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Rural Elderly and Livelihoods Pathways in Zimbabwe: A Case of Mutasa South Rural District.

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Abstract

The major focus of the study was to assess various survival pathways employed by the aged in rural Zimbabwe. Mixed methodology was used in quest to understand the various livelihood strategies used by the elderly in rural communities. Survey questionnaires, focused group discussions and key informant interviews were used to collect data from the sample of 40 randomly sampled elderly and 5 purposively sampled key informants. In order to illuminate elderly's survival pathways, the paper used continuity theory to examine the different kinds of livelihood issues engaged by the elderly in Mutasa rural district ward 12 to stave off poverty and other life demands. The study noted that, in the absence of robust formal social security systems, the elderly in Mutasa rural area in Zimbabwe have been able to make a living through subsistence farming, casual labour, informal activities and self-employment among others to add income value to their households. Few individuals indicated that cash and non-cash remittances are also playing a prodigious part in enabling the rural aged to buy basic goods and few essentials. The study also established that government and civil society is not timely stepping in as a compliment to individual efforts in addressing the livelihood challenges faced by the aged rural population. The study concluded that the plight of elderly in rural areas remain unvalued by various stakeholders. Therefore, it was recommended that strenuous effort between government and private players is instantaneously needed to rescue the elderly from aura of abysmal poverty assailing them.

Key Words: Rural elderly, Livelihoods, pathways, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Problems relating to older people have been underplayed and they are being put on the bottom shelf in most of developing countries (Nyanguru , 2005). When one reaches the age of 60 years in Zimbabwe, the person is prone to face a lot of challenges and

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problems especially those ones who resides in poor rural areas. Most of the rural elderly living in low income households in Zimbabwe like elsewhere face a double misfortune; challenges in generating income and vulnerability to economic, political, social and environmental crises. HAI (2003) states that the population living to the age of 60years and beyond in Zimbabwe have made the problems of aging more widespread, more visible and ultimately more widely known. In Zimbabwe the aged are susceptible to poverty especially the rural elderly due to loss of employment, absence of formal social security systems, family breakdown and waning economic conditions. As one grows old, literature in both developed and developing nations indicates that the socio – economic conditions of the person changes consequentially.

Zimbabwe is one country where the well-being of older people has not emerged as a policy issue due to the belief that families still remain as the strongholds of support (Maposa, 2005; Help Age International, 2003). Traditionally, the family was the single most imperative source of livelihood support for older people in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the contemporary demographic and social changes occurring in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa have disrupted some of the inbuilt safety nets that were in place for older people (HAI, 2003). Muzingili and Gozho (2015) observe that countries with formal pension systems have been successful in reducing, if not eliminating poverty to a certain magnitude. This then means that formal pension is an important livelihood strategy which rural elders can apply so as to combat old age poverty and countries with no such policies, the living standards of the rural elderly have been deteriorating systematically. For example, in South Africa the old age grant is the primary source of income for older persons who would otherwise be living in abject poverty and it is estimated to have reduced the poverty gap for older people by 94 percent (Sagner, 2000). Pension systems ensure income security during old age for all and place recipients above the poverty datum line. Without such a security system, the aged people are exposed to become susceptible to various shocks, risks and above all to scarcity. In Zimbabwe, formal social security is considered to be fragmented and only accessible to designated group of people. The situation is worse for elderly in rural Zimbabwe where formal social security is not accessible except current cash transfers programmes which have provisionally replaced public assistance benefits.

In a caring society, when one reaches the age of 60, the person must live a good life being supported by the government, the family and relatives. This is however a boggling assumption as elderly continues to languish in abject poverty in Zimbabwe; a country that has set the needs of the aged population at lowest point of policy preferences. Ironically, however, the value of policies featuring child protection in Zimbabwe is not subversive rather crested upon apparent success story. Due to futile

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policies in Zimbabwe towards the aged, breaking down of family relations due to migration and urbanisation, life has been a toll order for the aged (Muchemwa, 2005). It is also the society's belief that when one is able bodied has come to be equated with normality. Wittingly or unwittingly, the family and other community support systems are neglecting to take care of the aged in the society. To this effect, HIV/AIDS and other contemporary disease pandemics are felt by all population subgroups. However, some population subgroups such as the elderly are more unguarded as they are left unaided to take care of their grandchildren following the death of their children through calamitous diseases. Despite Zimbabwe's noteworthy success in arresting HIV/AIDS pandemic; the phenomenon has been on upswing in households where the elderly are either taking care of the orphans or are nursing their sick children. Help Age International Zimbabwe (2004) estimates that about 60 percent of orphans are living with grandparents. It is therefore important to note that disease pandemics and epidemics are confronting older persons to take responsibility of the care of their sick children and support for the orphans. Muzingili and Gozho (2015) note that economic misfortunes faced by the rural elderly living with dependents create a miasmic situation as the aged are robbed of their main economic support mechanism that is their children. Therefore, it is imperative for this paper to assess multiple pathways or strategies which are being taken by the elderly in their search of basic survival.

Theoretical Framework

Chambers and Conway (1995) are defined livelihood strategies as the means used by individuals to gain a living or a combination of resources used and the activities undertaken in order to live. United Nations (1992) notes that the chief goal and objective of the livelihoods is to maintain or enhance natural resources productivity, secure ownership of access to assets and income earning activities as well as ensure adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs. The rural elderly's vulnerability to poverty has not stopped them to find the means of gaining a living as they continue to employ various livelihood strategies. The rural elderly engage in various livelihood strategies to make a living and to fight against the effects of old age adversities. The issues concerning the livelihood of the elderly can be explained through various theories. Therefore, continuity theory forms the bases of this study. Neugarten (1964) in Macnicol (2006) proposed the continuity theory which is based on the premise that various stages of the life cycle are characterized by high degree of continuity. As a person grows to maturity and passes on to the stages of later maturity and old age, continuity theory holds that the individual develops rather stable values, attitudes, norms and habits that become an integral part of his or her own personality (Madzingira, 2006). The manner in which the individual will react to

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the process of ageing is perhaps influenced by predispositions. Continuity theory therefore admits that there is a wide range of different reactions to the ageing process, each depend on a variety of factors. In this essence, survival strategies used by the rural elderly is part and parcel of life reaction to changes and continuities.

The theory holds that in making adaptive choices the elderly attempt to preserve and maintain existing internal and external structures and they prefer to accomplish this objective by using strategies tied to their past experiences of themselves and their social world. Change is linked to the person's perceived past, producing continuity in inner psychological characteristics as well as in social behavior and in social circumstances. Continuity theory is thus a grand adaptive strategy that is promoted by both individual preference and social approval. As a result of trying to maintain the internal and external structures, the rural elderly are bound to engage in livelihood survival strategies. Maposa (2006) argues that the past coping strategies continue as old age people try to grapple with the challenges of ageing in the face of death. They do not sit and relax to wait for help; rather engross themselves in several activities and strategies to ensure that they make a living. Though most countries have set the ages 60 and 65 years respectively as retirement ages, continuity theory argues that the elderly ignore such norms and go beyond these ages to continue in their various activities to ensure and maintain security in later life. It is stressed that perpetual involvement of the aged ensures that they make their living through age adaption. Failure to engage in livelihood activities results in dependence on scanty external support.

Research Methodology

The population of the study was comprised the elderly in Mutasa rural district ward 12 aged above 60years. The study targeted the elderly population of estimated 156 people in Mutasa south rural district ward 12. This information was taken from ZimStas (2012)'s census preliminary report. The key informants included the 5 local leaders from the 12 villages in ward 12 of Mutasa South Rural District. Systematic random sampling was used to select a total of 40 elderly persons from the 10 villages in ward 12 of Mutasa South Rural District using community registers. Purposive sampling was used to identify 5 village heads to participate in both key informant interviews and focus group discussion out of the 10 village heads. The study used mixed methodology based on explanatory sequential design which typically involves two phases: an initial quantitative instrument phase followed by qualitative data collection phase. The rationale behind this was to explain statistical data qualitatively.

Survey questionnaires were used to collect data from 40 elderly. For the study to ensure accurate interpretation and clarification of questions the data was also collected through key informant interviews and focused group discussions with the elderly. The key informant interview guide allowed

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the researchers to probe more information and rephrase questions to get more information. All interview guides were characterized by open and closed questions. The open ended questions have been praised hence they were essential in soliciting qualitative information. The closed questions were essential for soliciting of quantitative information. All the interviews were conducted in a local language (Shona) to make it easy for the rural elderly since most of them are semi illiterate. All the elderly who took part in the interview sessions were willing to be part of the study.

The study was conducted under the guidance of ethical considerations which are informed consent and confidentiality. Under informed consent, the research team underscored on voluntary participation of the respondents and this enabled the respondents to willingly participate in the study. Confidentiality made the respondents to freely contribute as they were assured that the study was being done for academic purpose only. It was made clear that no names were going to be mentioned in the final report.

Data Presentation

This section presented the major findings of the study. The problem of the study has been that the realization of the absence of social security systems to cater for the elderly coupled with worsening economic, political and social factors which prompted the need to assess the livelihood strategies which aged people in poor rural communities are engaged in. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS software while qualitative was presented to explain quantitative data.

Demographic Profile of the respondents

Among 40 sampled elderly, the average age was 66, 7 years, while average dependency ratio was 3.7 (this is considered high in current Zimbabwean government rankings). Only 18 (45%) were in marital relationship or married and this shows that most of the aged people in rural areas are single. Unsurprisingly, 20 (50%) of interviewed elderly attended primary school and the other (50%) never attended school. This shows the highest level of adult illiteracy in rural communities. More staggering was that those who attended primary school, only 6 (15%) were able to write and read. In terms of formal employment history, only 11 (27.5%) has been formally employment. However, the majority has been employed during colonial period and few managed to continue to work in the post independent Zimbabwe. Perhaps, this provides explanation why majority of the aged in rural Zimbabwe are not beneficial of formal security systems such as pensions. All key informants who participated in the study reached at least secondary school education and their average age 43.2 years which shows better access to education by young generation.

Livelihood Pathways of the rural elderly

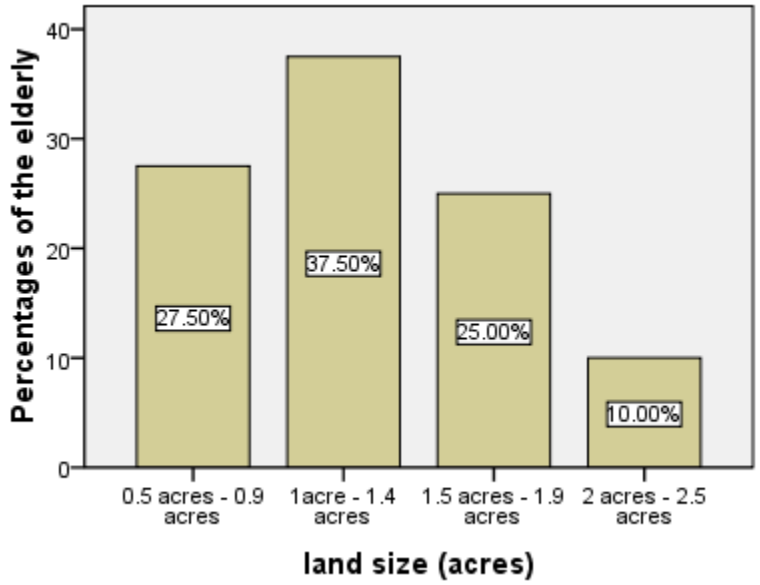
Land and agriculture

The study found that all the rural elderly had a piece of land that is 100% of the elderly

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interviewed. The study then had to look at the sizes of the land which the rural elderly owns. The fig 1 below show the sizes of land which the elderly interviewed own. Most of the rural elderly own 1 acre to 1.4 acres of land, while those who own big lands only constitute 10% of the sample and that is 2 acres to 2.5 acres and those that own smaller lands constitute 27.5% and that is 0.5 acres to 0.9 acres of land.

Figure 1: Elderly Respondents Land Size Owned



All the rural elderly from the sample were involved in farming and confessed that it easily accessible to everyone in the community. The table 1 below represents the types of farming which is practiced by the rural elderly and it is indicated that 85% of the rural elderly are subsistence farmers while 15% are commercial farmers. It was revealed during in-depth interviews that that most of the farming produces include only food crops and they do not depend much on the cash crops. The rural elderly only grow crops for their own consumption and this limits their own source of income. The study also discovered that there is lack of key agricultural inputs to support the commercialisation process of subsistence farming.

Table 1: Use of Land by the Elderly Respondents

	Type of Farming	Frequency	Percent %	Cumulative Percent
	Commercial farming	6	15	15

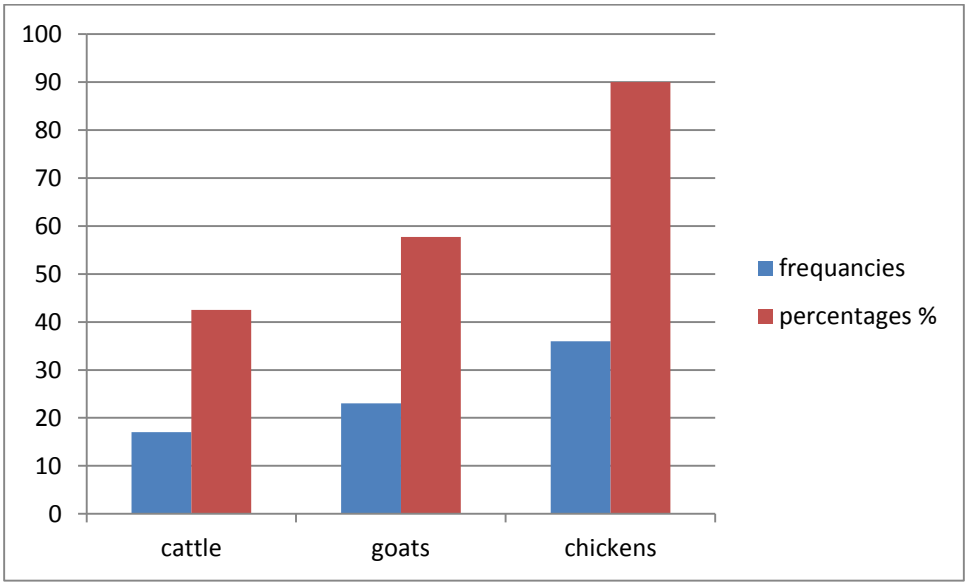
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Subsistence farming	34	85	100
Total	**40**	**100**	

Livestock production

The fig 2 below indicates the livestock which the rural elderly keep. Ninety percent (90%) of the elderly indicated that they keep chickens, 57.5% which is representing 23 elderly indicated that they keep goats and 42.5% keep cattle. Elderly participants admitted that the livestock remain an epitome of their economic base in rural areas. It was revealed that they sell their livestock when drought hit them and also use the same money to send their children or grandchildren to school in form of tuition payments. Apart from economic value, participants indicated that livestock such as cattle are crucial for wealth measurement and use in religious ceremonies. Therefore, killing of cattle is culturally managed though in some cases droughts leave them with no option but to sell in order to feed their dependents.

Figure 2: Livestock Owned By Elderly Respondents



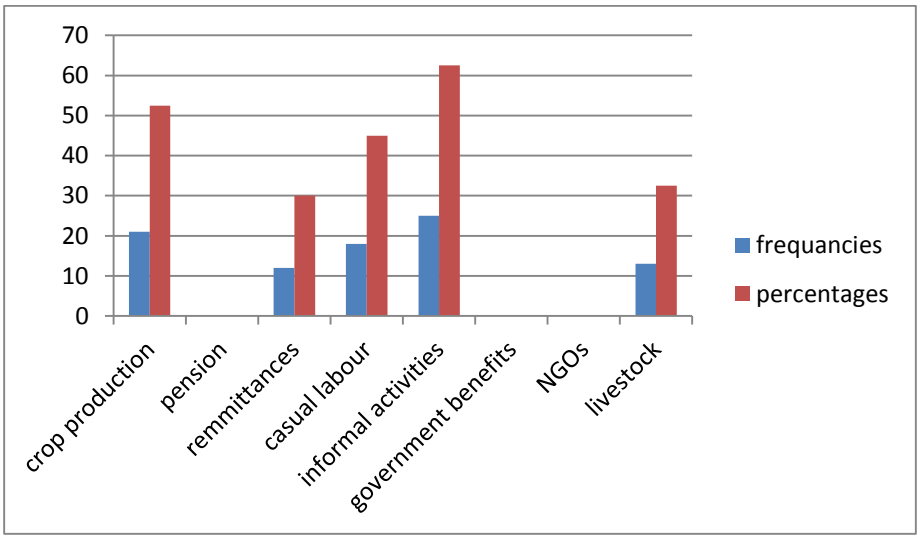
Main Sources of Income for the Rural Elderly

The fig 3 below shows the main sources of income for the rural elderly in the study. The rural elderly in the study indicated five main sources of income which are informal

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activities having the highest percentage of responses with 62.5%, crop production 52.5%, casual labour with 45%, and livestock production with 32.5 and remittances with 30%. From the sample of the participants, none of them indicated government benefits as their source of income. The findings also revealed that none of the rural elderly was enjoying the employment benefits of pension. It was also noted that no NGOs are taking part in as far as the income source of the elderly is concerned.

Figure 3: Sources of Income



Farming was the backbone of income source for the rural elderly. From the fig 3 above farming constitute 52.5% of the main sources of income for the rural elderly. Key informants confirmed that many rural elderly depend on farming. This encompasses livestock as well as crop production income. It also included consumption of own farm output as well as cash income derived from the output sold. Farming is practiced by many rural elderly because of free and easy access to land. It was however established that commercial farming was practiced to a lesser extent. Subsistence agriculture is at the apex of farming system in Mutasa rural district, especially among the elderly.

The study noted that the elderly are not passive; they continue to contribute to their families and communities. The participants indicated that they also engage in informal activities. From Fig 3 above, the informal activities have 62.5% of the main sources of income for the rural elderly. It was also established that for the rural elderly, the informal sector was easy to enter and to exit because one does not need money as startup capital or certificate of competence. However, work in the informal sector involves small businesses such as the sale of

cigarettes, fish, tomatoes and vegetables. No government and Non-governmental organisation help was available during the time of data collection. Focused group discussions found out that government and other stakeholders support was no longer available for the elderly, only grapevine of incoming programmes was only source of optimism.

The rural elderly in the sample also indicated that they rely on their children for the source of income. In the fig 3 above remittances have 30% of the main sources of income for the rural elderly. Family care remains the most widely used survival strategy for the majority of the world's older people, whether in the context of extended families or co residence of parents with adult children. It was revealed that some of the aged people have their children and relative who are in Diaspora. In Zimbabwe, the study noted that the family is still the major support mechanism, with 45% of older people in the sample receiving cash transfers, albeit for small amounts and 61% receiving transfers in kind.

Main Sources of Food

Table 2: Sources of Food for the Elderly Respondents

Source of income	Frequencies	Percentages
own crop production	40	100
purchasing	15	37.5
barter trade	25	62.5
remittances	19	47.5
casual labor	19	47.5
governments benefits	0	0
NGOs	0	0
pension	0	0
informal activities	33	82.5

The table 2 above shows that the responses of the elderly concerning their sources of food. From the table above own crop production has emerged to be the main source of food for the entire rural elderly getting 100% response rate. This can be attributed to the fact that the rural elderly are all engaged in farming activities since land for farming is easily accessible and no purchasing obligations are involved. The other sources of food are informal activities with 82.5% responses, barter trade with, 62.5% responses, remittances and casual labour all having 47.5% responses, purchasing with 37.5% responses and government benefits , NGO support and pension getting no response. Participants noted that agriculture is important in their survival though they contemplated the current series of drought which is affecting crop production and food for their domestic animals. During the study it was discovered

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that no formal support was coming from government in formal security systems. The situation was further compounded by the fact that majority of the respondents had no history of formal employment to get pensions.

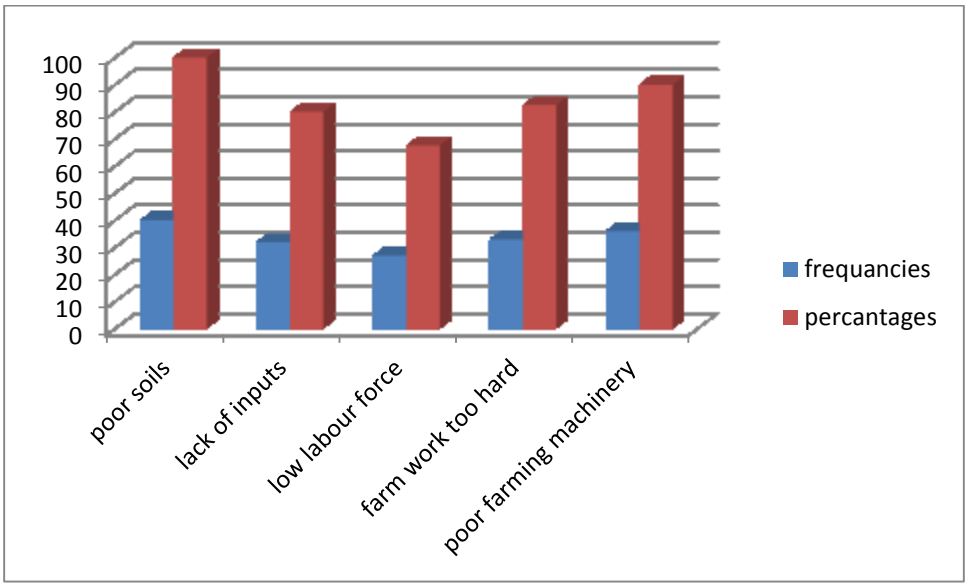
Livelihood challenges faced by rural elderly

This section is going to look at the livelihood challenges which are faced by the rural elderly as they try to cope with life needs and demands.

Agricultural Challenges

Many elderly in the rural areas are faced with a lot of challenges and the fig 4 below indicates the findings which the study got. One hundred percent (100%) of the elderly in the study signposted that the soils are no longer fertile; thus poor soils, lack of inputs having 82.5%, poor farming machinery 90% and labour shortage 80% were some of the key challenges facing agricultural production. The findings from the key informants indicated that the elderly are lacking capital, inputs, labour for farming; and this means that they cannot maintain their land nor pay others to do it for them. Most of agricultural activities lack contemporary and current technological form of farming methods to yield more production. Thus subsistence farming is common and this is failing to bail out the aged out of tricky food insecurity situation.

Figure 4: Agriculture Challenges



Challenges on Remittances

The elderly that were in sample (71%) reported that the support they are getting from remittances especially their adult

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children is not enough to cover for their basic needs and only a few said the money was enough. The findings found out that most children of the elderly were economically inactive either because they are young students or they are unemployed. The results showed that 4.8% of the elderly did not receive any money from their children. Even the 44.75% who received money from children mostly received very little. Although it is believed that the family is the first line defense of the elderly but the findings by the study showed that 30 (75%) of the elderly in rural area were not receiving enough remittances.

Government Benefits

The study found out that all the rural elderly are not aware of any current governments benefits meant to benefit the elderly. All participants (100%) response rate was recorded indicating that they were not aware of any available government benefits schemes. It was revealed that the majority of the aged are not even conscious of the existence of the public assistance. Key informants noted that very little publicity is given to the public assistance in Zimbabwe and those services are only accessible in urban areas. The rural poor are therefore automatically eliminated for consideration under the public assistance.

Old Age Pension

All participants confirmed that they are not getting any old age pension benefits. This can be attributed to the fact that many of the rural elderly in sample were not formally educated and formally employed. For those who were formally employed also confirmed that they never received any pension benefits. Key informants noted that most elderly in rural areas had no historical record of the formal employment. This excludes them from receiving pensions which is contributory and requires one to be formally employed.

Discussion

The main activity engaged in by aged people in Mutasa community is agriculture. The free availability of land as a natural resource has seen aged people being able to grow food crops for consumption and sale in case that they get some surplus harvests. Livestock rearing has also ensured that aged people get food and income as they are able to sell them in times of hardship. This concurs with the findings by Nyanguru (2002) which notes that land is accessed freely in rural areas of Lesotho and many rural elderly had piece of land for farming. From the study it also emerged that besides agriculture aged people have diversified their livelihood activities into self-employment like cloth making and tailoring, pottery, weaving, carpentry, metal work and brick making. These activities have helped aged people secure a decent living and be able to tackle the impacts of old age poverty because of the cash incomes they get. However, rural agriculture is not performing well in Zimbabwe to support the aged more adequately. This is in line with Chikwati (2016)'s arguments that rural farmers cry foul due to drought and low prices of

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agricultural production in Zimbabwe. One can therefore argue that the situation is thornier for the aged who lack enough capacity to handle daunting agricultural challenges.

The elderly in Mutasa rural ward 12 standards of living have been deteriorating, yet the study noted that there little support provided by the government, the family and relatives and other community to strengthen their livelihoods strategies. This shows that some people who are supposed to be responsible of assisting the elderly in old age are not playing their part. This confirms the finding by Muzingili and Gozho (2015) which revealed that disintegration of traditional kinship system has placed the lives of rural elderly in serious situation. The findings also concur with study in India by Oberai and Singh (1983) in Nhongo (2009) looked closely at the ability and willingness of migrant workers to send remittances to family members. It was found out that out of 4700 migrants surveyed only 23.5 % of that total was willing and was sending remittances back home to cater for the welfare of the elderly. As noted the study, remittances and family support is no longer viable to bail out the elderly from rapacious life scarcities.

The study also noted that the livelihoods of the aged people have been enhanced by the support they get from social networks. Through access to cash and non-cash remittances from their children and other relatives, the elderly people have been able to add to their own efforts. It has always been long assumed that in Africa the family plays a central role in the well-being of aged people. No support services have also been advanced by organisations such as non-governmental organisations and government. However, it emerged that aged people have been able to engage in different livelihood strategies these have been impacted by various factors. The study by Maro (2009) in Tanzania shows that African governments lack institutional commitments to help the aged in remote areas. Therefore, the context in which the aged people in Zimbabwe have been operating has been a difficult one as economic, political, social and environmental factors have greatly affected the outcome of sustainable livelihoods of the aged people.

When those that are formally employed reaches the age of 60 in developing and developed countries the person is pensioned and thus employment benefits schemes becomes also the source of livelihood strategies for the rural elderly. From the study it was evident that most of the elders in Mutasa rural area were not formally employed. Therefore, they did not benefit from any pension schemes. Those that were fortunate enough to be formally employed were unfortunate that they were employed during the colonial era when the government policy towards the employment benefits schemes only favored the white and segregated the blacks. Therefore, formal security system as one pathway of livelihood is not obtainable in Mutasa rural district. Muzingili and Gozho (2015) are of opinion that if important policies are put in place in

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Zimbabwe elderly people will fully achieve their livelihoods and improve their well-being. It is evident from the study that they have the capacity and potential to be continually active. The failure of the government to formulate social policies for the aged when other vulnerable groups such as OVCs, the disabled and AIDS patients are given much attention shows that society does not consider their plight as a thoughtful concern. Traditional cultural beliefs have convinced policy makers that children and families take great care of their ageing parents. The study has clearly shown that elderly people need more external support to ensure them to eke out a living.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study confirmed that in the absence of old age grants the elderly in Mutasa have been continually active in the construction of their livelihoods pathways. They were able to do so because of access to a number of readily available resources in their community such as land for agriculture. The elderly in Mutasa have been able to combat the impact of poverty in old age by fully engaging in agricultural activities, diversifying their livelihoods and relying upon on meagre support from their families and support organisation. The continuity theory helped to show how old aged people despite their age still have the capacity to work for their living. The option becomes imperative since there is no formal social security to cater for their needs at old age. From a continuity theory perspective the elderly are not passive persons they continue to support themselves through engaging in different livelihood activities. The rural elderly themselves have been engaging in different livelihood strategies farming being the most applied strategies to fight against old age vulnerability. The study noted that the livelihood strategies being applied by the rural elderly are not effective and sustainable in as far as fighting with old age poverty is concerned. Many of the livelihoods strategies being applied by the rural elderly are seasonal and thus cannot be sustainable. The following summarizes practical recommendation for the care of the elderly in Zimbabwe:

- **Economic empowerment and advocacy**: the elderly are taking over the role of care-giving for many orphans as they struggle to care for themselves with limited resources. Given the background that most elderly were never formally employed and those who were once employed were deprived of contributing to a pension fund, government should introduce non-contributory old age benefits to enable all the elderly to have access to basic life-sustaining goods and services. There is, therefore, need to inculcate in the family, the community and society at large the value of the elderly. The role of the elderly as custodians of culture and oral history must be recognized and the elderly must be involved in the education of children for them to be appreciated. Encourage families to

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take care of their elderly, and make institutionalization a last resort. To facilitate this, tax relief and subsidies targeted at those providing care for the elderly may be introduced.

- **Community:** the community to support and contribute to the success of the *zunderaMambo* concept where the community provides labour for a chief or headman in his fields. The two motives of such work are: firstly, to pay homage and secondly, in exchange for work in the chiefs' field, the subjects have a right to call upon some of the harvest in times of drought. As such, the needy in the community, the elderly included, may benefit from the removal of the main indicator of poverty which is shortage of food.

- **Private sectors:** The private sector has an important role to play in building the livelihoods of the elderly people. Through corporate social responsibility private organizations can contribute to the improvement of the wellbeing of aged people by engaging them in development activities. However such approaches can only be successful if ageist tendencies towards older people are shattered because they have been streamlined in social development agenda. This is because their activities are considered to be passive and unproductive.

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