

Zimbabwe

Local Action for Gender Justice

*Knowledge of, and added value for,
the country context*

March 2026



"I am free." This is how Varaidzo Chitima sums up what has changed in her life since moving to Murewa Rural District Council, a "dura" (Shona for "granary") or hub for the Centres of Excellence (COE) for Gender in Local Government in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland East Province.

Immaculate in an African print dress, Chitima recounts to a team of Gender Links (GL) country managers on a study visit from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) a life punctuated by the horrors of, incest, verbal and physical abuse. Yet hers is a story of reclaiming agency; of hope and renewal through a programme rooted in systemic, holistic change to bring #VoiceandChoice to women in rural areas.

A victim of teenage pregnancy, she moved from her home area of Murewa in the North East of Zimbabwe, 86 km from Harare, to her husband's home in the Manicaland province where she had three children. In 2009 when she travelled to a funeral, she came back to the devastating news that her husband had been sexually abusing her older daughter. She decided to report the case to the police. They took no action but this led to her husband physically abusing her and ostracising her. Later her brother-in-law started abusing the same daughter, who fell pregnant and gave birth to a child later adopted by Social Welfare and put in a children's home.

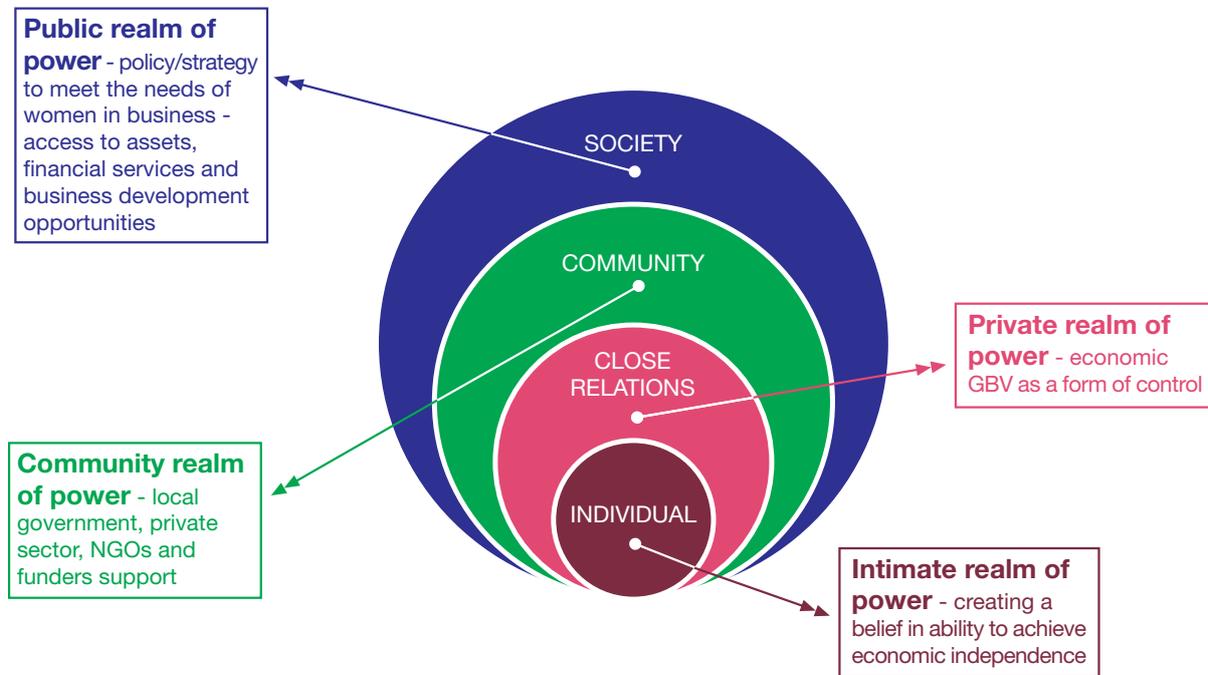
Chitima moved back to Murewa, her home, with her three children a few years ago. She made sure that her abused daughter got counselling and completed her "O" level high school. Chitima enrolled in the [Sunrise Campaign](#), a unique programme that provides entrepreneurship training to survivors of gender violence through a combination of business and life skills.

Chitima used her travel money as capital to start a fish business. "I have gained confidence and my business is growing," she told the study visit team. "I have applied for market space from the council. I can now use a computer and I have my own E Mail address. I now also have a bank account. I use my cellphone for business transactions. I have gained confidence and my business is growing. From a nobody who was always abused, I am now an emerging entrepreneur!"

GL's Theory of change for economic justice and ending GBV

Gender Links (GL) works with local authorities across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to advance gender equality through the **Centres of Excellence (COE) programme**. The programme supports councils in institutionalising gender-responsive

governance, strengthening women's leadership, and addressing structural inequalities affecting women and girls. In Zimbabwe, the COE programme is the channel through which all programming is anchored.



GL's Theory of Change (ToC) recognises that reinforced in formal and informal ways, gender inequality begins in the home; is perpetuated by the family; schools; work place; community, custom, culture, religion and tradition as well as structures within society more broadly - the media, new media, popular culture, advertising, laws, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and others. While society generally identifies other forms of inequality, gender inequality is so normalised that it often goes unnoticed, including by women who have been socialised to accept their inferior status. Gender inequality follows the life cycle of most women from cradle to grave. Despite changes in laws and Constitutions, many women remain minors all their lives - under their fathers, husbands, even sons, and as widows subject to male relatives.

GL's ToC posits that while individual, family, community and societal factors often become a vicious negative cycle that militates against

change each one of these layers can be reversed into a virtuous positive cycle that results in change. At the policy level, GL led the campaign by Southern African Women's Rights Organisations (the "Alliance") for a SADC Protocol on Gender and Development adopted in 2008 and updated in 2016 in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This unique instrument brings together African and global commitments to gender equality in one legally binding sub-regional Protocol that GL has cascaded to the local level through local action plans. The Centres of Excellence (COEs) cover 40% of the population in the ten countries in which the programme operates. Following official endorsement of the programme by the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, the COEs now cover all 92 councils in Zimbabwe. Through the COEs, GL is able to reach community, household and individual levels to change gender power relations.

¹ Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The Centres of Excellence (COE) model

The COE model involves a ten stage process including political buy-in; conducting a situational analysis; capacity building linked to the development of an action plan; development of flagship programmes and campaigns; monitoring and evaluation and sharing of good practices at annual SADC Protocol@Work summits. Each year, councils conduct a self-assessment using the Gender and Local Government Score Card. This is verified by independent assessors during the summits. Councils are issued colour coded certificates depending on their score (from blue, to green, to bronze, to silver, to gold, to platinum) during a public ceremony at the summit as an incentive to keep improving their performance on gender mainstreaming.



Priscilla Maposa, Gender Links Zimbabwe Country Director.
Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

In Zimbabwe, the programme covers all 92 local authorities with support from the **Ministry of Local Government and Public Works**, enabling systemic change from policy frameworks to community-level implementation. The Ministry recognizes the Gender Links COE programme as “their programme of choice” for gender mainstreaming. This long standing partnership has yielded multiple results including the institutionalisation of gender in local authorities by integrating gender into performance contracts of all Chief Executive Officers and Town Clerks; established gender structures (gender focal persons; gender champions and gender committees), vehicles and enablers of gender programming in local authorities. The

Ministry has also made it mandatory for all local authorities to submit **Gender Responsive Budgeting Statements** as a precondition for budget approval since 2024. This has further been extended to a **directive for all local authorities to allocate 10% of their expenditure budgets towards local economic development initiatives** in 2025. These policy directives have enhanced ownership and promoted sustainability of the programme.

Zimbabwe is piloting a second phase to the COE programme - the *Dura/Isiphala* (granary in Shona and isiNdebele) or “hub and spoke” model. This involves one urban and one rural council in each of the ten provinces taking on mentorship of surrounding councils. The hubs convene quarterly meetings to review gender action plans; arrange study visits and peer reviews ahead of summits; and promote youth and citizen engagement.

[Murewa Rural District Council](#) in Zimbabwe is one example of translating local government policy into action and becoming the benchmark for gendered service delivery in Zimbabwe's local government. Murewa, is a hub council for Mashonaland East councils, supporting and mentoring them through peer learning, study visits and coordinated implementation of gender programmes, including Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Responsive Budgeting. These programmes have strengthened ownership of gender programmes at institutional level, transformed local governance structures, strengthened citizen engagement and participation and expanded opportunities for women's economic empowerment and participation in decision making.

Through initiatives such as the **Gender Inclusive Local Economic Development, Gender Responsive Budgeting, Youth Participation and Women in Political Participation**, the COE programme addresses gender budgeting, youth inclusion, gender-based violence (GBV), and strengthens women's economic resilience at community level.

Murewa Rural District Council joined The Centres of Excellence (COE) programme in 2014 with a score of 40%. The council con

ducted a study visit to neighbouring Zvimba Rural District Council - long one of the best performing councils in the COE programme. The council has improved its gender performance score to 81% as of the Zimbabwe 2025 SADC Protocol@Work Summit. The council was also recognised as the best rural local authority in the Gender Responsive Budgeting category.

The council's ability to track gender components through its enterprise resource management system has placed it in a position to make informed decisions regarding gender expenditure. "The council budget enterprise resource management system software was upgraded to produce auto-generated gender reports that feed into the council's gender-responsive budgeting report", says Winnet.

Tambara, the council gender focal person. The council's commitment to gender mainstreaming and GRB has yielded significant results. Some of the notable achievements include **Increased allocation of resources for gender-specific programmes** from 2% of the total budget (USD 293,000) in 2024 to 4% of the



Winnet Tambara presenting the council's gender-responsive budgeting report. Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

total budget (USD 677,000) in 2025. Through the hub and spoke programme, Murewa has supported other local authorities with their gender endeavours. Most of Murewa's core focus within the hub and spoke programme is ensuring that other local authorities integrate gender-responsive budgeting in their planning and programming. This has improved service delivery and enhanced accountability.

Adorning the Council Chamber are a variety of awards that Murewa has won during SADC Protocol@ Work summits. From that time the programme "has brought positive change to the operations of council" says Winnet Tambara the Gender Focal Person. She summarises these changes as follows:

Table One	
Before COE	After COE
Council Policies were not Gender sensitive	Gender sensitive policies in place
There was no Gender Policy in place	Gender Policy in place
There was no Gender Management structures	Establishment of gender management structures
No Gender specific programmes	Gender specific budgeting (Most resourceful council award 2018 summit)
No sex disaggregation of data - poor decision making Council Chair and vice were both males	Sex disaggregated data for decision making
Engagement meetings were only done once during budget consultations and were done at Traditional Ward level.	Council chair now male, Vice Chair is female Citizen engagement meetings now done at Ward level (all 30 wards) and a platform to meet special groups was created
Did not take seriously the issue of SDGs and SADC protocol targets	Planning, policies and resolutions must address the SDGs and the post 2015 SADC protocol on Gender and development

Source: Murewa RDC.

Economic empowerment

The **Sunrise Campaign** supported survivors of gender-based violence through entrepreneurship and life skills training. The programme was based on research indicating that many survivors remain in abusive relationships due to economic dependence. In Murewa, the prog-

ramme delivered measurable economic and social outcomes. Average monthly income among participants increased significantly, rising from **\$159 to \$326 per month**, while indicators of gender empowerment and attitudes towards gender equality also improved.



Passion Kadiri sorting waste.
Photo: Winnet Tambara

The **Promoting Gender Inclusive Local Economic Development**, a flagship programme inspired by the Sunrise Campaign, which brought brick and mortar programming to Gender Links for the first time, targeting 5 key value chains, including Arts and Culture, Clean Energy, Horticulture, Health and Sanitation and Waste Management. Murewa was one of 12 councils that supported the Murewa Waste Management cooperative, made up

Gender aware leadership

At the heart of these changes is leadership from the front. In addition to a vibrant **gender focal person**, the Council has two **gender champions**.



Resta Dzvinayangoma is the first woman Vice Chair of the Council; a vocal proponent of the COE model and of the Fifty/Fifty campaign. Overall, Zimbabwe only has 14% women in local government. In Murewa, 4 out of 30 (13%) of the councillors are women. But Dzvinayangoma presents herself as a shining example of what investment in woman leadership can do. She recalls how shy she was when she came into politics; how she has since participated in COE training; stood against male councillors and won in her constituency based on merit and a record of delivery. She has competed in leadership categories in summits and spoken at international gatherings in at least ten countries as a result of the COE programme.

Dzvinayangoma is the Vice Chairperson of the Women in Local Government Forum (WILGF) national executive committee that is taking up a campaign for a constitutional amendment to ensure that the 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution includes women in local government

of 97 individuals (mostly women and youth) with economic opportunities through waste.

The council has established three aggregation centres (Murewa, Macheke and Domborembudzi) serving as a source of waste for the hub and also an innovative outgrower waste model. It has strategic partnerships with key stakeholders such as the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), Ministry of Women's Affairs, and industry players like PetroCoZim and Baobab, to drive inclusive economic growth at the local level. The council has since allocated 10% (USD1.5 million) of their budget to LED activities as directed by the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. The programme has impacted the participants positively as noted by Passion Kadiri. "Being a member of the waste management enterprise I collect, sort and sell waste generating USD\$120 from waste management activities monthly. Using these earnings, I have subsequently invested in a poultry project", she says.

under the hashtag #letsGo5050localgovt. "We cannot make a difference unless we are at the seat of power," says Dzvinayangoma. "I have seen the difference that it makes in Murewa. Now we must campaign for women in local government to be in decision-making across the whole nation." She is also a mentor to participants in the Sunrise Campaign.



The other gender champion is **Murewha CEO, Alois Gurajena**. He told GL Country Managers that "Gender Links has not only brought positive changes at policy level but it has also brought positive changes to me as an individual.

I am not ashamed to call myself a driver of change because the programme has made me one. My attitude towards gender issues has greatly changed and I now listen carefully to issues raised by women and grant them the opportunity to lead. I learnt that women are key in development and they must be accorded the opportunity to lead in governance issues. I also learnt that men's

involvement is key in women empowerment projects. The changes that took place in my life impacted positively on the way our institution operates.”

He noted that council has participated in various GL initiatives like the Sunrise Campaign,

“which has transformed the lives of gender-based violence survivors and has produced emerging entrepreneurs. We are also a participant in the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights programme and have adopted a Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights action plan together with the junior council.”

Embracing the #Voice andChoice Campaign



The Sunrise Campaign is a prime example of the #VoiceandChoice campaign. A unique partnership between GL, COE hubs and survivors of GBV, the programme arises from research showing that the majority of survivors of GBV remain in abusive relationships because they lack economic choices. In the first phase, GL ran the programme directly. Now, GL

provides training materials, monitoring and evaluation tools and training for Gender Focal Persons in councils. The councils provide venues, trainers, access to local finance, joint ventures, advice on council procurement, mentorship, markets and support.

In Murewa, building on to the entrepreneurship programme that was initiated by Gender Links, the gender committee has commissioned various empowerment projects and programmes. Notably council has a revolving fund for women. This fund is intended to empower women with entrepreneurial skills. Through this fund the local authority has assisted 11 women's groups. In addition the council has set-up ward based gender committees so as to gather and discuss gender issues at ward level in all 30 wards in the council. These are incorporated into the gender committee. The gender committee has a budget for most activities including the entrepreneurship programme.

Table Two: Key results of the Sunrise Campaign in Zimbabwe

Indicator	Overall (150 women)	Murewa RDC (15 women)
Started the business because of the project	52%	65%
Average monthly income before the project (currency)	\$178	\$159
Average monthly income after the project (currency)	\$385	\$326
Increase or decrease in average monthly income	116%	105%
Gender Progress Score of participants at start	55%	53%
Gender Progress Score of participants after	60%	61%
Increase or decrease in Gender Progress Score	5%	8%
Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) at baseline	45%	40%
GEI at endline	65%	63%
Increase or decrease in GEI	20%	23%

Source: GL Monitoring and Evaluation.

Fifteen women in Murewa (150 in the whole country), including Chitima, participated in the second phase of the Sunrise Campaign. Table two summarises key outcomes. In Murewa, average monthly income rose by 105% from \$159 to \$326 per month, compared to 116% in the programme overall. In Murewa, the Gender Progress Score, measuring gender attitudes, rose by 8%, compared to 5% overall. The Gender Empowerment Index (GEI), a composite indicator measuring increase in income, agency and entrepreneurial flair and decrease in the experience of GBV. In the Murewa this rose by 23%, compared to 20% in the programme overall.

Like the other ten hubs that are piloting running the Sunrise Campaign, Murewa has broadened its women's rights programming to include the #VoiceandChoice campaign more broadly. Led by the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance, this campaign includes menstrual health; maternal health; Comprehensive Sexual Health; teenage pregnancy; Early Child Marriage; GBV; HIV and AIDS; and Sexual Diversity. In addition to GBV, Murewa is focusing on two components: menstrua health and Early Child Marriages. As a result of the COE programme, the council has set up a parallel junior council.

During the study visit, the junior councillors performed a play featuring a mother forcing her child into an early marriage for economic reasons. A male junior councillor pleads with the mother to allow her daughter to finish school. He wins her over through arguments and persuasion that her daughter can be a far greater asset, and live a more fulfilled life with an education. The council has now enlisted the support of Chief Mangwende, the local chief, to lead the campaign against child marriages.

Partnerships for progress

As part of the COE programme, Murewa RDC also provided free land to the [Rozaria Memorial Trust](#) that empowers the girl child through various programmes and leading advocacy around ending child marriages. Rozario Trust honours the late mother of Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, a globally re-nowned Zimbabwean gender activist and African Union (AU) Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriages. The Trust in deep rural Murewa includes a place of safety, a "nhanga" or hut for young women to seek peer advice, a computer and general training centre.



Junior councillors in Zimbabwe.
Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

The junior councillors shadow the council and offer policy advice from a youth perspective. Junior councillors have started a campaign for free pads in schools. They have conducted a rapid assessment of Adolescent SRHR services from a youth perspective that will be shared with the council. They are also spearheading the campaign for ending Child Marriages.

ROZARIA

Vision
A world in which women and children live in dignity; access equal opportunities and enjoy their rights.

Mission
To support initiatives that foster education, health and entrepreneurship for young people especially girls in rural communities.

Priority Areas

- I) Integrated Services on GBV
- II) Social Protection for OVCs
- iii) Foster girls SRHR & Leadership
- iv) Research and Advocacy
- v) Girls & Women Economic Empowerment

Lessons learned

Key lessons learned from the study visit include:

- **Political will and commitment:** Despite the many political challenges and change of personnel in Zimbabwe, the COE programme has progressed for over a decade to become the “programme of choice” for gender mainstreaming. Political support from the parent ministry has been a key success factor. Individual “Drivers of Change” have sustained the momentum on the ground.
- **Local ownership:** The “hub and spoke” model is a key sustainability strategy that is bearing fruit. Its emphasis on peer learning and sharing (each one teach one, each one reach one) is teaching GL to learn to let go; trust partners; pass on ownership and manage from behind.
- **Smart partnerships:** The case study demonstrates the power of smart partnerships between GL and local authorities; between local authorities themselves, as well as other CBOs such as the Rozario Trust.
- **Value for money:** GL's role is now catalytic: ideas; standard setting and quality assurance with the bulk of costs shouldered by the council and its neighbours. The Sunrise Campaign is an example of multiplier effects, with modest investments in human capital resulting in significant increases in income. Some results, e.g. reduction in GBV, are difficult to quantify in numbers, but are key success factors.
- **Holistic approaches:** This programme is an integrated approach to women's rights.



Murewa study visit.
Photo: Gender Links

#Voiceandchoice on the ground ranges from women's political participation to bodily integrity, freedom from GBV to economic inclusion.



Youth play a pivotal role in using their voice on SRHR matters.
Photo: Gender Links

- **Involving youth:** Involving youth in a structured way, through the junior councils, brings their voice into local governance especially on SRHR. This is also a promising model for training young women leaders.
- **Systemic change:** The programme moves from palliative solutions such as places of safety to systemic change, such as financial independence, providing women the means with which to exercise #Voiceandchoice.
- **Changing lives:** As demonstrated in Chitima's testimonial, the programme is delivering real change in the lives of women. Chitima moved back to her home area, Murewa to find the freedom that she had been denied most of her adult life. There can be no greater affirmation of the COE hub and spoke programme that it is here she has finally found that freedom.

For more information go to:

<https://www.genderlinks.org.za/how-we-do-it/local-action-for-gender-justice>