermore, service-improvement programmes should be developed
and micro-enterprises and agricultural and non-agricultural activities that will generate income and
employment should be encouraged in order to reduce poverty in Wooldridge.
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TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Terms and acronyms related to the topic.

Alleviate: Making something less severe
Dignity: Value as a human being, worthy of respect
EAP: Economically active population is the number of people, employed or unemployed, over the age of 15 years who offer their labour for the production of goods and services
HSL: Household subsistence level is the living level of a household
MSL: Minimum subsistence level is the minimum financial requirements of a family to enable members to maintain their health and have acceptable standards of hygiene and sufficient clothing
MLL: Minimum living level includes food, clothing, compulsory payments to local authorities, fuel and light, washing, cleaning, materials, education, transport, contributions to medical funds and medical expenses, replacement of household equipment and taxes
Poor: People experiencing a lack of physical necessities, assets and income to include lacking basic needs
Poor household: When the combined income of all members of the household is less than the Household Subsistence Level (HSL) calculated for the specific household
Poverty: A lack of physical necessities, assets and income, and includes, but is more than, being income-poor
Poverty gap: The difference between the income of a poor household and the HSL for that specific household
Poverty line: Shows the income level needed to provide a MSL
SLL: Supplemented living level includes more necessities and some desirable amenities that enable the maintenance of a modest low-level standard of living; however, there is no general minimum living standard to satisfy certain basic needs
Unemployed: Those people who, being 15 years and older, are not in paid employment or self-employment, but are available for paid employment or self-employment, but cannot find a job
Wellbeing: The experience of a good quality of life