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Evaluating Gender Disparity in Mining Employment and Social Cohesion: Pathways to Community Development in Shamva District, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the relationship between gender disparity in mining employment, social cohesion, and community development in Shamva District, Zimbabwe. Despite the economic benefits generated by foreign direct investment in the gold mining sector, women continue to face systemic barriers such as cultural stereotypes, limited access to training, and workplace discrimination. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with community members, mining employees, and local leaders, selected via purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and perspectives. Findings reveal that gender inequality in mining employment restricts women's economic participation, exacerbates household poverty, and undermines community well-being. Disparities in access to jobs and decision-making roles weaken trust, cooperation, and solidarity, thereby eroding social cohesion. While foreign direct investment has stimulated local economic activity, it has not adequately addressed entrenched gender barriers. The study concludes that inclusive employment policies, gender-sensitive training programs, and community engagement initiatives are essential for promoting equitable opportunities. By linking gender equality to sustainable development and social cohesion, the research provides actionable insights for policymakers, mining firms, and development practitioners seeking to foster inclusive growth in resource-dependent regions.

Key Words: Gender Disparity, Social Cohesion, Community Development, Foreign Direct Investment, Inclusive Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender disparity in employment remains a persistent challenge in resource-dependent economies, particularly in male-dominated sectors such as mining. In Zimbabwe, mining is a cornerstone of economic activity, yet women continue to face systemic barriers to participation, including cultural stereotypes, limited access to training, and workplace discrimination (ILO, 2021; IWiM, 2024). These disparities not only restrict women's economic empowerment but also have broader implications for community development and social cohesion. In mining regions such as Shamva District, where foreign direct investment (FDI), especially from Chinese enterprises, has reshaped local economies, the persistence of gender inequality raises critical questions about inclusivity and sustainability. While FDI has generated employment and infrastructure, it has not adequately addressed entrenched gender barriers, leaving women underrepresented in formal mining employment and decision-making roles (UNDP, 2023; Onditi, 2022).

The consequences extend beyond individual livelihoods. Excluding women from meaningful employment opportunities reduces household income, exacerbates poverty, and limits access to education and healthcare. At the community level, gender disparity undermines social cohesion by fostering inequality, mistrust, and weakened solidarity (IISD, 2022; World Bank, 2014). Addressing these disparities is, therefore, not only a matter of equity but also a prerequisite for sustainable community development. This study evaluates the extent of gender disparity in mining employment in Shamva District and examines its implications for social cohesion and community well-being. It further assesses the role of foreign direct investment in shaping gendered employment patterns. By linking gender equality to inclusive development, the research contributes to ongoing debates on governance, equity, and sustainability in resource-dependent regions.

Although foreign direct investment has expanded Zimbabwe's mining sector, gender disparities in employment remain entrenched, particularly in Shamva District. Women continue to face systemic barriers such as cultural stereotypes, limited training opportunities, and workplace discrimination, which restrict their participation in formal mining employment (ILO, 2021; IWiM, 2024). This exclusion not only undermines women's economic empowerment but also reduces household income and perpetuates

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poverty. At the community level, gender inequality weakens social cohesion by fostering mistrust, dependency, and social divisions, while also contributing to negative outcomes such as child labour and substance abuse (IISD, 2022; World Bank, 2014). Despite the significance of these issues, limited empirical research has examined how employment disparities in Zimbabwe's mining regions affect both community development and social cohesion. This study addresses that gap by evaluating the dynamics in Shamva District and assessing the role of foreign direct investment in shaping gendered employment patterns.

Theoretical Framework: Social Role Theory

Social Role Theory, originally advanced by Eagly (1987), provides a robust framework for understanding how gender disparities in employment are socially constructed and perpetuated. The theory posits that gender roles emerge from the division of labour in society, where men and women are assigned different responsibilities based on cultural expectations rather than inherent ability. Over time, these expectations become institutionalised, shaping perceptions of what constitutes "appropriate" work for each gender and reinforcing systemic inequalities (Anglin, Kincaid, Short & Allen, 2022). In the mining sector, these socially constructed roles are particularly visible. Mining has historically been framed as a physically demanding and male-dominated occupation, while women have been relegated to caregiving or informal economic activities. Such stereotypes are reinforced through recruitment practices, workplace cultures, and community norms that systematically exclude women from formal mining employment. This exclusion is not simply a reflection of tradition but a manifestation of entrenched social roles that limit women's access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power (Rickard, 2024).

Social Role Theory also highlights the dynamics of role conflict and role strain as mechanisms that sustain exclusion. Role conflict arises when societal expectations of women as caregivers clash with the demands of formal employment, while role strain reflects the stress of navigating competing obligations within a single role (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2021). These dynamics make women's participation in

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mining appear incompatible with prevailing cultural and institutional expectations, thereby perpetuating gender disparity. By applying Social Role Theory, this study interprets gender inequality in mining employment not as an isolated labour market issue but as a socially embedded phenomenon that shapes, and is shaped by, broader community structures. This theoretical lens underscores the argument that addressing gender disparity requires more than policy reform; it demands a transformation of the social roles and cultural norms that underpin exclusion. In doing so, Social Role Theory provides a critical foundation for evaluating how gendered employment patterns in Shamva District affect both social cohesion and community development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation: Social Role Theory

Social Role Theory, first articulated by Eagly (1987), provides a powerful framework for understanding how gender disparities in employment are socially constructed and perpetuated. The theory argues that gender roles emerge from the division of labour in society, where men and women are assigned responsibilities based on cultural expectations rather than inherent ability. Over time, these expectations become institutionalized, shaping perceptions of what constitutes "appropriate" work for each gender and reinforcing systemic inequalities (Anglin, Kincaid, Short & Allen, 2022).

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Gender Disparity in Mining Employment

Gender disparity in employment remains a defining feature of the global mining industry. Women are significantly underrepresented across the mining value chain, often confined to informal or peripheral roles with limited security and low pay (ILO, 2021; IWiM, 2024). Structural barriers such as discriminatory recruitment practices, lack of access to technical training, and gender-based harassment reinforce this exclusion (Rickard, 2024).

Globally, women in mining face multiple challenges, including unsafe working conditions, limited maternity protections, and exclusion from decision-making processes. These barriers are not only institutional but also cultural, as mining continues to be perceived as "men's work" in many societies (Lahiri-Dutt, 2018). In Africa, entrenched cultural norms and weak institutional enforcement exacerbate these disparities, with women frequently balancing informal mining with household responsibilities (Nalule, 2021; Onditi, 2022).

In Zimbabwe, these dynamics are particularly visible in Shamva District, where gold mining dominates the local economy. Despite the influx of foreign direct investment, women remain largely excluded from formal employment, reflecting both cultural stereotypes and systemic barriers such as limited access to capital and protective equipment. This entrenched gendered division of labour underscores the need for targeted interventions to promote inclusivity.

Implications for Community Development

The exclusion of women from mining employment has profound implications for community development. At the household level, reduced access to income limits women's ability to support education,

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healthcare, and nutrition, perpetuating cycles of poverty (World Bank, 2014; Hebl & King, 2019). At the community level, gender inequality diminishes women's participation in governance and collective decision-making, weakening social infrastructure and resilience (Chatterjee & Werner, 2021).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly link gender equality (Goal 5), decent work (Goal 8), and reduced inequalities (Goal 10) to inclusive development. Yet, in mining communities, persistent gender disparities undermine progress toward these goals. In Shamva, the uneven distribution of mining benefits has created visible inequalities, raising concerns about whether mining-led development can be truly sustainable without addressing gender imbalance. Furthermore, development literature emphasises that women's economic empowerment has multiplier effects. When women earn income, they are more likely than men to reinvest in family welfare, education, and community projects (UN Women, 2020). Excluding women from mining employment, therefore, represents a missed opportunity for enhancing community well-being and resilience.

Gender Disparity and Social Cohesion

Social cohesion, defined as the trust, solidarity, and cooperation within communities, is weakened by gender inequality. Exclusionary practices in mining foster resentment, dependency, and perceptions of injustice, which erode trust in institutions and community leadership (Rickard, 2024; IISD, 2022). Studies show that when women are marginalized, communities are more vulnerable to social vices such as child labour, prostitution, and substance abuse, which further fragment cohesion (World Economic Forum, 2022).

In mining regions, weakened social cohesion manifests in several ways. Firstly, the exclusion of women from formal employment contributes to economic dependency, which can fuel household and community-level conflicts. Evidence from Zimbabwe's artisanal mining areas shows that gendered exclusion often escalates into conflict and violence, particularly where women's livelihoods are insecure and dependent on men's access to mining opportunities (Emthonjeni Women's Forum, 2023; Africa Social Work, 2022). Secondly, the lack of inclusive participation in economic life fosters resentment and perceptions of injustice, undermining trust in institutions and local leadership. Studies on gender and mining highlight that when

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women are systematically excluded, communities perceive development benefits as unevenly distributed, which erodes solidarity and weakens governance structures (IWiM, 2024; Zimbabwe Gender Commission, 2021). Thirdly, gender inequality often correlates with the rise of social vices such as child labour, prostitution, and substance abuse, which further fragment community solidarity (IISD, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2022).

In Shamva District, these dynamics are particularly pronounced. Despite the influx of foreign direct investment, women remain largely excluded from formal mining roles, reinforcing a gendered division of labour that undermines both equity and cohesion. Reports from Zimbabwe's extractive sector confirm that women's participation in mining is often limited to occasional or informal roles, leaving them marginalized from the more lucrative and stable opportunities (Zimbabwe Gender Commission, 2021; Africa Social Work, 2022). Recent advocacy initiatives stress that without deliberate gender-inclusive governance, FDI risks entrenching these disparities rather than alleviating them (ZIMCODD, 2020; Impact Stories Zimbabwe, 2025). Community-level evidence suggests that this exclusion not only limits women's economic agency but also creates visible divisions between those who benefit from mining employment and those who are marginalised. Such divisions weaken the bonds of trust and cooperation that are essential for community resilience and inclusive development (Emthonjeni Women's Forum, 2023; UNDP, 2023).

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Gendered Employment

Foreign direct investment (FDI) has become a defining feature of resource-dependent economies, particularly in Africa, where extractive industries attract significant capital inflows. In principle, FDI can stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and transfer technology, thereby contributing to national development (Globerman & Shapiro, 2021; UNCTAD, 2023). However, the benefits of FDI are not evenly distributed, and without deliberate safeguards, investment often reinforces existing inequalities. This is especially evident in the mining sector, where capital-intensive operations generate limited employment opportunities and tend to privilege male-dominated roles, leaving women marginalized (ZIMCODD, 2020).

In Zimbabwe, Chinese investment has reshaped the mining landscape, particularly

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in gold and platinum production. While such investment has expanded infrastructure and boosted output, it has done little to address entrenched gender disparities (Onditi, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Reports from the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (2021) and civil society organizations highlight that women remain concentrated in informal or peripheral roles, such as artisanal mining or support services, while men dominate formal employment and managerial positions. This gendered division of labour reflects both structural barriers such as limited access to training, finance, and protective equipment and cultural perceptions that mining is inherently "men's work."

The literature further suggests that FDI can exacerbate exclusion by prioritising efficiency and profit over inclusivity. Large-scale mining operations often displace artisanal miners, many of whom are women, without providing alternative livelihoods or integrating them into formal employment structures (ZIMCODD, 2020). This displacement not only undermines women's economic agency but also weakens community resilience, as households lose critical income streams. In Shamva District, where FDI-backed mining projects dominate, these dynamics are particularly visible. Women's exclusion from formal employment has created visible divisions between those who benefit from FDI-driven opportunities and those who remain marginalized, reinforcing social inequalities and undermining cohesion (Impact Stories Zimbabwe, 2025).

At the policy level, the absence of gender-sensitive frameworks in Zimbabwe's mining governance has limited the transformative potential of FDI. While initiatives such as the Women and Mining Conference have called for gender-inclusive governance, implementation remains weak (Impact Stories Zimbabwe, 2025). This gap highlights the need for deliberate interventions such as quotas, gender-responsive procurement policies, and targeted training programs to ensure that women benefit equitably from FDI-driven growth. Comparative evidence from other African mining regions shows that when gender-sensitive policies are embedded in investment agreements, women's participation in mining employment increases, with positive spillovers for household welfare and community development (Santos-Silva & Klasen, 2021).

Strategies for Inclusive Development

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Scholars and development practitioners emphasize that addressing gender disparities in mining requires more than economic reforms; it demands deliberate, gender-sensitive strategies that transform both institutional frameworks and community norms. Central to these strategies are gender-responsive policies, capacity-building initiatives, and inclusive governance mechanisms that ensure women's participation in decision-making processes (UNDP, 2023; Santos-Silva & Klasen, 2021). Evidence from other mining regions demonstrates that when women are integrated into the workforce through targeted recruitment, mentorship, and training programs, the benefits extend beyond individual empowerment to strengthening household welfare, community resilience, and overall social cohesion (IWiM, 2024).

Globally, best practices highlight the importance of policy mainstreaming. For example, Canada and Australia have introduced gender action plans in mining companies, requiring firms to report on gender diversity and implement anti-discrimination measures. These interventions have been shown to increase women's representation in technical and leadership roles, while also improving workplace cultures (Lahiri-Dutt, 2018). In Africa, initiatives in Ghana and Tanzania have demonstrated that community-based training programs and women's cooperatives can enhance women's access to mining value chains, thereby reducing dependency and fostering inclusive development (Nalule, 2021).

In Zimbabwe, however, the implementation of such strategies remains uneven. While the Ministry of Mines has recently established a Gender Desk to promote inclusivity in the sector, the effectiveness of this initiative is yet to be fully evaluated. Civil society organisations, such as the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, have also advocated for gender-inclusive mining governance, emphasising that empowering women is essential for sustainable development2. Yet, despite these efforts, women continue to face barriers to accessing finance, training, and protective equipment, which limits their ability to transition from informal artisanal mining into more secure and profitable roles (Zimbabwe Gender Commission, 2021).

Another critical strategy involves community engagement and participatory governance. Research shows that when women are included in local decision-making structures, mining communities are more likely to

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prioritize social investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure (Chatterjee & Werner, 2021). In Shamva District, however, women's exclusion from formal employment has translated into limited representation in community governance forums, weakening their ability to influence how mining revenues are allocated. This exclusion perpetuates inequities and undermines the potential for mining-led development to be inclusive and sustainable.

Finally, scholars stress the importance of monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of gender-inclusive strategies. Without systematic data collection and analysis, it is difficult to determine whether policies are effectively reducing disparities or merely symbolic. In Zimbabwe, there is limited empirical evidence on the outcomes of gender mainstreaming initiatives in mining, particularly in districts heavily influenced by foreign direct investment. This gap underscores the need for rigorous studies that evaluate how inclusive policies can mitigate gender disparities, strengthen social cohesion, and promote equitable community development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy

This study is grounded in an interpretivist research philosophy, which emphasises understanding the subjective meanings and lived experiences of individuals within their social and cultural contexts. Interpretivism is particularly well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena such as gender disparity in mining employment, where realities are shaped by cultural norms, institutional practices, and community dynamics rather than by purely quantifiable variables (Magwegwe, 2024; FEMNET, 2025). By adopting this philosophical stance, the study prioritises the voices of women and community members in Shamva District, recognising that their perspectives provide critical insights into how exclusion from mining employment influences both household welfare and broader social cohesion. Recent scholarship on gender and extractives underscores that interpretivist approaches are essential for capturing the nuanced ways in which power relations, cultural expectations, and foreign direct investment intersect to shape opportunities and inequalities (Impact Stories Zimbabwe, 2025; IWiM, 2025). In practice, this philosophy guided the use of qualitative methods including interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to engage directly

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with participants and uncover the meanings they attach to their experiences. By privileging these subjective accounts, the study not only deepens understanding of gendered employment patterns but also generates context-specific recommendations for promoting equity, resilience, and sustainable community development in mining regions (UNDP, 2023; IISD, 2024).

Research Approach

This study is situated within a qualitative research approach, which is best suited to capture participants' views, experiences, and perceptions in their natural settings. Qualitative research emphasises depth over breadth, relying on non-numerical data analysed through interpretive methods such as thematic analysis, rather than statistical techniques (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Magwegwe, 2024). This approach is particularly appropriate for uncovering the underlying reasons, motivations, and meanings that shape gendered experiences in mining communities, where social realities are complex and context-specific (IISD, 2024).

The study adopts a social constructivist ontological paradigm, which asserts that reality is not fixed but socially constructed through interactions, cultural norms, and shared meanings within communities (UNDP, 2023). This perspective is especially relevant in Shamva District, where gender roles in mining are shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional practices that reinforce exclusion. Epistemologically, the research is informed by feminist standpoint theory, which posits that knowledge is situated and shaped by the lived experiences of marginalized groups, particularly women (FEMNET, 2025; IWiM, 2025). By privileging women's voices, the study challenges dominant narratives in mining that often overlook or minimise gendered inequalities. This standpoint influenced both the design and data collection methods, leading to the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to foreground women's perspectives while also engaging men and community leaders for comparative insights. By grounding the study in this paradigm, the research not only captures the subjective meanings attached to gender disparity in mining employment but also generates context-specific recommendations for promoting equity, social cohesion, and sustainable community development in resource-dependent regions such as Shamva.

Research Design

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This study employed a qualitative, intrinsic case study design to explore gender disparities in mining employment and their implications for social cohesion and community development in Shamva District, Zimbabwe. A qualitative approach was selected to capture rich, context-specific meanings and lived experiences that cannot be reduced to numerical measures (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Saunders et al., 2019). An intrinsic case study was appropriate because the research sought to understand the unique context of Shamva's mining communities, rather than to generalize findings broadly (Yin, 2018). Although case studies may be critiqued for limited generalizability, this study prioritized transferability, offering thick descriptions that can inform similar mining settings in Zimbabwe and across the region (International Institute for Sustainable Development [IISD], 2024). The research was grounded in feminist epistemology to privilege marginalised voices and lived experiences, particularly those of women in mining.

Population

The study population comprised individuals whose livelihoods or roles intersect with mining activity in Shamva District. This included: community residents engaged in artisanal, small-scale, and formal mining; community members indirectly affected by mining; traditional leaders; mining company representatives; government officials; and civil society actors involved in extractive-sector governance (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023; Women and Law in Southern Africa [WLSA], 2024).

Sampling and Sample Size

Sampling Strategy

Purposive maximum-variation sampling was used to obtain diverse perspectives across gender, age, occupational roles, and community leadership positions. This approach aligns with qualitative research aims to understand complex social experiences through information-rich cases (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Saunders et al., 2019).

Sample Size

Consistent with qualitative saturation logic, the study targeted 30–40 participants. The final sample comprised 20–25 community participants (women, men, youth, elders) and 5–7 key informants (local leaders, mining enterprise staff, and civic society actors).

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This range aligns with similar studies in Zimbabwean mining communities (Magwegwe, 2024; IISD, 2024), supporting thematic depth rather than statistical representativeness.

Summary Table for Population and Sample/Sampling

Category	Description	Size / Scope
Target Population	Individuals whose livelihoods or roles intersect with mining activity in Shamva District, including artisinal, small, and formal	≈400 individuals
Sampling Frame	Community residents and local leaders impacted by mining, employees of mining enterprises, and CSO representatsives.	–
Sampling Method	Purposive maximum-variation sampling to capture diverse perspectives by gender, age, occupation, and community leadership positions	30-40 participants
Target Sample Size	Purposive maximum-variation sampling to capture diverse perspectives by gender, age, occupation, and community leaders	30-40 participants
Final Sample Size	Planned range for participant recruitment, based on qualitative saturation logic.	30 individuals

Data Collection Procedures

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which facilitated the development of detailed narratives while allowing for consistent engagement across participants (Rashid, 2025). An interview guide was developed and piloted in Shamva to ensure clarity, sequencing, and cultural appropriateness. Interviews were conducted in private and mutually agreed locations to enhance participant comfort and confidentiality (UNDP, 2023).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guided the study. Participants were provided with informed consent forms and assured confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any point. No identifying information was recorded. Ethical considerations followed UNDP (2023) human-research guidelines and feminist ethics emphasising dignity, safety, and respect in field settings involving vulnerable groups.

Data Saturation

Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, evidenced by repetition of themes, stability of codes, and absence of new conceptual insights (Hennink et al., 2022). These criteria ensured analytic completeness and conceptual adequacy.

Recording and Transcription

With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes captured contextual cues and non-verbal information, supporting interpretive depth (Magwegwe, 2024).

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Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step framework. Analysis combined deductive coding guided by research objectives and Social Role Theory, and inductive coding emerging from participants' narratives. Narrative analysis complemented thematic analysis by highlighting how gendered mining experiences are embedded within broader cultural and institutional contexts (Magwegwe, 2024). Participant quotations were integrated to retain voice authenticity and honor feminist standpoint theory valuing experiential knowledge (FEMNET, 2025; International Women in Mining [IWiM], 2025).

Trustworthiness

The study enhanced credibility and dependability through method triangulation (interviews, documents, field notes), member checking with selected participants, reflexive journaling to manage positionality and bias, as well as thick description to support transferability. These strategies reinforced trustworthiness and analytic rigor (IISD, 2024).

FINDINGS

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, organised around themes derived from the research objectives and iterative thematic analysis. Four major themes emerged: (1) Structural and socio-cultural barriers to women's participation in mining employment; (2) Socio-economic implications of gendered exclusion; and (3) Gender imbalance and social cohesion, and (4) Emerging attitudinal shifts and pathways to change.

Structural and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Women's Participation in Mining Employment

Findings indicate that women in Shamva continue to face intersecting structural, socio-cultural, and institutional barriers that limit access to mining employment. Participants highlighted discriminatory recruitment processes, gendered job allocation practices, and informal gatekeeping systems favouring men. Women reported that they are often channelled into low-paying auxiliary roles such as cooking and vending rather than technical positions.

As one respondent expressed:

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"Even when we apply, they say mining is for men. They tell us to go and sell food outside the mine instead of working inside."

(Female participant, Shamva)

Similarly, another participant noted:

"The jobs that come with the new investors are given to men. Women are only called when they need cleaners or cooks."

(Community member, FGD)

In addition to institutional exclusion, cultural beliefs about gender roles persist, reinforcing perceptions that mining is "men's work." Participants linked these dynamics to weak enforcement of gender-equality legislation and the absence of deliberate gender-transformative policies in the mining sector. These findings align with national studies showing that despite policy rhetoric, women remain marginalized in Zimbabwe's extractive economy.

Socio-Economic Implications of Gendered Exclusion

The gender bias in employment has significant socio-economic consequences at both household and community levels. Participants emphasised that women's exclusion limits their capacity to contribute to family income, with cascading effects on child welfare, education, and access to healthcare. In many instances, this reinforces household dependency on men, creating vulnerability to economic shocks and labour instability in mining.

One participant explained:

"If women were working in the mines, our children would not be sent home for school fees. We depend too much on men, and when they lose jobs, the whole family suffers."

(Female participant, Shamva)

Local leaders acknowledged gendered differences in spending patterns, noting that women's income tends to be allocated toward family welfare:

"When women earn, they invest in the family. Men sometimes spend on themselves, but women think of the children first."

(Local leader, Shamva)

Thus, gender inequality in employment not only disadvantages women individually but also constrains community development outcomes particularly those related to education, nutrition, and household resilience.

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Gender Disparity, Power Relations, and Social Cohesion

Gendered exclusion also has social and relational consequences that undermine community cohesion. Participants described how unequal access to mining employment contributes to power imbalances within households and communities, fuelling tension, resentment, and weakened social bonds.

A female respondent observed:

"It causes tension. Men feel superior because they are the ones working, and women are left behind. It brings quarrels even in families."

(Female participant, FGD)

Another participant highlighted how exclusion from employment translates into exclusion from decision-making spaces:

"When women are excluded, they also lose voice in community meetings. People say, 'you don't work in the mine, so you don't understand.'

(Male participant, Shamva)

These narratives reflect how economic inequality reproduces social hierarchies and erodes communal solidarity. Consistent with gender-and-development research, the findings suggest that inclusive economic participation fosters stronger social cohesion, while exclusion perpetuates social stratification.

Shifting Attitudes and Emerging Pathways for Change

Despite persistent barriers, the findings reveal gradual shifts in community attitudes, particularly among youth, who expressed openness to women's participation in mining. Exposure to gender-diverse mining environments elsewhere and increasing advocacy on women's rights appear to be reshaping aspirations and social norms.

As one male youth stated:

"We grew up being told mining is for men, but now we see women driving trucks and working in other places. It is possible here too."

(Young male participant, Shamva)

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Similarly, a female respondent noted generational differences in attitudes:

"The younger generation is more open. They don't see mining as only for men. But the older people still resist."

(Female participant, Shamva)

Participants suggested that practical interventions including skills training for women, mentorship programmes, gender-sensitive hiring policies, and awareness campaigns could accelerate progress. However, without deliberate institutional reforms, change is likely to remain slow and uneven.

FINDINGS

The study's findings demonstrate that gender disparity in Shamva's mining sector is deeply rooted in intersecting structural, socio-cultural, and institutional dynamics. Women continue to face entrenched barriers to employment, including discriminatory recruitment practices, gender-stereotyped job allocations, and informal gatekeeping mechanisms that privilege men's access to formal mining opportunities. These barriers are reinforced by enduring cultural norms that historically associate mining with masculinity, and by weak implementation of gender-responsive policy frameworks designed to promote equity within the extractives sector.

The exclusion of women from mining employment has far-reaching consequences for household livelihoods and community development. Women's limited participation in paid mining work constrains their ability to contribute to family income, intensifying household dependence on male earners and reducing economic resilience. This dynamic negatively impacts access to essential services such as education and healthcare, with ripple effects on child welfare and long-term community well-being. Participants consistently emphasised that when women have access to stable income, the benefits extend beyond individual households to broader community upliftment, reinforcing the pivotal role of women's economic empowerment in local development pathways.

The findings further reveal that gender-based exclusion extends beyond economic outcomes to influence social relations and community cohesion. Unequal access to employment was perceived to reinforce power imbalances within households, reduce women's influence in community decision-making spaces, and generate tensions

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between men and women. In many cases, mining employment was associated not only with economic power but also with social status and voice, meaning women's exclusion contributed to marginalisation across multiple spheres. As a result, gender inequality in the mining labour market emerged as both a cause and a symptom of weakened social cohesion and diminished collective agency within the community.

Despite these persistent challenges, evidence from the study suggests that attitudes toward women's participation in mining are not static. Younger respondents, in particular, expressed growing acceptance of women in non-traditional mining roles, influenced by exposure to changing gender norms in other regions, media, and advocacy initiatives. Civil society efforts, education, and increased visibility of women in mining-related spaces at national and global levels are contributing to evolving perceptions. However, the pace of change remains gradual, and participants stressed that meaningful progress will require deliberate interventions, including gender-sensitive hiring practices, targeted skills development, mentorship opportunities for women, and active policy enforcement.

Taken together, the findings illustrate a dual reality: deep-seated gender exclusion that continues to undermine socio-economic development and community cohesion, and emerging opportunities for inclusive transformation driven by shifting norms and advocacy efforts. These insights underscore the need for integrated, gender-responsive strategies that combine policy reform, institutional accountability, community sensitisation, and empowerment initiatives to move Shamva's mining sector toward equitable and sustainable outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that gender disparity in mining employment in Shamva District remains pervasive and deeply embedded in socio-cultural, institutional, and structural systems. Women continue to be marginalised due to entrenched gender stereotypes, unequal access to skills and training opportunities, and the absence of enforceable gender-responsive workplace policies. These intersecting barriers constrain women's ability to fully participate in the mining economy, limiting their income-earning potential, reducing household resilience, and perpetuating dependence on male breadwinners. The exclusion of women from meaningful employment within the mining sector also weakens social cohesion, diminishes women's voice in community

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decision-making, and restricts pathways for equitable community development. While emerging shifts in attitudes particularly among younger generations signal potential for change, progress remains slow and uneven without targeted interventions. Therefore, meaningful transformation requires structural, cultural, and institutional action to dismantle pervasive gender inequalities and promote inclusive participation in mining-based local economies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To meaningfully address the systemic gender inequalities identified in this study, a comprehensive and coordinated set of interventions is required across educational, institutional, and community levels. Firstly, strengthening women's access to education and skills development is essential. Expanding opportunities for formal education, technical training, and vocational programs specifically tailored to the mining sector would equip women with relevant competencies and enhance their labour market competitiveness. Initiatives such as targeted scholarships, apprenticeships, and on-site training schemes can help address existing skill gaps while empowering women to pursue roles beyond traditional support functions. In addition to skills development, the mining sector must adopt and enforce gender-responsive policies that safeguard women's rights and promote equitable participation. This includes the establishment of clear recruitment guidelines, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment procedures, maternity protections, and mechanisms for reporting and addressing workplace grievances. For these policies to be effective, they require robust institutional monitoring, transparent accountability structures, and collaboration between mining firms, local authorities, and regulatory bodies.

Community engagement is equally critical, as socio-cultural norms continue to shape gender roles and influence labour market dynamics. Sustained awareness and advocacy campaigns can help challenge stereotypes that position mining as a masculine domain, while encouraging households and community leaders to support women's participation in mining-related employment. Working with traditional leaders, youth groups, religious institutions, and civil-society organisations can facilitate attitudinal change and foster a more supportive environment for women's economic empowerment. Furthermore, mentorship and peer-support networks

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should be strengthened to provide women with guidance, role modelling, and platforms for collective advocacy. Women who have successfully navigated mining environments can play a pivotal role in inspiring and supporting others, helping build confidence and resilience. Industry-partnered mentorship programs and alliances with women's mining associations can create sustained pathways for career growth and community leadership.

Finally, inclusive economic development strategies should be prioritized to ensure women benefit equitably from mining-driven growth. Beyond direct employment, women should be intentionally integrated into mining-related value chains, including procurement, services, artisanal activities, and value-addition enterprises. Participation in planning and benefit-sharing dialogues is also vital, enabling women to influence decisions that shape the future of their communities. Collectively, these recommendations emphasise the need for structural, cultural, and institutional reforms to dismantle barriers faced by women in Shamva's mining sector. Through education, policy enforcement, community mobilisation, mentorship, and inclusive development planning, stakeholders can promote gender equity, enhance social cohesion, and contribute to sustainable and inclusive economic transformation in Zimbabwe's mining communities.

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