

**PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL COMMUNITIES ON INDICATORS AND DETERMINANTS OF
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF MAKHADO MUNICIPALITY IN
LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is a process that is based on the premise that disadvantaged people have better insight into the challenges that militate against their development. As a result, the affected people are in a better position to develop practical solutions that lead to improvement in the quality of their livelihoods. The current study investigated the perceptions of children, youth, men, women and community leaders at village level on the indicators and determinants of women empowerment in some rural areas of Makhado Municipality in Limpopo Province of South Africa. A total of 5 924 participants from 41 villages in Wards 1, 29 and 37 of Makhado Municipality voluntarily participated in the confirmatory study from which data were collected from reflection circles using questionnaires requiring responses on a Likert-type scale. The Categorical Data Modelling (CATMOD) procedure of the Statistical Analysis Systems (SAS, 2005) and the pseudo Duncan multiple range procedure (Miller and Miller, 2004) were used to analyse the data.

The perceptions of children, youth, men, women and community leaders on the indicators and determinants of women empowerment were found to be different. There were significant differences in mean response levels for the perceptions: *most women can read and write; women have access to life improvement opportunities; women have access to old age grant; women are rarely physically, emotionally and sexually abused by men; women are aware of all government and private sector opportunities for their empowerment; women are financially independent; women have power and ability to develop their communities and women are respected when they become leaders among the interest groups* ($p < 0.1$). Also, the perceptions of the participants were the same among the three Wards.

Significant inter-Ward differences ($p < 0.1$) in mean response levels for the following perceptions were noted: *women are multi-skilled and talented; women know their rights and exercise the rights responsibly and freely; few women are unemployed; women have access to business opportunities; Women have a lot of time to do all the things they want; women occupy powerful leadership positions such as Principals and Ward Councillors; women are always given the chance to make firm decisions at home and in communities; women are not undermined by men and society in general and most women are excellent role models for children and youths* were detected. However, opinions overlapped among the interest groups. It was concluded that the participants were not satisfied with the current level of women empowerment in rural areas of Makhado Municipality.

The study contributed significantly to rural development by opening up democratic channels for decision-making processes at community level. This holistic approach to community engagement can be used during *imbizos* and also by policy makers when formulating policies on development.

The study recommended that grassroots communities of Makhado Municipality should be actively involved in issues pertaining to their well-being. Also, there was need to undertake a similar study covering a larger geographical area such as Makhado Municipality.

Key words: Determinants, indicators, interest groups, perceptions, reflection circles, rural communities, women empowerment