

**BIINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION**



**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITY**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**

**FOOD INSECURITY IN RURAL CHILD HEADED HOUSEHOLDS OF WARD 34 MT  
DARWIN, ZIMBABWE**

**BY**

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**SUPERVISOR: MR NYAMAKA**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE  
EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
BACHELOR OF SCIENCES HONOURS DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK.**

**JUNE 2025**

## APPROVAL FORM

I certify that I have supervised Juliana Chiveso B210757B in undertaking the research titled: Food insecurity in rural child headed households of ward 34 Mt Darwin , Zimbabwe. This is in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a Bachelor of Science, Honors Degree, in Social Work, and hereby recommend it for acceptance by Bindura University of Science Education.

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Date

(Supervisor)

### **Chairperson of the Department Board of Examiners**

The department board of examiners is satisfied that this dissertation report meets the examination requirements and therefore I recommend to BUSE to accept this research project Juliana Chiveso: Food insecurity in rural child headed households of ward 34 Mt Darwin , Zimbabwe . This in partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of Science, (Honors) Degree in Social Work

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**DECLARATION**

I, declare that “**Food insecurity in rural child headed households of ward 34 Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe**”, is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

**JULIANA CHIVESO****Date: 20/06/2025**

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**Date: 20/06/2025**

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**Student Number:** B210757B

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Above all, I give thanks to God for granting me the wisdom, knowledge, strength and guidance to complete this research.

**Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved auntie, brothers and sisters for their unwavering support and love. I also dedicate it to the loving memory of my late parents Mr and Mrs Chiveso, whose legacy inspires me. And above all, to the Almighty God, for granting me wisdom and strength throughout this journey.

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## Marking guide

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### MARKING GUIDE: UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION	Possible Mark	Actual Mark
Abstract	10	
Background to the study- what is it that has made you choose this particular topic? Include objectives or purpose of the study	20	
Statement of the problem	10	
Research questions	15	
Assumptions	5	
Significance of the study	15	
Limitations of the study	5	
Delimitations of the study	5	
Definition of terms	10	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
Weighted Mark	15	

Comments.....  
.....

### Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction- what do you want to write about in this chapter?	5	
Conceptual or theoretical framework	10	
Identification, interpretations and evaluation of relevant literature and citations	40	
Contextualisation of the literature to the problem	10	
Establishing gaps in knowledge and how the research will try to bridge these gaps	10	
Structuring and logical sequencing of ideas	10	
Discursive skills	10	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
Weighted Mark	20	

Comments.....  
.....

### Chapter 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction	5	
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Research design	10	
What instruments are you using to collect data?	30	
Population, sample and sampling techniques to be used in the study	25	
Procedures for collecting data	15	
Data presentation and analysis procedures	10	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
<b>Weighted Mark</b>	<b>25</b>	

Comments.....

.....

#### Chapter 4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction	5	
Data presentation	50	
Is there any attempt to link literature review with new findings	10	
How is the new knowledge trying to fill the gaps identified earlier	10	
Discursive and analytical skills	20	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
<b>Weighted Mark</b>	<b>30</b>	

Comments

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#### Chapter 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction- focus of the chapter	5	
Summary of the whole project including constraints	25	
Conclusions- have you come up with answers to the problem under study	30	
Recommendations(should be based on findings) Be precise	30	
References	5	
Appendices i.e. copies of instruments used and any other relevant material	5	
Total	100	
<b>Weighted mark</b>	<b>10</b>	

Comments

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**SUMMARY:-**

**Actual**

**Total**

**Chapter 1** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chapter 2** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chapter 3** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chapter 4**

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**Chapter 5**

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## **Abstract**

*Food insecurity presents a critical threat to the survival and development of child-headed households (CHHs), a vulnerable group becoming more widespread in rural Zimbabwe due to HIV/AIDS, Covid 19, migration, and poverty. This qualitative case study, anchored in interpretivist philosophy, investigates the complex dynamics of food insecurity within rural CHHs in Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District. Employing a multi-method approach, the research explored four key Objectives which are: (1) the drivers of food insecurity, (2) the implications of food insecurity among child headed households, (3) the coping strategies employed, and (4) the potential components of a sustainable food security framework. Data was gathered from 18 purposively sampled participants: 6 key informants (Traditional Leader, Councillor, Social Worker, NGO Representative, Agricultural Extension Officer, Health Care Worker), 8 minors (aged 12-17) acting as primary caregivers in CHHs, and 4 community members (neighbours, relative through purposive sampling technique). Data collection methods included in-depth interview for both children, community members and key informants. Data collection tools include 3 distinct in depth interview guide for primary and secondary participants. Thematic analysis revealed interconnected drivers including profound poverty, limited land access, climate vulnerability, orphan hood-related disadvantages, and inadequate institutional support. Minors experience severe implications including chronic hunger, psychological effects, health and nutritional challenges and educational disruption due to hunger. Coping strategies ranged from meal reduction and consumption of wild foods to precarious income generation and reliance on fragile social networks. Triangulating these insights, the study proposes a multi-level framework for sustainable food security, emphasizing community-based support systems, strengthened child protection, improved access to agricultural resources and social safety nets for CHHs, and policy advocacy. The findings underscore the urgent need for context-sensitive, child-centered social work interventions and policies to safeguard the rights of children leading households in resource-constrained rural settings. Recommendations target practitioners, policymakers, NGOs, and communities.*

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## **ACRONYMS**

CHH	Child-Headed Household
FI	Food Insecurity
IDI	In-Depth Interview
WFP	World Food Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNHCR	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
DSD	Department of Social Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SLF	Sustainable Livelihoods Framework
HH	Household
HCT	Harmonized Cash Transfer
CBT	Community-Based Targeting
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
ZIMSTAT	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency
ZimVAC	Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee
DFID	United Kingdom’s Department for International Development

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Food insecurity is a major problem facing vulnerable children from Child-Headed Families in Zimbabwe. Food insecurity among children from CHH is caused by different factors depending on varying situations. There are social, economic and political factors that cause food insecurity among vulnerable children. Therefore, this research seeks to assess food insecurity among child-headed rural households in Ward 34 in Mount Darwin District in Zimbabwe. This chapter looks at the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms.

#### **1.2 Background of the Study**

Food insecurity is a complex and widespread issue with far-reaching implications (World Food Programme, 2022), particularly for vulnerable groups such as children in child-headed households (CHHs) (Action against Hunger, 2020). Globally, more than 350 million children experience food insecurity, with many facing extreme poverty and hunger daily. World Food Programme (2024) reports estimate that around 350 million children worldwide live in extreme poverty, with hunger as a constant part of their lives (World Food Programme, 2024, p. 12). Further, the WFP (2022) highlights that children account for half of the global food insecurity burden, with 23 million more children pushed into acute food insecurity since 2022, bringing the total to 153 million affected children (WFP, 2022, p. 7). In the United States, the Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2016) reported that 14.6% of households were food insecure, with children representing 12.6% of the affected population. The report also identifies rising food prices, systemic racism, and discrimination in food access as contributing factors. According to USDA (2020), 20–25% of Black households with children in America were food insecure compared to 11% of white households. As a result, affected children face numerous challenges, including malnutrition, poor health, and stunted growth due to inadequate access to food (Action Against Hunger, 2020, p. 4).

Globally, child-headed households are an emerging phenomenon, often resulting from parental death due to diseases like HIV/AIDS, economic hardship, and conflicts (AIDS Action, 2015). By 2010, an estimated 15 million children under the age of 15 had lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS, with a significant number experiencing food insecurity (Grenson et al., 2010). In Eswatini, around 1,800 child-headed households were identified, primarily due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the death of

many parents (United Nations Eswatini, 2021; Africa Press Eswatini, 2020). These households depend heavily on food assistance and social grants, highlighting the severity of food insecurity they face. Malnutrition among these children leads to stunted growth, cognitive impairments, and poor educational outcomes (UNICEF, 2019). In response, the United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 to eliminate hunger, improve food security, and promote better nutrition by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). In Eswatini, a case study shows that the United Nations, in collaboration with the Eswatini Prime Minister and Ministry of Agriculture, provided farming inputs worth E620, 000 to 167 child-headed households. This initiative aimed to boost agricultural productivity and promote food self-sufficiency. Additionally, global organizations such as the WFP, UNICEF, and the Child Nutrition Fund have scaled up efforts through school feeding and community-based nutrition programs introduced in 2015 to combat malnutrition (Gelli, 2015).

In Africa, food insecurity is caused by factors such includes climate change, conflict, and economic instability, which severely disrupt food systems and limit access to nutrition (WFP, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). Consequently, millions of children across the continent suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition. UNICEF (2020) study estimates that 64 million children under the age of five suffer from food shortages and countries such as Nigeria, Gaza, and Ethiopia, where conflicts are recurrent, are particularly affected. Sub-Saharan Africa remains highly vulnerable. For instance, in South Africa, the 2022 census indicated that 2.5 million households (14.2%) had inadequate access to food, many of which were child-head households and the situation was worsened by Covid 19 pandemic. It is also estimated that 61 million children in Southern Africa suffer from severe food insecurity and are 50% more likely to experience life-threatening malnutrition (UNICEF, 2020, p. 5).

In Africa, the availability of precise and up to date statistics on child-headed households faces limitation because of inconsistent data collection and reporting methods (Meintjes et al., 2011). Nonetheless, studies show that child-headed households exist across numerous African nations, primarily as a result of factors such as HIV/AIDS, armed conflicts, epidemics, and other crises (Anderson & Philipians, 2015). The 2001 South Africa census reported 183,000 child-headed households, where individual fewer than 18 years where in charge because of the impact of HIV and AIDS and apartheid conflicts. Housegood et al. (2019, p. 327) indicate that the growth of child headed households in South Africa resulted primarily from HIV epidemics and conflicts. Study conducted by Chiastolite (2010) found that child-headed households in South Africa commonly experience low levels of food security, often surviving on only one or two

meals per day. The use of Social grants, together with partnership efforts from organization such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF has helped mitigate these challenges.

Similarly, a study in Nigeria demonstrate that the emergence of child-headed households was largely driven by HIV/AIDS, armed conflicts, and deepening poverty, particularly in the North-East and North-Central regions (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2014, p. 27). The 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey found that 10% of children under the age of 18 live without both parents, and about 1.5% of households are led by children. These children face numerous challenges which consist of limited educational opportunities, poor nutrition, and more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (UNICEF, 2020). The government of Nigeria, in collaboration with international organizations such includes USAID and PEPFAR, introduced support initiatives like the Local Partners for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Nigeria (LOPIN) project. These initiatives provide conditional cash transfers to child-headed households according to (USAID, 2014). Despite these efforts, there remain considerable gaps in data collection and service provision, underscoring the ongoing need for well-targeted and sustained interventions to adequately support child-headed households in Nigeria.

In Zimbabwe, food insecurity is a critical issue, particularly for rural child-headed households. The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2020), indicate that food insecurity affects 67% of rural households experience food insecurity, while children remain particularly at risk for hunger and malnutrition (ZNSA, 2020, p. 3). The UNICEF (2024) report shows that approximately 580,000 Zimbabwean children face extreme food poverty, which is worsened by climate-related disasters such as droughts and cyclones (UNICEF, 2024, p. 12). Save the Children (2019) estimates that approximately 75% of child-headed households in Zimbabwe face food insecurity, resulting in malnutrition, health issues, and limited access to education (Save the Children, 2019, p. 7). In rural areas like Mt. Darwin District, where 81% of the population lives in poverty (Government of Zimbabwe, 2025, p. 14), child-headed households are particularly at risk. These households depend heavily on subsistence farming, which is highly vulnerable to climate shocks. For instance, the El Niño-induced drought in 2020 resulted in widespread crop failure, deepening the food crisis in the region (CARE, 2025, p. 9).

Many CHHs in Mt. Darwin are led by children who have lost their parents due to HIV/AIDS and are now responsible for the care and well-being of younger siblings (Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2016, p. 22). The lack of adult caregivers, coupled with limited access to social protection, increases the vulnerability of these children to malnutrition, exploitation, and health problems

(Ndiweni & Manik, 2018, p. 19). The Zimbabwean government along with UNICEF, WFP, and CARE has implemented emergency food aid, nutrition initiatives, and farming support, these efforts have not fully addressed the underlying causes of food insecurity, such as poverty and inadequate social safety nets (Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2016, p. 22). In rural Zimbabwe children face struggle to access assistance due to lack of identity documents, bureaucratic barriers, and long distances to aid centers (UNICEF, 2016, p. 10).

This research examines the food insecurity challenges faced by child-headed households in Ward 34 of Mt. Darwin District, Zimbabwe. The study examines the underlying causes of food insecurity, evaluate the coping strategies used by these households, and propose sustainable intervention strategies to enhance food security in the area. By offering an in-depth analysis of the local context, this research seeks to contribute to the design of practical and sustainable solutions that meet both the immediate and long-term needs of child-headed households. The research intends to fill existing knowledge gaps about food insecurity in rural Zimbabwe CHHs and develop practical recommendations to enhance their wellbeing

### **1.3 Statement of problem**

Food insecurity is a growing and pressing issues affecting households led by children (CHHs) in Ward 34 of Mt. Darwin District, Zimbabwe. Study conducted by Save the Children indicates that approximately 75% of child-headed households in Zimbabwe are food insecure, leading to malnutrition, poor health, and limited educational opportunities (Save the Children, 2019, p. 7). In Mt. Darwin District, where 81% of the population lives in poverty, these households are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity due to the region's dependence on subsistence farming, which is highly susceptible to climate-induced disasters such as droughts and cyclones (Government of Zimbabwe, 2025, p. 14). The absence of adult caregivers, and the lack of access to adequate social protection, makes it difficult for child-headed households to secure food, healthcare, and other basic needs. If this issue is not addressed, children will face severe the long-term consequences. They suffer from malnutrition, stunted growth, and poor cognitive development, which hinder their ability to thrive in education and other aspects of life (UNICEF, 2022, p. 10). The problem is worsened by the limited availability of sustainable agricultural options and the lack of targeted interventions for child-headed households in rural Zimbabwe. Despite the efforts of international organizations like UNICEF, WFP, and CARE, and the government, food insecurity persists, and many children continue to suffer from its effects (UNICEF, 2022). This research aims to address the food insecurity crisis among child-headed households in Ward 34, Mt. Darwin District, by identifying the drivers of food

insecurity, examining the coping mechanisms employed by these households, and proposing sustainable intervention strategies. By examining the challenges faced by these households, the study will provide valuable insights for developing targeted policies and interventions to improve food security and overall well-being for vulnerable children in the district.

#### **1.4 Aim**

The main aim of food insecurity in child headed households of rural ward 34, Mt Darwin District in Zimbabwe.

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

1. To analyse drivers of food insecurity in rural child headed households of Ward 34 Mt. Darwin, Zimbabwe.
2. To analyse the implications of food insecurity in rural child headed households of ward 34, Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe.
3. To examine food insecurity coping strategies adopted by rural child headed households in ward 34, Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe.
4. To propose a sustainable food security intervention strategy for child-headed rural households in Ward 34 in Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe.

##### **1.5.1. Research Questions**

1. Which factors are leading to food insecurity in rural child headed households in Ward 34 in Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe?
2. What are the implications of food insecurity in rural child headed households of ward 34, Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe?
3. What strategies do rural child headed households in ward 34, Mt Darwin use to cope with food insecurity?
4. What are feasible sustainable food security interventions strategies for child -headed rural households in ward 34, Mt Darwin district, Zimbabwe?

#### **1.6 Assumptions**

This study assumes that children in rural, child-headed households demonstrate a strong sense of resilience, enabling them to navigate the challenges they encounter on a daily basis. It also suggests that food insecurity can have harmful effects on their physical health and cognitive growth, potentially affecting their overall development and educational success. Furthermore,

the research assumes that community resources and support structures are essential in addressing food insecurity, indicating that improved access to these services can greatly enhance the well-being of these at-risk households. By exploring these assumptions, the study seeks to shed light on the dynamics influencing the lives of children being affected

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

Researching about food insecurity among rural child-headed households in Mt. Darwin is essential for several reasons. First and foremost, these households face unique challenges, often forced to take adult responsibilities at an early age due to parental absence. This situation exacerbates their susceptibility to food shortages, which can severely impact their physical and emotional health. Additionally, exploring this topic reveals critical insights into childhood nutrition and developmental outcomes. By identifying the unique needs of these households, researchers and policymakers can develop effective interventions tailored to their needs. This study not only adds to the academic discourse but also informs practical strategies aimed at enhancing food security across similar rural settings. Moreover, addressing food insecurity is not merely a matter of individual welfare; it also plays a pivotal role in reinforcing community resilience and ensuring a healthier future for the next generation. Ultimately, this research is a vital step toward comprehending and addressing the challenges faced by these children, and advocating for their rights and overall well-being.

### **1.8 Definition of key terms**

#### **Food insecurity**

Food insecurity is the lack of regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and health life (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nation). Food insecurity is defined as a lack of access to the kinds and amounts of food necessary for each member of a household to lead an active and a healthy lifestyle (Babu & Gajanana, 2022). In this study, food insecurity is defined as lack of access to adequate and affordable food all time which subsequently increase the risk of malnutrition in communities with poor standards of living.

#### **Child headed Families**

According to UNICEF (1998) a child headed family is defined as a family unit of which the oldest person residing in the household is under the age of eighteen. Onyango (2013) defines a CHH as household where all members are less than 18 years old. Thus in this study, a CHH refers to household consisting of unaccompanied children and adolescents below the age of 18 years.



## **Child**

According to amendment Children Act (5.06), a child is a person under the age of 18. Convention on Rights of the Child, Article 1 defines a child as referring to every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. Thus in this study, a child refers to any human being below the age of eighteen.

### **1.9 Dissertation outline**

This dissertation is made up of 5 chapters which are as follows;

#### **Chapter 1.Introduction**

This chapter provides the background of the study, introduces the aim, objectives, research objectives, research question, statement of the problem and the definition of key terms.

#### **Chapter 2.literature review**

This chapter provide comprehensive literature on food insecurity in rural child headed households .It also include the theoretical framework and the research gap

#### **Chapter 3 Research Methodologies**

This chapter explains the approaches used in the study to gather data .It provides the data collection instruments that are used to collect data , sapling strategies and target population from which the sample is selected.

#### **Chapter 4 Data presentation, discussion and analysis of findings**

This chapter provides the analysis, and interpretation of the data that has been collected by the researcher and focus on the finding.

#### **Chapter 5 Conclusion and recommendation**

This chapter contains a summary of objectives , conclusions , Implications and recommendation based on the findings to provide insights about a way forward in terms of what needs to be done, with who and why in the future to solve the problem of food insecurity.

### **1.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter introduces the critical issue of food insecurity within rural child-headed households (CHHs) in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe. It establishes the research context by highlighting the unique vulnerabilities of CHHs minors orphaned by HIV/AIDS,

economic migration, or other crises who assume household leadership. The chapter articulates the study's significance for social work practice, child protection policy, and food security interventions in resource-limited settings. Four central research questions guide the inquiry, focusing on drivers, lived implications, coping strategies, and proposed sustainable food security frameworks

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Food insecurity in rural child-headed households (CHHs) is a critical yet under studied challenge, shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities such as economic marginalization, environmental shocks, and systemic neglect. This chapter synthesizes global, regional, and Zimbabwean literature to contextualize the drivers, lived experiences, coping strategies, and potential solutions to food insecurity in CHHs, with a focus on Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District. By integrating theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and policy analyses, the review establishes the socio-economic and cultural dynamics that perpetuate food insecurity in these households. It also identifies gaps in existing research, particularly the lack of child-centered, qualitative insights and localized data from understudied regions like Mt Darwin. The chapter is structured to first conceptualize food insecurity and CHHs, then systematically address four

research objectives, followed by a discussion of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) as a guiding theory. Finally, it highlights geographical, theoretical, and empirical gaps that this study seeks to bridge. Through this comprehensive analysis, the chapter lays the groundwork for understanding how structural inequities and agency intersect in CHHs' daily struggles for survival and dignity.

## **2.2 Theoretical framework**

This section seeks to present and justify the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) as the guiding theoretical lens for this study. The SLF provides a comprehensive approach for examining how child headed households mobilise available resources to respond to vulnerabilities and adopt coping strategies to address food insecurity in child headed

### **2.2.1 The Sustainable Livelihood Framework by United Kingdom's Department of International Development in 1999**

The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) introduced the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) in 1999 to examine how individuals and households use resources to handle vulnerabilities and create sustainable livelihoods. The framework examines how five capital types (human, social, natural, physical, and financial) interact with vulnerability elements (shocks, trends, seasonal changes) and institutional structures which determine livelihood options. This theory proves essential in exploring food insecurity among child-headed households in Mt Darwin District's Ward 34 because it provides a systematic approach to understand the barriers they encounter and their coping mechanisms. The SLF framework analyses food insecurity in child-headed households by examining their socio-economic and environmental context which allows for the development of sustainable solutions to these complex issues.

The SLF defines sustainable livelihoods as those able to resist external disturbances while improving capabilities and ensuring future generations have fair access to opportunities. The study's research objectives align directly with the framework's five capitals which include human, social, natural, physical, and financial elements. Objective 1 examines human capital drivers such as limited education and skills development through its focus on education, skills, and health. The lack of access to quality education and vocational training for CHHs in Mt Darwin continues to trap families in poverty because children cannot develop skills needed for meaningful employment (FAO, 2021). Objective 2 explores stigma and isolation through the lens of social capital which consists of networks, trust and community support. The exclusion

of CHHs from kinship networks and communal resources intensifies their vulnerability because it restricts their access to informal support systems (Mushunje, 2022). Land and environmental resources which make up natural capital link to food insecurity drivers (Objective 1) through limited agricultural productivity and climate events. In Zimbabwe patriarchal inheritance norms remove CHHs from arable land which limits their food production potential (Mkodzongi, 2022). The absence of irrigation systems and drought-resistant seeds among CHHs makes physical capital essential for Objective 3's coping strategies (Manjengwa et al., 2023). The financial resources such as income and savings help explain why CHHs participate in exploitative work and informal trading to purchase food (ILO, 2023).

The examination of SLF's vulnerability context which includes shocks like droughts, economic trends such as collapse and seasonal cycles such as lean periods forms the basis of Objective 1's driver investigation. The recurrent droughts which affect Mt Darwin destroy crops and increase food shortages due to climate change according to IPCC 2022. The hyperinflation and unstable currency situation in Zimbabwe (Chagonda, 2023) worsen CHHs' economic challenges and reduce their food purchasing power. The SLF's focus on changing structures and processes including policies, institutions and cultural norms works with Objective 4's goal of building sustainability. Zimbabwe demonstrates institutional failure through its inadequate social protection mechanisms and biased land laws which continue to marginalize CHHs (Chinyoka, 2023). The SLF examines livelihood strategies where households use their assets to manage crises which connects with Objective 3's investigation into coping mechanisms. CHHs from Mt Darwin move to find work or depend on wild plants which demonstrates their limited control in a tough economic setting (Ndlovu et al., 2023).

The study demonstrates greater importance of the SLF because of its ability to adapt to specific local environments. The framework operates effectively in rural Zimbabwe because it respects cultural elements that stem from kinship systems and traditional governance structures which control resource access. The SLF perspective allows researchers to study both HIV/AIDS-related social capital erosion due to stigma (Chitiyo et al., 2021) and natural capital functions within communal land tenure systems (Mavedzenge et al., 2023). The framework's participatory approach matches with the qualitative research method which focuses on CHHs' personal experiences. The SLF prioritizes CHHs' input to guide interventions that meet specific contexts and help households use their existing assets effectively.

The SLF identifies critical deficiencies in current approaches to addressing food insecurity. The Harmonized Social Cash Transfer program in Zimbabwe serves as a financial resource but bureaucratic barriers prevent it from reaching CHHs (Chinyoka, 2023). NGO-run agricultural programs frequently ignore physical capital requirements that include child-friendly farming tools. The SLF thus provides a roadmap for addressing these gaps: The SLF approach prioritizes enhancing social protection systems as its fourth goal while simultaneously developing agricultural practices that withstand climate challenges through improved natural and physical resource management and building communal support networks.

### **2.3 Conceptualization of food insecurity and child-headed households**

This segment focuses on defining food insecurity along with child-headed households and analyses their interconnection within vulnerable environments. A detailed investigation into how food insecurity and child-headed households (CHHs) overlap needs to examine the fundamental definitions of both issues and how they interact within vulnerable settings. The following section analyses food insecurity dimensions while defining CHHs as socio-economic issues and explore their reciprocal relationship through global and regional studies including Zimbabwean literature.

#### **2.3 1 Definition and dimension of food insecurity**

The definition of food insecurity encompasses the absence of steady access to adequate, safe nutrition necessary for sustaining healthy living (FAO, 2021). This definition transcends mere caloric adequacy to encompass four interrelated dimensions: availability, access, utilization, and stability. Food availability describes how food exists through its production process, distribution networks or delivery through humanitarian assistance. Regions like Mt Darwin in rural Zimbabwe experience limited food availability because erratic rainfall patterns and soil degradation negatively impact crop yields (Manjengwa et al., 2023). Access to food requires economic means and social capacity which CHHs often lack because of poverty and market exclusion. Children who lead households in Malawi typically cannot afford maize during lean seasons which reflects similar difficulties faced by rural wards in Zimbabwe (Kayuni, 2022). Utilization refers to the ability of the body to absorb nutrients but this capability is obstructed by insufficient cooking facilities together with poor sanitation practices and inadequate nutritional education. The population of CHHs living in Indian slums shows elevated occurrences of stunting because of water contamination and dietary monotony (Agarwal & Seth, 2020). Stability means having continuous access to food which faces threats from events such as droughts or economic downturns. Child-headed households in Syria depend on

humanitarian aid that lacks stability because of their displacement from war while Zimbabwe's CHHs face similar aid instability during economic downturns (Chagonda, 2023). Food insecurity at a worldwide level extends beyond food scarcity as it represents a structural collapse created by socio-economic disparities and environmental challenges combined with ineffective governance.

### **2.3.2 Conceptualization of child-headed households**

In child-headed households (CHHs) minors under 18 years old become the main providers for both care and financial support because adult caregivers are no longer present. The occurrence of child-headed households emerges from parental death due to diseases like HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 and other factors such as migration or abandonment while presenting regional variations throughout the world. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has significantly contributed to the formation of child-headed households in sub-Saharan Africa as evidenced by Zimbabwe's report of more than 1.3 million orphans many of whom now lead households (UNICEF, 2022). Children left behind because of gang conflicts and migration issues in Latin America become evident in Honduras where children escape homes because their parents face imprisonment or threats (Martínez, 2021). The combination of natural disasters and poverty in Asia breaks up families and forces young people to support their siblings as seen in Indonesia after the tsunami (Suryadarma & Suryahadi, 2020). CHHs demonstrate role reversal because children take on adult duties such as earning income and making decisions while losing opportunities for education and mental health development. However, definitions vary: The Children's Act of South Africa acknowledges CHHs as legitimate families but Zimbabwe's laws do not provide clear inheritance rights for minors (Chigudu, 2023). Cultural views determine their experiences with CHHs in Uganda facing stigmatization as "cursed" while in Mozambique kinship networks sometimes take in orphaned children (Nhancale, 2020). The vulnerability of CHHs changes because they lack uniformity and are influenced by factors like gender composition and sibling count. Adolescent girls in CHHs face increased sexual exploitation risks which are evident in Zimbabwe's mining areas where they obtain food through sex work according to Mkodzongi (2022).

### **2.3.4 The relationship between food insecurity and child-headed households.**

The connection between food insecurity and child-headed households presents a reciprocal relationship where each situation worsens the other. Food insecurity and CHHs maintain a bidirectional reinforcing cycle. The emergence of CHHs typically worsens food insecurity conditions. When adult caregivers pass away households lose their primary earners compelling

children to pursue unstable ways to earn money. Zambian CHHs participate in unlawful charcoal production which generates inadequate income insufficient to purchase nutritious food (Ngoma et al., 2020). In Zimbabwe's Mt Darwin region children engage in artisanal mining which generates unreliable and inadequate financial returns (Ndlovu et al., 2023). The existence of food insecurity can lead to the formation of CHHs when parents leave to work elsewhere or become ill due to poverty-related health problems. A Miller et al. (2020) study found that 30% of CHHs in Malawi became so because parental migration for agricultural work left children in charge of subsistence farming.

Environmental factors intensify the relationship between food insecurity and child headed households. Southern Africa experiences reduced agricultural output as a result of climate change droughts which compels CHHs to seek sustenance from wild food sources. During lean seasons, CHHs in Mozambique turn to eating mopane worms as a survival strategy which aligns with findings from Zimbabwe's Mwenzi District research by Mujeyi et al. (2021). While these survival strategies endanger long-term health outcomes CHHs in Malawi become exposed to parasitic infections when they forage for insects (Kambewa et al., 2023). Gender dynamics further stratify risks as girls in CHHs receive the smallest portions of meals served last which contributes to their worsening malnutrition (Chinyoka, 2023). Food distribution inequalities inside Bangladeshi households cause 45% of CHH girls to experience anemia (Hossain & Begum, 2020) while Zimbabwe's rural areas exhibit similar patterns (WFP, 2023).

The overlap between food insecurity and CHHs demonstrates fundamental breakdowns in social justice systems alongside poor governance and resource management. Interventions need to provide immediate assistance such as food aid alongside tackling structural causes like land reform and child-sensitive social protection. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) provides an approach to holistically strengthen CHHs by improving their asset access and reducing their vulnerabilities.

## **2.4 Global overview of food insecurity**

There are estimated to be 10 million more people in world hunger in 2019 and sixty million people more in food insecurity over the past five years (FAO et al., 2020). Also, there are over 3 billion people (38.3% of the world's population) who cannot afford a healthy diet (FAO et al., 2020). Food insecurity is a violation of human rights to food (Onyeaka et al, 2024). The combination of moderate and severe levels of food insecurity is around 26.4 percent of the world population translating to a total of about 2 billion people in food insecurity (FAO, IFAD,

UNICEF, WFP & WHO, 2019). Approximately 66 million children attend school on an empty stomach, one in four are stunted and half of the death is caused by poor nutrition (Onyeaka et al, 2024; FAO, 2024). The frequency, duration and intensity of droughts have generally increased globally hence being a threat to world food security (Mbaye, 2020). Over 11 million people have died and more than 2 billion people have been affected worldwide due to droughts since the turn of the century (Ngcamu & Chari, 2020). Economies are still trying to recover from the havoc effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Su & Amrit, 2024). Higher global commodity prices due to these economic challenges and supply chain disruptions as a result of the pandemic have resulted in household limited access to food in many food-insecure countries (FAO, 2024). Most of the African countries are net food importers (Sampson et al, 2021).

Food and nutrition security is a human right that exists “when all people at all times have physical, social, and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy and active life” (Committee on World Food Security, 2012). The United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 to tackle the problem. SDG 2 is directly linked to food security and aims at “Zero Hunger” in order to achieve food security and improve nutrition..

Nutrition is a crucial pillar of the UN’s (2015) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development because good nutrition is the basis for most of other SDGs (FAO et al., 2018). Good nutrition is the lifeblood of sustainable development and fuels the change needed for a more sustainable and prosperous future (Icheria, Carbanatto & Bila, 2021).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have set a priority on addressing food insecurity to achieve human rights by the year 2030 (Drammeh, Hamid & Rohana, 2019). In many parts of the world, social or political barriers leave hundreds of families in poverty and hunger (Ashley, 2016). Food insecurity has been found to be a powerful stressor for families, and have significant negative implications for child health and development; these include negative effects on physical, social, cognitive and behavioral development, independent of poverty (de Oliveira, 2020). Although, there is universal recognition of the right to food across the world, billions of people from all over the world are food insecure, while about 900 million people are suffering from acute hunger and over 2.4 billion people suffer from moderate-to-severe food insecurity (Icheria, Carbanatto & Bila, 2021).



## **2.5 Regional overview of food insecurity**

Food insecurity is still a major problem in Africa where more than 800 million people go to bed hungry while more than 135 million face severe food shortages (Oduoye et al, 2024). Food insecurity is a key driver of deaths to a majority of the children in Sub sahara Africa either directly or indirectly through under consumption and poor quality diets (Drammeh, Hamid & Rohana, 2019). Most of the households in Southern Africa struggle to feed their families due to poverty and dependency on climate, sensitive livelihoods such as agriculture and natural resources (Murungweni et al. 2014).

There are various legal frameworks and policy measures at international, regional and national levels which support the fight against food insecurity in Africa (Onyeaka et al (2024). The African populations who live below the international poverty line have been affected by rising undernourishment, famine, malnutrition, hunger and the most extreme form of acute food insecurity at an unprecedented rate (Ngcamu & Chari, 2020). Climate change, conflicts, population and HIV and AIDS are some of the factors that contribute to food insecurity in Africa (Bwalway, 2013, FAO, 2015). In the Sub Saharan Africa, it is reported that agricultural productivity declined from 28 to 9 due to lack of rain and drought IPPC, 2007. Availability and access to food are the main challenges to the right to food in Africa while the adequacy of the available food compound these challenges, 78% of Africa's population is unable to afford healthy meals leading to a high prevalence of diseases associated with nutritional deficiencies (FAO, 2024; Su & Amrit,2024).

According to the Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC, 2022), the severe food insecurity in the Sahel region of Africa is getting worse in recent times. Governance, favoritism, and ethnic and religious factors all play a role in Sahelian conflicts, with climate change increasingly serving as an amplifier that triggers violence (Mbaye, 2020). According to the Global Food Security Index (Global Food Security Index, 2021), Africa's central area is suffering from a food crisis.

Food insecurity is a public health issues, it is widespread in developing countries, as millions of people are dying from lack of food and food scarcity (Kotir, 2010) Variety and balanced diet is essential to reduce the rate of malnutrition, but food insecurity jeopardises this dietary intake (Nnakwe & Onyemaobi, (2013).Children are the most vulnerable, due to the high nutrient demands for growth. Poor nutritional status among children leads to low school admission, absenteeism, early dropout and low academic achievement, which results in reduced

productivity during adulthood (de Oliveira et al, (2020). Child malnutrition remains a major concern in SADC Region, (SADC Synthesis Report, 2022). Presence of food insecurity at household level implies high level of vulnerability to broad consequences, including psychosocial dysfunction among household members, especially children, socioeconomic predicaments and poor overall health status (Su & Amrit, 2024).

Malnutrition is the most severe consequence of food insecurity (Mbaye, 2020). Over the past decade, the number of malnourished children in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased from 5.5 million to 30 million, leading to the death of over 3.5 million children under age five every year due to the inadequate consumption of food (FAO, 2024). Stunting remains high averaging above 25% in most SADC member states. Every country in SADC has prevalence of stunting that is classified as high or very high by WHO. 18.6 million Children less than 5 years in SADC regions are stunted (SADC Synthesis Report, 2022). In the year 2008, the global deaths of children under age five were 8.8 million, with 93% of them occurring in the developing countries of Africa and Asia (Bashir & Schilivia, 2013).

In Southern Africa children are heading households, due to the death of parents or caring for ill-stricken parents (UNICEF, 2013, UNICEF, 2015. As the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to be experienced most severely in Southern Africa, 14% of children are now orphans and 48% of these children have been orphaned due to AIDS ( FAO et al, 2022). These children are uninformed about their rights and have difficulties accessing the support to which they are entitled, especially if they do not have the support of a parent or caregiver (Ashely, 2016).

It is predicted that more children will be orphaned or made vulnerable due to AIDS which will increase the vulnerabilities already experienced by children due to increasing poverty, food insecurity and poor service provision in vital areas such as health and education (Miller et al, 2014; Mushunje, 2014). This will add further burden upon extended families and communities that are already overwhelmed by caring for orphans and other vulnerable children (Mushunje, 2014).

## **2.6 Local overview of food insecurity**

Zimbabwe is one of the Southern African and Sub-Saharan African countries that is facing serious food insecurity (ZimVAC, 2019; Humanitarian Action, 2024). Most households in Zimbabwe are vulnerable to food insecurity as a result of a loss or lack of physical, social, financial, natural and human assets (Ndiweni & Manik, 2018. Poverty and climate change also seem to be the major contributors of food insecurity in rural areas (Ndiweni, 2015).

The poorest populations are normally found in marginal areas that are sensitive to climate change and they tend to rely on climate-sensitive livelihoods. A Rural Livelihood Assessment Report by Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (2019) projected that, 59% the rural population would be cereal insecure during peak hunger periods (January- March, 2020). In response to this, the government of Zimbabwe and its development partners launched a humanitarian appeal in July 2019 to support vulnerable groups ZimVAC (2019).

According to SADC Synthesis Report (2022) livelihoods in rural areas in Zimbabwe continue to be affected by both systematic and idiosyncratic shocks which include droughts, flooding, water logging, crops and livestock failure, cereal price hikes and death of breadwinners. The report also indicated that, the average number of shocks experienced at household level in Zimbabwe was 3.

According to Humanitarian Action (2024), in 2024 Zimbabwe experienced a severe El Niño-induced drought that caused widespread total crop failure and water shortages. In response to this, the GoZ declared a state of emergency in April 2024 indicating that a total of 7.1 million people were at risk of food insecurity. Rising food insecurity in Zimbabwe has triggered a surge in needs across multiple sectors including nutrition, protection, child protection, education, health and WASH with an indication that these challenges will persist in 2025 (Humanitarian, Action, 2024)

## **2.7 Drivers of food insecurity among Child-headed households of ward 34 Mt Darwin**

This study investigates the structural and systemic elements that continue to cause food insecurity among rural child-headed households in Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District. Child-headed households (CHHs) develop post parental deaths from HIV/AIDS or climate disasters and economic migration which puts minors in dual roles of earning income and providing care despite their vulnerabilities. Research identifies economic instability alongside agricultural difficulties and weak social protections with skills shortages and environmental disturbances as primary forces. The section analyses five subthemes through literature from global, regional, and Zimbabwean sources to explain the complex factors leading to food insecurity among this marginalized group.

### **2.7.1 Economic Marginalization and Poverty**

Economic marginalization is the primary cause of food insecurity for rural CHHs across the world. Economic poverty restricts people's ability to obtain healthy food and medical care as well as education which results in ongoing cycles of deprivation across generations. Agarwal

and Seths (2020) study in India shows that poverty and discrimination resulted in orphaned children being excluded from formal employment and inheritance right which pushes them into informal work such as rag-picking and street vending. The research by Silva et al. (2021) demonstrates that CHHs in rural areas experience systematic exclusion from social protection programs which maintains ongoing cycles of deprivation. Research from sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates that child-led households face greater challenges due to unemployment and credit access restrictions according to Devereux (2019).

In sub-Saharan Africa rural households led by children are systematically blocked from formal labor markets because of age-based discrimination together with restricted inheritance rights and insufficient access to credit resources (Devereux, 2022). The economic breakdown of Zimbabwe which included hyperinflation above 800% along with currency instability destroyed purchasing power with rural residents being most affected as 70% of their households depend on informal economies (World Bank, 2023). Mt Darwin District CHHs face exclusion from land ownership through patriarchal inheritance systems which force them to depend on either tiny unproductive plots or communal lands that face encroachment threats (Ndlovu & Mhlana, 2019). According to a 2022 study conducted in Mashonaland Central 89% of CHHs did not have title deeds which prevented them from using their land as loan collateral (Mkodzongi, 2022). The absence of financial safety nets leads children to hazardous jobs like illegal mining and cross-border trading which makes them susceptible to exploitation and deepens poverty according to UNICEF's 2021 report.

### **2.7.2 Limited Agricultural and Livelihood Productivity**

Structural barriers create agricultural productivity constraints for CHHs through restricted access to inputs as well as technology and extension services. Youth-led households produce 40% less yield than adult-led farms worldwide because they lack technical expertise and financial resources (FAO, 2021). Limited access to seeds and tools causes child-headed households in Nepal to experience low agricultural yields according to research by Thapa and Mishra (2021). Indigenous child-headed households in Guatemala experience soil degradation and insufficient extension services which limits their ability to cultivate staple crops (Pérez et al., 2022). Maize production in Southern Africa has declined between 30 to 50% since 2015 because of recurring droughts and soil degradation which severely impacts CHHs who depend on rain-fed subsistence farming according to Masipa (2023).

Following land reform Zimbabwe's agricultural sector has decreased because farmers are lacking access to resources and services that require them to practise smart agriculture practices (Mutambara, 2021). Surveys conducted in 2023 in Mt Darwin shows that 76% of CHHs faced financial barriers to purchasing seeds and fertilizers which led them to cultivate traditional crops like millet that produce low yields (Manjengwa et al., 2023).

Gender disparities also increase these challenges in child headed households. It was found that girls in CCHs they dedicate Girls living in CHHs dedicate 60% more time to domestic chores compared to boys which limits their ability to participate in productive farming (Chinyoka & Gumbo, 2023). Financial exclusion prevents CHHs from acquiring necessary start-up capital to engage in non-farm activities like petty trade which limits their options for livelihood diversification. Studies focus on structural obstacles but overlook children's coping mechanisms including labour exchanges between households and gathering wild foods. Research into gendered labour dynamics in CHHs remains insufficient; girls face unequal domestic workloads which hinder their ability to participate in income generation and sustain poverty cycles.

### **2.7.3 Poor Social Protection Nets/Systems**

Insufficient social protection provisions heighten food insecurity among CHHs. Social assistance reaches just 28% of children in low-income countries globally with rural populations facing exclusion due to logistical challenges and bureaucratic obstacles according to ILO (2022). CHHs in Bangladesh face exclusion from social safety nets such as the 'Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar' program because of bureaucratic adult guardianship requirements (Hossain & Begum, 2020). Conditional cash transfers in Mexico exclude CHHs because minors fail to satisfy necessary documentation criteria (González, 2021). The Social Cash Transfer Program in Malawi faces significant difficulties reaching CHHs located in remote regions according to Miller et al., 2020. The Harmonized Social Cash Transfer program in Zimbabwe does not include CHHs due to the unavailability of guardianship verification procedures in remote areas (Chikoko, 2020). CHHs who manage to register for aid receive monthly payouts of only \$5 which does not cover their basic needs (World Food Programme, 2023).

Due to urban migration and poverty traditional kinship networks have deteriorated, a study conducted in Mt Darwin ,(2021) revealed that extended family support was absent for 63% of CHHs due to urbanisation (Mugwagwa, 2021). International NGOs deliver food aid intermittently yet their programs are temporary and usually lack livelihood training

components. UNICEF's 2022 distribution of maize in Mt Darwin helped with immediate needs but neglected fundamental issues like access to land (UNICEF, 2022). Community-based organizations aim to plug service gaps but suffer from financial constraints and merely 12% of child-headed households in Ward 34 experienced CBO interaction during the past year (Manjengwa et al., 2023). Social protection systems focus on adult-led households while overlooking the administrative and age exclusion faced by rural CHHs. The strict eligibility rules of the HSCT including adult guardian requirements demonstrate gaps in policy that fail to acknowledge child-headed families as valid entities

#### **2.7.4 Poor Skills Development and Limited Education**

Food insecurity endures because education deficits and skill shortages restrict access to economic opportunities. UNICEF's 2021 report reveals that school dropout rates for children living in CHHs are fifty percent higher compared to their adult-led household counterparts because they frequently need to work or provide care. It was found that , high dropout rates among CHHs in Indonesia is a result of the care giving duties which then restrict their access to vocational training opportunities (Suryadarma & Suryahadi, 2020). Martínez (2021) shows that adolescent-led households in Honduras cannot access agribusiness programs which results in continued dependence on low-paying jobs. According to research by Patel et al., (2022), South Africa's 'Siyakha' initiative shows that skills' training helps to solve CCHs vulnerability across the region. Rural schools in Zimbabwe demand high fees that average \$20 per term while CHHs cannot afford essential school materials; these factors result in a 67% dropout rate among adolescent-headed households (Chinyoka & Gumbo, 2023). Training programs for vocational skills in Zimbabwe remain limited. A survey conducted in Mt Darwin by Mkodzongi in 2022 found that 82% of CHHs lacked access to agribusiness and carpentry training programs which could support children who balance caregiving and learning duties remain inadequate(Mkodzongi, 2022) .

Gender discrimination limits girls' educational participation because cultural beliefs favour boys' schooling which results in higher illiteracy rates among girls who end up working in informal sectors (FAO, 2021). The absence of job skills leads CHHs to depend on unstable low-paid work such as Mt Darwin's CHHs who work in seasonal farming earning \$1 daily which doesn't provide reliable food access (Manjengwa et al., 2023). The general approach of skills development programs fails to meet CHHs' requirements for adaptable training that fits local needs. Digital literacy initiatives do not benefit regions which lack electrical power.

Cultural prejudices against child labour unintentionally reduce income possibilities because policymakers misinterpret necessary survival work as exploitative child labour.

### **2.7.5 Environmental Vulnerability and Climate Change Impacts**

Food insecurity increased as climate change induces extreme weather patterns along with biodiversity decline and water shortages. The IPCC (2022) reports that rural households which rely on rain-fed farming experience food shortages 30% more frequently because of climate shocks. Floods occur regularly in Bangladesh's coastal areas which destroy crops and force families to relocate (Alam et al., 2021). A study in Haitian revealed that food systems face disruptions from hurricanes which results in CHHs relying entirely on foreign aid (Jean, 2020). According to Omolo (2020), CHHs in Kenyan arid counties face crop failures as a result of drought conditions. Since 2015 Southern Africa has experienced droughts twice a year instead of once every ten years which has resulted in significant losses to vital maize crops (Masipa, 2023).

The Mt Darwin District in Zimbabwe experienced a 20% drop in rainfall from its already semi-arid conditions during the past decade which drove CHHs to depend on wild fruits and insects to survive lean seasons (Manjengwa et al., 2023). Limited irrigation infrastructure together with scarcity of drought-resistant seeds increases vulnerability for CHHs. The process of environmental degradation through activities like deforestation for firewood decreases soil fertility and establishes a cycle of resource scarcity. Due to insufficient resources CHHs cannot implement adaptive measures like drought-resistant crops and water harvesting because they demand initial investments (Mutenje et al., 2020). The implementation of climate adaptation strategies focuses resources on adult farmers while avoiding support for CHHs through training programs and resource allocation. Formal programs fail to recognize the value of indigenous drought prediction methods as traditional knowledge.

### **2.8 The implications of food insecurity among child headed households**

This literature investigate the implications of food insecurity faced by rural child-headed households in Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District along with comparative observations from various Zimbabwean regions. This section incorporates global, regional and national literature to demonstrate how socio-emotional distress and role strain alongside stigma and systemic exploitation contribute to nutritional deprivation shaping CHHs' lived experiences.

### **2.8.1 Socio-Emotional and Psychological Struggles**

Children living in CHHs around the world experience increased depression rates which stem from losing parents and the stress of assuming caregiving roles (UNICEF, 2022). CHHs in post-conflict Syria display elevated levels of PTSD and anxiety because trauma exposure combines with caregiving responsibilities (Al-Mahmoud et al., 2022). Orphaned children in Colombian CHHs internalize their stress to prevent being seen as “weak,” resulting in social withdrawal (Gómez, 2021). The research by Nabunya et al. (2020) demonstrates that girls in Ugandan CHHs frequently hide their sorrow to provide care for their brothers and sisters. Research in sub-Saharan Africa reveals that children in CHHs hide their trauma to prevent being seen as weak which results in emotional detachment (Mkhize & Ndimande, 2020). In Zimbabwe, similar patterns emerges, study conducted in Masvingo District revealed that 68% of CHH heads experienced hopelessness while other child care givers hid their hunger to protect their siblings from emotional pain (Mupedziswa et al., 2021).

Reports show that children in Mt Darwin stay away from group events to avoid pity or ridicule and this behaviour matches findings in Gutu District ,where 55% of child headed households adolescents also experience social withdrawal (Chirisa et al., 2022). Throughout Zimbabwe mental health resources are limited because only 10% of rural health clinics provide counseling services and stigma prevents people from seeking help (MoHCC, 2023). Traditional healers in Manicaland serve as primary care providers yet they focus on spiritual explanations for illness while ignoring mental health requirements (Mushore, 2020). Universality of trauma exists alongside regional distinctiveness captured within Zimbabwean literary works. Children heading households in Matabeleland North credit their resilience to clan-based support systems, while those in Mashonaland contend with rigid patriarchal norms leading to orphan isolation. Western-centric interventions fail to recognize the importance of indigenous coping strategies such as Masvingo's storytelling.

### **2.8.2 Household Management Role Strain**

CHHs face negative implications when excessive responsibilities that are more appropriate for adults are placed on their younger shoulders. Studies conducted by Philipians shows that children in the Philippines who hold CHH positions dedicate 14 hours each day to balancing their education with work and household duties which results in fatigue and implicate children academic performance (Cruz, 2020). Girls in CHHs in Ethiopia are forced to abandon on school to fetch water obtain water,(Abebe (2021). Study conducted in Malawi shows that CHHs



dedicate 70% of their income to food expenses which restricts their financial capacity to pay for healthcare and education fees (Kayuni, 2022).

In Zimbabwe, gendered role strain causes negative implications especially to girls. The 2022 UNICEF report found that girls in Chiredzi District CHHs dedicate 6 hours every day to tasks like water collection while boys spend only 3 hours on similar chores. In Mt Darwin girls face sexual exploitation as they trade labour for food and boys move to Mazowe District artisanal mines where they encounter dangerous working conditions (Mkodzongi, 2023). Role strain also implicates child headed households educational performance. Research from Zimbabwe shows regional variations in role strain throughout the country. In drought-prone areas like Beitbridge District CHHs concentrate on water collection instead of farming but Mutare District CHHs experience labour exploitation on commercial farms. National programs by policymakers fail to consider these geographical differences.

#### **2.8.4 Nutritional Challenges and Health Consequences**

Limited access to diverse foods results in nutritional challenges and health consequences among child headed households. According to WHO, (2023) data, it is estimated that 45% of CHHs worldwide suffer from stunting with girls being more severely impacted than boys. Study conducted in Yemen shows that Children receive only one daily meal resulting in 45% of them experiencing stunting according to (Al-Zubairi's, 2022). The dependence on cassava consumption in Papua New Guinea has led to kwashiorkor outbreaks among CHHs according to Gibson (2021). From the CHH populations in Malawi, 60% of them suffer from anemia because their diets lack sufficient iron (Kambewa et al., 2023). In Zimbabwe, most people rely on maize meal for food. According to a 2022 national survey 75% of CHHs in Zimbabwe ate meals that are not enough and with no balanced diet (ZIMSTAT, 2022). Mt Darwin children search for wild 'matamba' known as 'desert dates' during lean seasons as documented in Mwenezi District research by Mujeyi et al. (2021). Health outcomes are dire as health records from Gutu showed kwashiorkor affected 20% of children under five years old in CHHs (MoHCC, 2023). Regional agro-ecological zones influence dietary strategies. Maize-abundant Mashonaland Central features CHHs that display slightly improved nutritional conditions compared to their counterparts in arid Matabeleland South. Food aid programs rarely tackle market access disparities between regions such as Mutare and Mt Darwin.

#### **2.9 Food insecurity coping strategies utilised by Child-headed households**

The objective examines how rural child-headed households (CHHs) use adaptive yet precarious methods to address food insecurity. The survival tactics of these households demonstrate both

strength and weakness as they adapt within the boundaries of their environmental obstacles and societal expectations and available resources. This section combines international findings with regional data and Zimbabwean research to demonstrate CHHs survival tactics while revealing systemic deficiencies. Five subthemes are analysed below.

### **2.9.1 Immediate Short-Term Survival Strategies**

CHHs implement desperate methods to fight severe hunger that results in negative effects on their long-term well-being. Research indicates that children living in CHHs make younger siblings their primary focus while avoiding meals and eating poor-quality "famine foods" (Humanitarian Action Aid, 2024). Research conducted in India shows that CCH turn to wild tubers and edible leaves as drought food sources which results in 40% of their children developing stunting from malnutrition according to Singh & Agarwal (2021). Children in Nicaraguan CHHs extend their maize porridge servings by adding water similarly to the methods used in sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2022). Southern African researches shows that CHHs gather 'mopane' worms from Zambia and in Botswana they harvest 'marula' fruits so that they eat when they is no food to eat, similar to Zimbabwe children search for "matamba" and wild food for food insecurity (Ngwenya et al., 2020). Research conducted in Malawi during 2023 revealed that 65% of CHHs ate insects during food short periods which put them at risk of parasitic diseases (Kambewa et al., 2023).

CHHs from Mt Darwin and Mwenezi Districts in Zimbabwe use 'matamba' (desert dates) and baobab fruits as food alternatives while those from Beitbridge District depend on bitter wild melons which result in stomach ailments (Mujeyi et al., 2021). Research conducted in Masvingo demonstrated that 58% of CHH members developed anemia due to extended reliance on wild food sources (MoHCC, 2023). These methods deliver fast solutions while continuing the vicious cycle of malnutrition. Many global research publications fail to consider indigenous understanding exemplified by Zimbabwean CHHs who utilize medicinal plants to manage foraging dangers. CHH-focused programs need to ensure survival requirements are met while delivering nutritional education.

### **2.9.2 Social Support Networks**

The support systems for CHHs are deteriorating kinship and community bonds. Around 30% of CHHs worldwide obtain irregular assistance from relatives which deteriorates due to urbanization and poverty (UNICEF, 2023). Bangladeshi CHHs utilize community kitchens during flood events which stands in contrast to the nonexistence of such facilities in rural African areas (Hossain et al., 2020). Within Southern Africa CHHs experience societal stigma

while sometimes gaining advantages from community networks (Ndiweni and Manik, 2018). Savings groups known as ‘stokvels’ in South Africa deliver food loans to CHHs located in Limpopo as opposed to church-based aid which Mozambican CHHs receive (Nhancale & Arthur, 2021). Mutoko District in Zimbabwe shows ongoing clan support where half of CHHs obtain grain from elders but this support drops to 20% among Mt Darwin CHHs (Mushunje, 2022). CHHs in Matabeleland benefit from “ilima” collective labor for ploughing but boys face exclusion because of cultural traditions (Dube, 2021). Harare urban dwellers sometimes send money to their families but hyperinflation quickly reduces the funds' worth (Chagonda, 2023). Social support is gendered and geographically uneven. NGO programs like Chiredzi's community kitchens struggle to maintain operations because funding for the long-term is missing (ZimVAC, 2019).

### **2.9.3 Income-Generating Activities and Child Labour**

Child headed household perform exploitative informal jobs to purchase food which leads to violations of children's rights (UNICEF, 2023; Humanitarian Action Aid, 2024). ILO, (2023 ) report shows that one-quarter of CHHs worldwide depend on dangerous activities including waste scavenging in the Philippines and brick production in Nepal. Child headed households in Kenya focus on livestock herding for food and in Uganda CHHs specialize in charcoal sales for money so that they purchase food (Omolo & Mwanje, 2022). A study conducted in Zambia shows that child-headed households' girls earn \$10 monthly working as housemaids where they encounter abuse (Musonda, 2021). In Hurungwe CHHs find seasonal work on tobacco farms although they face respiratory illnesses from pesticides (Chingono, 2021). Policymakers criminalize child labour without alternatives because children are seen in dangerous places, working to get money (Musonda, 2021). Zimbabwe’s 2022 Child Labour Act penalizes the employment of children in work place but it fails to address the survival needs of household led by children. Regional disparities exist as some child-headed households (CHHs) have access to cotton-picking employment in Gokwe yet Matabeleland North offers no similar job opportunities.

### **2.9.4 Government and NGO Support**

Government and NGO support plays a critical role in addressing food insecurity among vulnerable populations however, its effectiveness in reaching child-headed households (CHHs) remains limited and often misaligned with their needs (Humanitarian Action Aid, 2024). Brazil’s Bolsa Família program and South Africa’s Child Support Grant alleviate poverty but do not cater to CHHs lacking legal guardianship (Barrientos, 2020). A study conducted in

Malawi' shows that Social Cash Transfer Program reaches only 15% of CHHs, while Mozambique's food-for-work schemes do not cater for children because they are considered vulnerable (Hanlon et al., 2022). In Zimbabwe, the Harmonized Social Cash Transfer Programme fails to serve child headed households and it estimated that 80% of CHHs are not saved due to bureaucratic barriers (Chinyoka, 2023). Local leadership can influence support outcomes, as seen in Mudzi District where active promotion has enabled 40% of CHHs to access grain loans, compared to just 10% in Mt Darwin (Manjengwa et al., 2023). While NGOs such as CARE distribute drought-resistant seeds, they often fail to provide essential farming tools, leading CHHs in places like Masvingo to sell their seeds in order to buy food (WFP, 2023). Aid frameworks remain largely adult-centric, with NGOs based in Harare facing logistical challenges in reaching remote CHHs in areas such as Muzarabani and Mt Darwin. Moreover, few support programs adopt participatory approaches that involve CHHs in their design and implementation, resulting in interventions that do not fully address their lived realities.

## **2.10 Sustainable Food Security Framework for Rural Child-Headed Households**

This objective introduces a multidimensional framework to combat food insecurity in rural child-headed households (CHHs) through combined social, economic and environmental interventions. The framework brings together worldwide best practices and regional innovations with Zimbabwean contextual realities to promote sustainability and equity while supporting child participation. Five main subthemes set the priorities for future policy development and practical implementation.

### **2.10.1 Strengthening Social Protection Systems**

Cash transfer programs have emerged as a widely endorsed strategy for enhancing household food security and poverty alleviation, yet their impact on child-headed households (CHHs) varies based on design and accessibility. Programs like Brazil's Bolsa Família and South Africa's Child Support Grant have been shown to alleviate poverty and improve food access through effective targeting (FAO, 2021). In Mexico, the Prospera social program provided cash transfers that resulted in higher school attendance and improved dietary diversity among vulnerable children (World Bank, 2022). Malawi's Social Cash Transfer Program (SCTP) delivered monthly stipends that led to a 15% reduction in food insecurity among CHHs (Miller et al., 2020). Mozambique's Subsídio Social Básico combines food vouchers with nutrition education, although ongoing implementation challenges persist (Nhantumbo et al., 2021). In Zimbabwe, the Harmonized Social Cash Transfer (HSCT) excludes most CHHs due to

requirements (Chinyoka, 2023). However, child-sensitive cash transfer pilots by World Vision and other NGOs in Masvingo linked cash payments to school attendance, reducing hunger 25% in Masvingo (Chinyoka, 2023). While global evidence supports the value of unconditional transfers during emergencies, Zimbabwe's complex administrative systems hinder effective delivery. CHHs require streamlined registration procedures such as community-based verification and child-friendly disbursement mechanisms that ensure accessibility.

### **2.10.2 Climate smart agriculture**

Climate-smart agriculture (CSA), focuses on planting drought-resistant varieties such as millet alongside practices like agroforestry and water harvesting (FAO, 2023). A study conducted in India shows that, the population including child headed households experienced a 30% increase in yields due to CSA which was introduced (Singh et al., 2022). Through training in minimum tillage practices the Zambia Conservation Farming Unit supports households led by children (Ngoma et al., 2021). According to Omolo (2020), 40% of CHHs in Kenya's arid counties shifted away from rain-fed farming to irrigation schemes to improve food security. In Zimbabwe the Pfumvudza program advances climate-resilient agricultural techniques while CHHs continue to face restricted input access (Humanitarian Action Aid, 2024). Study conducted in Masvingo (2023), CHHs produced 1.5 tons/hectare of drought-tolerant sorghum but only 12% had access to government seed (Manjengwa et al., 2023). Practical Action NGO provides water-harvesting training for CHHs which results in better yields for farmers in Matabeleland South promoting food security (Dube, 2022). CSA achievements require both accessible inputs and appropriate training. CHHs require access to subsidized seeds while mobile-based extension services and child-friendly tools will help overcome their knowledge gaps.

### **2.10.3 Education and Skills Development**

Education and skills development remain critical pathways for empowering CHHs, not only to escape the cycle of poverty but also to build sustainable livelihoods through both academic and vocational support. Globally, programs like India's Mid-Day Meal Scheme have boosted nutritional intake and improved school retention rates (UNICEF, 2022). In Guatemala, vocational training initiatives led to income growth for 60% of adolescent-headed households (IFAD, 2021). Kenya's Inua Jamii combines cash transfers with agribusiness training, enabling CHHs to start poultry projects so that they earn money and improve standards of living (Mugo et al., 2020). South Africa's Siyakha initiative supports CHHs with financial literacy training, leading to 20% of participants getting knowledge about how budget finances income (Patel

et al., 2023). In Zimbabwe, the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) covers school fees but lacks complementary nutritional support (Manjengwa et al., 2023). CAMFED's mentorship program in Mashonaland Central linked 500 CHHs to vocational training, resulting in 45% of them launching their own micro-enterprises (CAMFED, 2022). To be more effective, education interventions should incorporate nutritional support through school gardens and adopt flexible schedules that accommodate caregiving roles. In addition, gender-responsive curricula are essential to reducing dropout rates among girls, who often face the dual burden of education and household responsibilities.

#### **2.10.4 Legal Empowerment and Advocacy**

Legal empowerment and child-focused advocacy frameworks are vital for protecting the rights of CHHs, particularly in securing inheritance, accessing services, and navigating institutional barriers. In Guatemala, the Procuraduría de la Niñez safeguards children's land rights, resulting in a 25% drop in land dispossession cases (UNICEF, 2023). India's "Right to Food" legal campaign led to expanded school meal programs (Drèze & Khera, 2020). Kenya's Legal Aid Act provides free legal support to CHHs involved in land disputes (Okoth, 2021), while South Africa's Children's Act mandates social workers to help CHHs claim their inheritance (Patel, 2022). Zimbabwe's Children's Amendment Act (2022) outlaws land grabs but lacks effective enforcement (Manjengwa et al., 2023). Nonetheless, grassroots efforts such as the Masvingo paralegal network enabled 50 CHHs to recover property in 2023, despite the inaccessibility of rural courts (Chigudu, 2023). For legal systems to effectively support CHHs, services must be decentralized through mechanisms such as mobile courts and supported by widespread awareness campaigns. Equipping traditional leaders with child rights advocacy skills will further strengthen community-level protection and enforcement.

#### **2.11 International, regional and local legal and policy frameworks for the protection of children.**

There are various legal policy frameworks that aim to protect the rights and well-being of children at global level to regional level. At the global level, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children (UNCRC) asserts every child's right to life, survival and development (Article 6 and 2) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). The UNCRC was created in 1989 in response to the growing global recognition that children needed specific rights and protection that acknowledge their vulnerability (Peter and Khan, 2020). These rights encompass access to adequate nutrition, shelter and education; these are fundamental components of food security. However in the absence of adult care givers CHHs often fall through the cracks of traditional

child protection systems. The principles in the UNCRC, align with the Sustainable development goals(SDGs) 2030 agenda which are zero hunger, no poverty, good health and wellbeing and quality education, UN , 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have emphasized the urgent need to tackle food insecurity in achieving human rights by the year 2030 (Drammeh, Hamid & Rohana, 2019).

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) operates at the regional level to supplement the UNCRC with culturally relevant provisions. The Charter came into effect in 1990 to represent the socio-economic conditions and communal child-rearing practices found in African nations like Zimbabwe. The Charter identifies children's entitlements to protection against exploitation as well as their right to obtain education and proper nutrition (Moyo & Banda, 2018). Dlamini (2019) states that the Charter's focus on structural poverty and extended family care systems holds important implications for CHHs who face challenges due to insufficient adult support and lack of state recognition. States must take responsibility to ensure that national development and food security strategies include provisions for the care of orphans and vulnerable children according to the Charter.

Zimbabwe has national laws that correspond to global and regional instruments. The Children's Act (Chapter 5.06) established in 2001 creates legal protections against child abuse and neglect along with protection from child labour and hazardous environments (Chikowore & Tembo, 2021). The Act has received historical criticism because it fails to adequately protect children's socio-economic rights to both food and education. Child-headed households experience significant barriers because they often do not have legal guardians to support them and lack birth certificates or land ownership which limits their access to food programs and government assistance. The Children's Act Amendment of 2022 responded to these issues by introducing forward-thinking measures which include new definitions for children needing care and protection. The updated definition now includes children who live without adult supervision and those who are homeless or struggle with chronic hunger or malnutrition. The amendment supports social welfare programs and community-led care approaches for children living in informal or rural areas while recognizing the struggles of CHHs with food insecurity.

In 2021 Zimbabwe introduced the National Child Protection Policy alongside new legislative reforms. This policy seeks to reinforce child protection systems by targeting children from vulnerable groups including orphans and individuals affected by HIV/AIDS who live in impoverished rural regions. The policy establishes a multi-sectoral coordination system that

enhances access to nutrition and health services as well as psychosocial support. The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (2021) explained that the policy aims to protect every child with specific attention to those in humanitarian and climate-affected areas experiencing severe food scarcity. Despite these advancements, implementation challenges persist. Many CHHs in rural districts like Mt. Child-headed households in rural areas such as Mt. Darwin continue to face exclusion from food aid programs and lack documentation while missing out on agricultural extension services and school feeding initiatives. International and national child rights commitments must be translated into tangible food security outcomes for child-headed households through legal recognition and targeted.

## **2.12 Research gap**

Research to date about food insecurity and child-headed households (CHHs) shows important deficiencies that the current study aims to resolve. Zimbabwe's prior research has mostly examined urban and peri-urban areas such as Harare and Bulawayo along with renowned rural districts like Masvingo and Matabeleland but failed to explore the distinctive socio-ecological conditions in Mt Darwin District. Ward 34, in particular, remains understudied despite its distinct vulnerabilities: The district faces frequent drought episodes and inadequate infrastructure which contribute to high numbers of child-headed households because of HIV/AIDS and population movement. Research has examined coping strategies in semi-arid Mwenezi and Gutu Districts (Mujeyi et al., 2021; Chirinda et al., 2022) but the combined effects of climate shocks and cultural norms along with economic marginalization on Mt Darwin's CHHs are yet to be studied. The research deficiency hinders policymakers from developing targeted solutions for areas that share comparable agricultural and demographic characteristics.

Empirical studies show insufficient qualitative data from child-centered perspectives about their lived experiences and coping methods. Research typically utilizes quantitative surveys such as ZIMSTAT 2022 and NGO reports which merge CHHs with other vulnerable populations thereby concealing their distinct agency and survival strategies. Research in Malawi and Zambia shows that CHHs use wild food foraging as a coping mechanism according to Kambewa et al. (2023) but fails to examine their strategies for negotiating communal resources or their use of peer networks. Zimbabwean research rarely includes CHHs as active contributors which leads to policies that focus on material support instead of empowerment. A lack of longitudinal research regarding how ongoing food insecurity affects CHHs' health and economic mobility prevents development of enduring solutions. This study connects current



research gaps by focusing on CHHs' perspectives and the unique conditions of Ward 34 to develop customized rights-based interventions.

## **2.12 Chapter summary**

This literature review chapter provides a multidimensional exploration of food insecurity in rural child-headed households (CHHs), anchored in global, regional, and Zimbabwean scholarship. It begins by conceptualizing food insecurity through its four dimensions: availability, access, utilization, and stability and defines CHHs as households where minors assume caregiving roles due to parental loss or migration. The chapter then examines the 'bidirectional relationship' between food insecurity and CHHs, demonstrating how systemic inequities (for instance land dispossession, exclusion from social protection) and environmental shocks (for instance, droughts) exacerbate each other in a vicious cycle. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) is positioned as a critical theoretical lens, emphasizing how CHHs' access to five key capitals (human, social, and natural, physical, financial) is disrupted by structural vulnerabilities. The chapter concludes by identifying research gaps. By considering CHHs' voices and contextualizing findings within Ward 34's unique socio-ecological landscape, this review not only consolidates existing knowledge but also charts a path for innovative, child-sensitive interventions.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology that was used to address the research questions and objectives set out in the research. The purpose of this research is to explore the drivers of food insecurity in rural child-headed households (CHHs) in Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe. This chapter outlines the research approach, design, study population, sampling methods, data collection techniques, data presentation strategies, and ethical considerations, among other elements. This research employed qualitative methods to obtain an in-depth understanding of food insecurity and its underlying causes in the study area. The methodology section provides a detailed plan of how the research will be conducted to ensure that the findings are reliable and valid.

### **3.1 Research philosophy**

This study adopted an interpretivist philosophy, grounded in the understanding that social reality, particularly experiences of vulnerability like food insecurity, is subjectively constructed through the meanings individuals assign to their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018). Interpretivism posits that knowledge is co-created through interaction between the researcher and participants, prioritizing deep understanding of context-specific phenomena over generalizable laws (Saunders et al., 2019). This philosophy aligns perfectly with the study's aim to explore the complex drivers, lived experiences, and coping strategies of CHHs phenomena deeply embedded in their socio-cultural and economic realities (Chilisa, 2020). The researcher acts as the primary instrument, engaging reflexively to interpret participants' narratives, behaviors (observed), and social interactions. Recognizing multiple realities, interpretivism allows for the voices of minors, community members, and key stakeholders to shape the findings holistically (Tracy, 2020). This approach facilitates rich description and theory development (the proposed framework) rooted in the emic perspectives of those experiencing food insecurity firsthand (Brinkmann, 2022).

### **3.2 Research Approach**

Research approach is a plan and procedure that consists of the steps of broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Mavodza, 2022). It outlines the way in which a researcher intends to understand the challenges of food insecurity in child headed families and interpret the problem (Creswell, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 2014). A research approach refers to the overall strategy or philosophical foundation guiding the collection and analysis of data. The qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. According to Charmaz (2016), qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena in their natural settings, emphasizing the meanings that people attribute to their experiences. Therefore qualitative approach helps in engaging in natural settings and this enhances the researcher to engage with the Mt Darwin community and children using indepth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of food insecurity. In qualitative research, the researcher typically engages in direct interaction with children, community members and key informants through in-depth interviews, enabling a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding food insecurity in child-headed households in ward 34, Mt Darwin (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This approach is also aligned with the research objective of understanding how food insecurity manifests in rural child-headed households and identifying potential intervention strategies in order to solve the issue of food insecurity in child headed households in Mt Darwin (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2017). The qualitative approach is justified because food insecurity is a complex issue that need

in-depth exploration of the lived experiences affecting child-headed households (Flick, 2020). It enables the researcher to interact directly with child-headed households, capturing accurate data and gain a deeper understanding of how food insecurity manifests in their daily life.

### **3.3 Research Design**

A research design refers to the detailed plan or blueprint for how the study will be conducted (Betram, 2015). It involves specifying the methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Bryman, 2016). In this study, a case study design was employed. According to Kothari (2016) research design involves various methods and procedures which are used in solving the research problem by answering the what, how and when questions. A case study design is particularly appropriate for research aiming to explore the complexities of food insecurity in rural ward 34, Mt Darwin (Yin, 2018). According to Stake (2013), a case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. Therefore in this study, case study involves a detailed examination of food insecurity and understand the complexities of the factors influencing food insecurity and what intervention strategies that can be adopted. According to Stake (2013), a case study is “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.” The case study design allows for a comprehensive examination of the subject, making it particularly suitable for this research, which will focus food insecurity in rural child-headed households in ward 34 of Mt-Darwin District, Zimbabwe. Case studies provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by allowing researchers to gather multiple sources of data, including interviews, observations, and documents (Baxter & Eyles, 2017).

The case study design allowed for an in-depth exploration of the factors contributing to food insecurity in child-headed households within the specific context of Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District. Case study is of paramount importance because it enabled the researcher to analyse the social, economic, and environmental factors that causes food insecurity in child-headed households, as well as the coping mechanisms adopted by these households. According to Stake (2010), case studies enable researcher to gather comprehensive data from multiple sources, providing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

### **3.4. Study setting**

Study setting refers to the physical, social, or institutional environment in which a study is conducted, it includes the location, context, and conditions under which data are collected (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). The study setting helps define the population or sample under

investigation, influencing the external validity or generalizability of the study's findings. A well-chosen setting ensures that the results are applicable to the intended population (Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted in ward 34 in Mt. Darwin District a rural region characterized by economic difficulties and reliance on agriculture (ZimVac, 2020). This area is notable for a high prevalence of child-headed households, which face distinct challenges related to food insecurity Chikodzi (2010). The study area was preferred by the researcher mainly due to its vulnerability to drought and developmental gaps which disadvantage the vulnerable groups (World vision, 2023 ). The community is mainly accessed through dust roads and accessibility of facilities such as health, information and social services is difficult. (Chengeta, 2010). The lifestyles are mainly communal and many households depend on subsistence farming. Non- governmental organisations such as World Food Program and Plan International play important roles in donating food aid to many vulnerable households on yearly basis due to persistence droughts (World Food Programm, 2020). Therefore, concentrating on this specific area, the study seeks to understand how local factors interact with broader socio-economic issues that contribute to food insecurity among vulnerable populations.

### **3.5 Target population**

The population target refers to the entire group of individuals or entities that a researcher aims to study, and from which the sample is drawn (Saunders et al., 2019; Etikan et al., 2016). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) defines target population as a set of individuals from which a sample is taken to help draw conclusions. The target population for this study encompassed all individuals residing in or serving Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District whose experiences, knowledge, or roles are directly relevant to understanding food insecurity in rural child-headed households (CHHs). This study targets children aged 12-17 who are the primary caregivers and decision-makers in formally or informally recognized CHHs within ward 34. They are the core population experiencing the phenomenon under study. The study also targets community members including relatives eg (aunts). They offer perspectives on community support dynamics, observed coping strategies, and social norms. Lastly the study targets key informants holding specific roles such includes professionals ,traditional leadership (custodian of customs, teachers land access), local government Ward Councillor (local governance, resource allocation), Social Workers (child protection, welfare services), NGO Representatives (program implementation), Agricultural Extension Officers (food production support), Health Care Workers (health/nutrition status). These professionals provided expert insight into

systemic drivers of food insecurity and responses to food insecurity challenges. This multi-faceted population ensures a holistic understanding of the CHHs' food insecurity ecosystem from the lived reality of the children themselves to the community context and institutional frameworks surrounding them. Justification lies in capturing the complex interplay of individual, household, community, and institutional factors shaping food security for this uniquely vulnerable group.

### **3.6 Sampling**

Sampling is a fundamental technique in research that involves selecting a smaller group, or sample, from a larger population to represent the whole (Mills, 2024). It refers to the methods used to select participants or cases from the larger study population (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2016). According to Creswell (2017) choosing a person, time and location is essential since they offer information that is necessary to address the research question, which is important in choosing qualitative sampling strategy. Purposive sampling was used by the researcher in this study for both primary participants and key informants as explained below.

#### **3.6.1. Sample size**

A sample is a subset of the population from which observations and measurement are taken (Akhtar, 2016). Given the qualitative nature of this research, the sample was selected using purposive sampling bases on the principle of data saturation (Hennick and Kaizer, 2022). The sample size for this study was 18 participants consist of 8 children, 4 community members and 6 key informants (KIs), 8 minors from CHHs, and 4 Community Members. This size is consistent with qualitative case study norms aiming for depth over breadth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher also used the principle of Saturation, the point where new data yields little or no new thematic insights relevant to the research questions (Saunders et al., 2018), guided the finalization of this number. Recruitment continued purposively within the defined groups until saturation was achieved. Data collection and preliminary analysis occurred iteratively. After approximately interviews, core themes regarding systemic drivers and gaps emerged consistently. Interviews with 7 children revealed recurring patterns in experiences and coping strategies; the 8th confirmed saturation within this group. By the 18th participant (a community member), analysis showed that new data was redundant, fitting comfortably within existing themes without revealing significant new dimensions pertinent to the RQs. This iterative process, coupled with data triangulation across the different participant types, ensured that the sample size of 18 was sufficient to achieve informational redundancy and thematic depth for the specific, localized case of Ward 34 CHHs.

### **3.6.2.. Sampling technique**

Sampling technique is a method used by the researcher to select a subset of individuals, groups or data from larger population (Poppellewell, 2013). Sampling is a fundamental technique in research that involves selecting a smaller group, or sample, from a larger population to represent the whole (Mills, 2024). This method is essential in research methodologies because it's often impractical to study entire population due to constraints like time, cost, and resources. In this study, purposive sampling technique was employed by the researcher.

#### **3.6.2..1 Purposive sampling technique**

Purposive sampling is nonprobability sampling which allows the researcher to choose people with similar traits for a certain objective (De Vaus, 2014). Purposive sampling is ideal when the researcher wants to select specific individuals who have knowledge and experience related to the research topic (Patton 2015) (Charmaz, 2016). In this study, purposive sampling was used by the researcher for both participants facing food insecurity, community and key informants with in-depth knowledge and direct experience of food insecurity in child headed households as described by Alston and Bowles (2012) who described purposive sampling as an approach belonging to the non-probability sampling methodology in which sample members are chosen based on their knowledge, relationships, and experience in a study subject. Child headed households were identified through the assistance of local community, school authorities and social welfare officers and priority was given to children experiencing food insecurity, community members were selected to gain broader perspective on how child headed households are perceived and supported within their communities. The selection of community members like extended relatives provided important context on traditional forms of support and community based mechanism related to food insecurity. Key informants were chosen on their professional engagement with child headed households, social workers were found at DSD offices. This is justified, because this technique allows the researcher to choose participants who directly align with the research aim. The collection of data benefitted from multiple perspectives which created a rich and detailed data that are relevant in understanding the complexities of food insecurity (Charmaz, 2016). This method ensures that the sample is relevant and representative of the targeted demographic.

### **3.7.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

This section seeks to outline the specific criteria used to determine which participants are eligible and in eligible to take part in the study. Establishing clear inclusion and exclusion

criteria ensures that the selected participants are appropriate for addressing the research objectives and enhance validity, reliability and ethical rigor of the data collected.

#### **3.7.1.1 Inclusion**

Inclusion criterion is the sampling requirements identified by the researcher that was included in the sample (Burns, Grove and Gray, 2015). Given (2015) states that purposive sampling implies to a process whereby participants are selected because they meet the criteria of inclusion that has been predetermined by the researcher as relevant to answer the research question. This study on food insecurity and child-headed households employed purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific characteristics. Social workers aged 25–65 with at least one year of experience in child protection, children aged 12–18 who head households due to the absence of adult caregivers, food-insecure households in Ward 34, Mt. Darwin, and NGO representatives involved in child welfare and food insecurity were included. These participants offered diverse, firsthand insights into the challenges of food insecurity and its impact on children

#### **3.7.1.2 Exclusion criteria**

Exclusion criteria are those criteria that would lead a researcher to exclude certain elements individuals or objects from the population (LoBiondo-Wood and Haber, 2010). In this study, certain participants were excluded based on criteria that hindered their ability to contribute relevant insights into the research topic. Children who are not mentally stable were excluded, as their inability to provide coherent and reliable accounts of their experiences would compromise the study's data quality (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2010). Additionally, children who are not caregiving or leading households (i.e., those who are not child-headed households) were excluded also, as they do not possess the firsthand experience of food insecurity or the challenges of heading a family, which is central to the study's focus (Given, 2015). These exclusions ensure that the data collected is directly relevant to the research question, enhancing the validity and accuracy of the findings

### **3.8 Data collection methods**

Data collection methods refer to the systematic strategies, techniques, or procedures used by researchers to collect, analyse, and interpret data in order to answer research questions or test hypotheses (Creswell, 2018). Data collection is described as a process of gathering information with the purpose of answering the research question of the study (Wagner et al., 2012). In this study, the research collected data using in-depth interviews as explained below.



### **3.8.1 In-depth interviews**

An in-depth interview is a qualitative research method that is used to conduct detailed interviews with a small number of participants (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method and their goal is to explore an in depth participant point of view, experiences, feelings, and perspectives (Creswell, 2014). In depth interviews were used with both primary and secondary participants , to collect data from child headed households, community members and key informants such as local leaders and social workers because they are easy to manage and permit participants to share their experiences and they facilitate the researcher to get first hand comprehensive information on the study area (Choy 2014). In-depth interviews were used by the researcher because they involve personal and direct contact between interviewers and interviewees, as well as eliminate non-response rates, (Kothari, 2014; Creswell, 2014). Each interview took an average of 25-45 minutes depending on the depth of participant's answers. The researcher used her phone as a tape recorder after obtaining permission from participants to record the information. Another reason why the researcher chooses interviews is that they allow participants to demonstrate practical evidence of their attributes and help the researcher to capture verbal and non-verbal questions as well. Shona and English were used as the medium of communication.

Data collection commenced after the researcher received ethics clearance from the Department of Social Development. To prepare the interview the researcher asked the participant to determine time and place to create a conducive environment. The researcher obtained consent forms to participant before involving them in the study and the interview commenced after the researcher explain the purpose and significance of the study to the participants. The purpose of conducting interviews is to gather rich descriptive data that would assist the researcher to comprehend how the participants constructed their knowledge and sense of social reality (Nieuwenhuis, 2020).

### **3.9 Data Collection Tools**

Data collection tools are the instruments used to gather information from participants (Bryman, 2016). For this study, 2 in-depth interview guides for key informants and child headed households, focus group discussion guide and participant observation were employed as research tools. According to Creswell ,(2014) the benefits of using an in-depth interview guide is that it allows the researcher to direct the question, ask open ended questions and probe more information from participants and this helped to acquire more information needed in the study.

### **3.9.1 In-Depth Interview guides**

An in-depth interview guide is a qualitative research tool used to collect comprehensive and detailed information from participants through open-ended, conversational interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). In this study, the researcher used three distinct interview guides specifically tailored for heads of child-headed households, community members and for key informants including social workers and local leaders. This was designed to provide a flexible framework of questions that helps interviewers probe deeper into the participant's experiences, feelings, and perceptions (Kallio et al., 2016). IDIs guides were designed with extreme ethical sensitivity, prioritizing safety and minimizing distress. Questions used simple, non-leading language, focusing on concrete experiences rather than abstract concepts. Each guide was designed to suit the cognitive and communicative capacities of the respective participant groups. For children, the guide was simplified, enabling participants to express their experiences freely. For key informants and community members, the questions were moderately complex, reflecting their broader knowledge and institutional interventions. All interview guides consisted of open ended questions. These questions were structured with probing questions under each research main question to explore deeper understanding of the drivers of food insecurity, implications, coping strategies and intervention strategies. This was important in capturing rich, detailed insights into the complex issues of food insecurity. This format encourages deeper reflection, flexibility and helps to build rapport and made participants especially children to feel comfortable. Interviews were conducted in Shona (or preferred language), in a safe, private location (often a quiet spot near home/school), lasted 30-45 minutes, audio-recorded with assent/consent, with breaks offered.

### **3.10 Data analysis**

Data analysis refers to the process of organizing, interpreting, and making sense of the data collected during the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2017). For this study, the researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the interview data. Thematic analysis involves identifying and analyzing patterns or themes within qualitative data, which can provide insights into the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2016; Chilisa & Preece, 2015). The researcher utilised thematic analysis because it allows for both rich description and detailed interpretative of food insecurity in rural child headed households. The data analysis utilised both deductive and inductive analysis as analysis used pre-existing theory to identify themes on the one hand, while emergent

themes from the data were also identified (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016). The data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis. Initial data analysis commenced during the data collection process as the researcher recorded the interviews and familiarized herself with the data (Creswell, 2014).

Data were transcribed and coded into themes in order to identify commonalities, as well as unique themes. Efforts were then made by the researcher to re-check the transcriptions with the taped interviews and compared them with the field notes to ensure that the data had been correctly transcribed. The researcher read through the transcribed interviews multiple times to become familiar with the data. Initial codes were generated based on significant words, phrases, or concepts. These codes were then organized into broader themes that reflect on critical areas of food insecurity and its intersection with CHHs phenomenon in Ward 34 in Mt Darwin District. The themes were analysed in relation to the research questions. Thematic analysis was justified for this study because it allows for a detailed and flexible examination of child headed experiences with food insecurity. Given the explorative nature of the research, thematic analysis enables the identification of common and unique patterns from both participants in the study. Additionally its capacity to accommodate both deductive and inductive approaches allowed the researcher to analyse data through the lens of Sustainable Livelihoods Framework.

### **3.11 Research procedure**

The researcher sought a letter from the university first, following that the researcher then write proposal and research tools. After that, the researcher went to seek permission to conduct the study from the Department of Social Development, Head office for approval. After the approval from the head office the researcher collected data in Mt Darwin, ward 34. The researcher observed all the research ethics highlighted in Chapter 3. Its not clear and detailed

### **3.12 Measures to ensure trustworthiness of the findings**

Trustworthiness is of great importance in qualitative research in every step of research, from data collection, analysis, findings, and conclusions (Maree, 2016). In every study, researchers must uphold the protocols and procedures required for a survey to be considered worthy of consideration by readers (Amankwaa, 2016). Polit and Beck (2012) stated that trustworthiness is the degree of confidence qualitative researchers has in their data. In this study, trustworthiness was measured using the following criteria found in the highly influential work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) namely: credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability.

### **3.1 2.1 Credibility**

According to Silverman, (2014); Wagner; (2012), credibility is the extent to which any research claim to be based on undistorted evidence, sincere, free from error and evasion that the readers find its inferences to be believable. It is the most important criterion which shows that the study is of quality and the findings obtained are agreeable (Silverman, 2014). Credibility refers to how well data and process of analysis address the intended focus of the study. This means that no irrelevant data has been included in the study only relevant data recorded systematically. It further reflected that the truth of the findings as judged by participants and others within the same situation. Burns, Grove and Gray, (2015) further, suggested that credibility refers to the sureness of the reader about the extent to which the researchers have produced results that reflected the views of the participants. Credibility will be attained through using a series of techniques including prolonged engagement, member checks and persistent observation.

### **3.12.2 Prolonged engagement**

Polit and Beck (2017) refers to prolonged engagement as the investment of sufficient time collecting data to have an in-depth understanding of the experiences of children heading families so as to test for misinformation and distortion and to ensure saturation of important categories. It is during this stage that the researcher gains an in-depth understanding of the experiences of children in CHHs In this study, the researcher has ensured prolonged engagement by being in the field with participants for three weeks (Babbie and Mouton, 2012). Prolonged engagement enables the researcher to establish a sense of trust and build rapport between the researcher and the participants as it is important in gathering rich data (Brink and van der Walt and Van Rensburg, 2017).

### **3.12.3 Conformability**

Polit and Beck (2012) refers to conformability as the potential for congruency between two or more independent people about the data's accuracy, relevance and meaning. Creswell and Poth (2018:256) state that the findings of the study should reflect the views of participants to the extent that other researchers can confirm similar findings or use the study as the basis for future study. In case of this research, the study triangulated through the use of distinct in-depth interviews for both primary and secondary participants. The researcher ensured conformability by being as neutral as possible and not being biased. Throughout, the researcher was supervised and monitored by the supervisor in order to confirm the findings.

### **3.12.4 Transferability**

According to Polit and Beck (2014), transferability refers to the extent to which qualitative findings can be transferred and applicable to another context, settings or groups. Polit and Beck (2017) view transferability as the extent to which findings of study may be ‘generalised’ to other settings or groups. The researcher provided a clear picture of the study context, method, data collection to enhance transferability. This enables the researcher to evaluate similarities of their own context, allowing for the judging of the relevance and applicability of findings to their own situation. Therefore, ensuring transferability enhance the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how specific context influence results , which will be used to inform future studies.

### **3.12.5 Dependability**

Anol, (2012) views dependability in qualitative research, as when two researchers assessing the same phenomenon using the same set of evidence independently will arrive at the same conclusions or the same researcher observing or a similar phenomenon at different times arrives at similar conclusion. Holloway and Wheeler (2011) suggested that the context of the study must be well described to achieve dependability. In this study, the researcher assures dependability of the study findings by ensuring that the process was thoroughly detailed to enable other researchers who wished to conduct a similar study to replicate it. To enhance objectivity, the researcher also shared the transcripts with another experienced researcher who independently analyses them.

### **3.13 Ethical considerations**

Dahlberg and McCaig (2010) outlined that ethics in research refers to the systematic moral principles, rules or code of practice that guide activity from the beginning to completion of the study (including the publication of results). Qualitative research methods raise ethical issues based on the fact that there are human beings involved who are the objects under scrutiny (De Vos et al., 2011). At all stages of the research ,the researcher adhered to all research ethics , namely: permission to conduct study, informed consent, anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, freedom of autonomy.

#### **3.13.1 Permission to conduct a study**

The researcher seeks permission to carry out the research from the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare and Bindura University of Science and Technology (BUSE). Ethical clearances were used as evidence to apply permission to conduct research from BUSE and the Ministry.

### **3.13.2 Informed consent**

According to Dahlberg and McCaig (2010), informed consent is, essentially, a term made up of two parts. For the first part, research should always be conducted openly, honestly and participants should be made aware of what the research entails. Second, participation must be voluntary, and participants must give consent to be involved in the study. Polit and Beck (2014) explained that informed consent means participants have been provided with ample information and have the power and freedom to voluntarily accept or refuse participation and signifies researcher's efforts to establish and maintain participant's autonomy. ). In this study, each participant was requested to sign written consent forms based on the participant information sheet which gave all the information about the study objectives, research methods, and the possible risks of taking part and that they have the right to withdraw at any point (Babbie 2016). Participants were given also information on the purpose of the study, procedure, potential benefits, assurance of confidentiality, and description of risks.

### **3.13.3 Anonymity**

Polit and Beck (2017), outline that anonymity is when the researcher cannot link any data to a participant. It is usually a requirement of research ethics that the identity of individuals who have participated in research code numbers and pseudonym names were used. Anonymity is closely related to confidentiality and is the most secure means of protecting confidentiality. Therefore, to maintain strict anonymity the researcher did not link participants with data. Participants were also assured that their names and their villages would not be revealed

### **3.13.4 Privacy and Confidentiality**

Confidentiality refers to the process of keeping the information obtained from the participants during a study undisclosed and private (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). According to Burns and Grove (2016), privacy is the freedom participants should determine the time, extent, and general circumstances under which their private and sensitive information be protected and will not be made accessible to any persons other than the research team by using password protection. In this study, interviews were conducted in a quite environment identified by the participants to maintain and secure participant's rights.

Furthermore, the researcher assured participants that she was not going to divulge any information gathered with anybody. To maintain confidentiality, participants were assured that no identifying information would be made available to anyone not directly involved to the study. To provide secure storage and control, data collected was stored in a safe storage box where the research has easy access.

### **3.14 Limitations of the study**

Limitations refer to the constraints or weaknesses of the research that may affect the validity or generalizability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). According to Bryman (2016), limitations refer to the constraints or weaknesses inherent in a research design that may impact the validity and reliability of findings. In this context, several limitations are evident. The geographical scope is confined to rural Mt. Darwin, limiting generalizability to other regions or urban areas. Accessing child-headed households can be challenging due to cultural and social sensitivities, potentially resulting in a smaller sample size. Self-reported data from child respondents may be subject to biases and inaccuracies. Cultural and language barriers may affect data collection and interpretation. The focus solely on food insecurity excludes other essential needs. Reliance on quantitative data may limit nuanced insights. External factors like seasonal changes, economic fluctuations, or policy shifts may influence findings. By acknowledging these limitations, the study's findings can be contextualized, and future research directions identified.

### **3.15 Delimitations of the study.**

Delimitations refer to the boundaries or scope of the study that the researcher sets in order to focus on specific aspects of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Delimitation is defined as boundaries of the study within the research control (Marsall and Rossman, 2016). This study focuses exclusively on rural child-headed households in Mt. Darwin, Zimbabwe, where children serve as primary caregivers excluding households with adult care givers. Urban areas are excluded because the research geographical area is limited to rural Mt Darwin. The research scope is further limited to food insecurity, omitting other forms of insecurity like water, healthcare, and shelter. A cross-sectional design is employed, collecting data at one point in time. By concentrating on these specific factors, this study seeks to provide a detailed insight into food insecurity affecting rural child-headed households in Mt. Darwin.

### **3.16 Chapter Summary**

The chapter detailed all aspects of research methodology. The main focus of this chapter was to describe the methodology that was employed by the researcher when she collected data. It outlined the research design, the instruments and data collection procedures and data analysis plan. Ethical considerations were also considered in this section. Amicable efforts were also used to explain how the data was collected in this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION, INTERPRATION ,ANALYSIS AND DISCUSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

Chapter 4 presents, interprets, and discusses the findings of this qualitative study on food insecurity in rural child-headed households (CHHs) in Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe. Structured around the four research objectives, the chapter integrates primary data from interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation with secondary insights from key informants and community members. Each objective is analysed through the lens of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), which illuminates how systemic inequities, eroded capitals, and institutional failures perpetuate vulnerability. The chapter begins by contextualizing participants' demographic profiles, followed by a detailed exploration of drivers, lived experiences, coping strategies, and proposed solutions.

#### **4.1 Demographic characteristics of study participants**

This chapter presents the demographic characteristics of participants, followed by an analysis of the study's findings on food insecurity in rural child-headed households (CHHs). The demographic data contextualizes participants' lived experiences and systemic challenges, laying the groundwork for interpreting how socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors shape food insecurity. Three participant categories primary participants (minors in CHHs), key informants, and community members are profiled to highlight their roles, backgrounds, and relevance to the study's objectives.

Table 1: 5.1 Demographic characteristics of primary participants (caregiver/ decision makers in CHH aged 12-17)



<b>Age category</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Role in CHH</b>	<b>Duration as Household head/ decision maker</b>	<b>Education status</b>	<b>Vocational skills</b>
12-14	M	Sole care giver	1-years	Dropped at grade 5	
12-14	F	Shared caregiving	6-12 months	In primary school	Informal trade
15-17	M	Primary decision maker	3+years	Dropped at form 2	Artisanal mining
15-17	F	Sole caregiver	2-3 years	In secondary school	Domestic work
12-14	M	Shared caregiving	1.2 years	In secondary school	Livestock herding
15-17	F	Primary decision maker	3+years	Dropped at form 2	Informal trade
12-14	F	Shared caregiving	6.12 months	In secondary school	None
15-17	M	Sole caregiver	1-2 years	In secondary school	Informal trade

Table 1 above shows, the primary participants comprising eight minors (four males, four female) aged 12–17, with roles ranging from sole caregivers to shared decision-makers. Half were aged 15–17, reflecting older adolescents’ greater likelihood of assuming household leadership. Most had dropped out of school (five out of eight), primarily due to caregiving duties or income-generation pressures. Vocational skills varied: older participants engaged in higher-risk activities (e.g., mining, construction), while younger ones relied on domestic work or petty trade. The duration of household leadership ranged from six months to over three years, with longer tenures linked to entrenched poverty and limited external support. These demographics underscore the intersection of age, gender, and economic precarity in shaping minors’ caregiving burdens and livelihood strategies.

**Table 2 5.2 Demographic characteristics of community members**

Relationship with the CHH	Lengthy of relationship with the CHH	Involvement and support for the CHH
Neighbour	4+ years	Occasional food and too sharing
Teacher	3 years	Homework and school project assistance
Relative (aunt)	Since birth	Socio-emotional support, food and clothing assistance
Neighbour	1 year	No direct support

Table 2 shows the four community members included neighbours, relatives, and teachers with varying degrees of involvement in CHHs' lives. Two neighbours had longstanding ties (five years and one year), yet only one provided occasional food aid. The teacher indicated academic struggles linked to caregiving duties, while the relative highlighted intra-family land conflicts. Notably, the uninvolved neighbour cited stigma as a barrier to support. These dynamics reveal a spectrum of community engagement, from solidarity to neglect, shaped by cultural attitudes and resource constraints.

**Table 3 5.3 Demographic characteristics of key informants**

Professional role	Years of professional experience	Responsibility related to child welfare	Organisation affiliated to
Traditional leader	8+	Land and customary disputes and resolution	Community leadership
Councillor	5+	Representation in local government and advocacy for social services	Local government
Social worker		Child welfare advocacy, protection and counselling	NGO

NGO representative (programmes officer)	4+	Food aid distribution, skills development and training	International development NGO
Agricultural extension officer	6+	Community climate-smart farming support	Government agency
Community health worker	5+	Health promotion, screening and referrals	Public health clinic

Table 3 above shows six key informants who represented diverse sectors, including local governance, NGOs, and healthcare. Their professional experience ranged from three to over ten years, with roles directly impacting CHHs, such as land advocacy, food aid distribution, and malnutrition screening. The mix of institutional affiliations, NGOs, and community leadership highlighted fragmented but complementary efforts to address CHHs' needs. For instance, the agricultural officer's focus on climate adaptation contrasted with the social worker's emphasis on psychosocial support, illustrating the multidimensional challenges facing CHHs. These profiles reflect systemic gaps in coordination and child-sensitive policy implementation.

The demographics illustrate how age, gender, institutional roles, and community ties intersect to shape CHHs' vulnerability. Older minors (15–17) faced heightened livelihood pressures, often engaging in hazardous work, while younger ones (12–14) struggled with disrupted education. Community members' mixed involvement reflected cultural norms that alternately support or stigmatize CHHs. Key informants' varied expertise underscored systemic fragmentation, yet their collective insights identified actionable gaps (e.g., child-sensitive policies). Together, these profiles contextualize the findings, emphasizing the need for holistic interventions addressing household-level agency and structural inequities.

#### **4.2 Drivers of Food Insecurity in Rural Child-Headed Households ward 34 Mt Darwin District.**

This section examines systemic drivers of food insecurity in child-headed households (CHHs) in Ward 34, Mt Darwin, through five subthemes: economic marginalization, agricultural challenges, social protection gaps, education deficits, and climate vulnerability. Each subtheme is analysed with participant voices, interpreted through the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), and discussed in relation to global, regional, and Zimbabwean literature.

#### 4.2.1 Economic Marginalization and Poverty

Child-headed households experience both severe economic exclusion and structural vulnerability because relatives often strip them of land and inheritance rights based on their young age after their parents pass away. Children who lack agricultural land and receive minimal support often take up dangerous informal jobs including artisanal mining in order to support their siblings. The available work options for these children remain limited by their age and insufficient income fails to cover basic living necessities. Some people find themselves dependent on others for food because they have no other choice. Previously hidden from formal economic systems with no access to jobs or credit support their existence and needs have gained recognition from several institutions and service providers.

A male participant aged 16 said:

*“After our parents died, our relatives took everything including land, claiming that we are young, so we have no land to farm and we often go without food most of the time because everyone here rely on farming for food access.”*

Participant, a male age 15 said:

*“I go to work in the mines, but I do not earn enough money to buy food and even pay school fees for my siblings. Sometimes, other people denied me access to work in their mines because of my eage ‘tozosara tisina’ option than ‘kukumbira chekudya kunevamwe nekuda kwekushaya mabasa’”*

A key informant (social worker) said:

*“Child-headed households were invisible in our economic systems. They could not access loans or formal jobs, pushing them into dangerous work just to survive, but these days they are now considered”*

The above verbatims means, economic marginalization stemmed from systemic age-based exclusion. Minors, lacking legal recognition as household heads, were barred from formal jobs or loans, trapping them in exploitative informal sectors. This can also be interpreted as the death of the values of social fabrics and a comprise of Ubuntu philosophy. Patriarchal inheritance norms further dispossessed them of family assets, deepening precarity. The SLF's financial capital dimension is crippled here, as CHHs' inability to accumulate or retain resources perpetuates cyclical poverty.

These findings align with Devereux's (2022) analysis of youth unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa but highlight Zimbabwe's unique legal-cultural barriers. Unlike Kenya, where clan systems occasionally protect orphans' land rights (Okoth, 2021), Zimbabwe's patriarchal norms prioritize adult male relatives, leaving CHHs landless. This contrasts with India's Self-Help Group model, where collective microfinance empowers marginalized youth (Agarwal & Seth, 2020). The SLF's emphasis on transforming structures underscores the need for legal reforms to recognize CHHs as legitimate units capable of owning assets and participate in economic activities.

#### **4.2.2 Limited Agricultural and Livelihood Productivity**

CHHs in ward 34 relied on rain-fed subsistence farming as their primary source of food but lacked seeds, tools, and training. Poor rainfall and drought worsen crop failure and food shortages. Their age and physical limitation make farming difficult and unproductivity. Older minors at the household balanced farm labor with caregiving, while younger ones struggled with physically demanding tasks.

A female participant said:

*"We try to farm, but we do not have the necessary farming inputs and quality seeds. When rain does not come, our crops dry up, and we are left with no food, as farming is our main source of sustenance. The unpredictability of weather patterns, exacerbated by climate change, has made our situation worse even. "*

A female participant aged 15 said:

*"I am the only one who can contribute to our family, as my siblings are still very young and unable to help on the farm. The burden falls entirely on me, making it incredibly challenging to meet our daily needs. Often, I work tirelessly in the fields, but when crops fail, it feels hard."*

A key informant (agricultural extension officer) said:

*"These children try to farm but they lack resources and inputs and knowledge. Most of the time , their crops fail because they rely on rainfall and they lack seeds and knowledge Without tools or training, their crops fail year after year leading to food insecurity".*

The above verbatim reflects critical lack of support for CHHs, which is worsened by systematic neglects and underdevelopment of Mt Darwin. Agricultural productivity is constrained by climate change, resource gaps and physical capital. One can also interpret this as double tragedy experienced by children in Mt Darwin. Without access to drought-resistant seeds or

irrigation, CHHs faced chronic food shortages. The SLF's natural capital (land, water) and physical capital (tools, infrastructure) are depleted, limiting household resilience. The government of Zimbabwe is leaving the area of MT Darwin in terms of development. The researcher observed that there is no single dam in ward 34 Mt Darwin dam of which this area is affected by drought mostly.

These findings align with the conclusions of Mutenje et al (2020). who found that climate change have a significant impact on smaller holder households. However, the challenges facing CHHs in ward 34 Mt Darwin are caused by age related labour constraints, exclusion from formal agricultural support and the absent of adult caregiver which worsened their vulnerability.

In contrast, Zambia's Conservation Farming Unit offers a more inclusive approach, training youth in climate agricultural practices and supporting them with inputs in order to promote food insecurity (Ngoma et al., 2021). This model presents a viable strategy for Zimbabwe. Unlike Zambia, CHHs in Mt Darwin are excluded from such support showing the gap in the political regime of Zimbabwe in terms of inclusive development. The SLF's livelihood strategies are hindered by the lack of adaptive capacity CHHs. The absence of development initiatives like dams and irrigation systems in Mt Darwin contributed to food insecurity and poverty for Child headed households.

#### **4.2.3 Poor Social Protection Nets/Systems**

Child-headed households in a ward 34, Mt Darwin face systemic exclusion from social protection programs because administrative barriers including missing identity documents and lack of banking access prevent their participation. National assistance programs and humanitarian interventions repeatedly overlook these populations because of systemic barriers and policy shortcomings. The current assistance provided to children without adult guardians exists only for short periods and lacks consistency while failing to meet their specific requirements. CHHs continue to operate beyond formal support networks which results in their increased risk of chronic food shortages as well as their deepening susceptibility to poverty.

Participant male aged 15 said:

*“Help comes sometimes, but we face significant barriers in accessing it. We often lack essential documents like IDs and birth certificates, and many of us do not own phones to receive aid or have bank accounts. As a result, the assistance that is meant to support us frequently fails to reach those who need it most.*

Key informant ward Councilor said that:

*“Most of these children do not benefit from AID and money assistance because the systems require guidance or parents and certificates. Some of these children are not yet reached the age of having IDs so they are left behind worsening food insecurity and poverty.”*

Another key informant (NGO representative) said:

*“Government programs require documents these children do not have. Many of these children have not yet reached the age where they can obtain IDs, which further marginalizes them and exacerbates food insecurity and poverty. The absence of these documents is a significant barrier that keeps them from receiving the help they desperately need. We need simpler ways to include them.”*

The above verbatim demonstrated a systematic failure of the Zimbabwe social protection systems to accommodate vulnerable children especially the child headed households. The SLF's transforming structures and processes such as (policies and institutions) failed to adapt to a CCHs needs, leaving them invisible within the formal assistance programs leading to poverty and food insecurity.

The findings demonstrated that other Zimbabwe's social protection systems are not inclusive, most of them they are adult centric lacking inclusivity in CHHs. This exclusion contradicts the Brazil's 'Bolsa Família', which includes minors to benefit from conditional cash without requiring documents like IDs (Barrientos, 2020). Therefore, Zimbabwe's HSCT reflects adult-centric policy design Lacking flexibility to include vulnerable children. Similarly, South Africa's Child Support Grant, recognizes child caregivers and provide them with monthly monetary assistance (Patel, 2022). According to statistics in South Africa (2017), approximately 12, 5 million children received social grants, demonstrating how inclusive legal framework can help vulnerable children. Additionally, unsustainable support from NGOs reflects limited government capacity and reliance in donor interventions From the theoretical framework SLF perspective, this exclusion erodes social capital and limits financial capital, leaving households led by children without the assets to withstands food insecurity challenge. Moreover, the situation reflects legal and institutional failure in Zimbabwe child protection and welfare systems. The lack of inclusive policy designed for child headed households worsen inequality, poverty and food insecurity.

#### 4.2.4 Environmental Vulnerability and Climate Change Impacts

Children leading households in ward 34 face extreme vulnerability from their reliance on rain-fed agriculture because drought and unpredictable rainfall patterns threaten their survival. Current heat conditions make traditional crops including wild vegetables unsustainable because climate change has worsened these climatic changes. Participants expressed concerns about the unpredictable rainfall patterns consisting of extended dry periods followed by intense downpours which exceed the tolerance limits of their crops. Child-headed households struggle because they do not have irrigation systems and drought-resistant seeds nor understand climate-smart farming techniques. Their farming practices depend on hope rather than certainty which results in chronic food insecurity and high vulnerability to climate shocks.

A male participant aged 14 said:

*“These days, the rains are increasingly unreliable, and we often find ourselves suffering as we search for wild food to survive. The uncertainty of rainfall has made it possible for us to rely on our traditional farming practices, because the rains are not predictable”*

A key informant, a community health worker said:

*“The unpredictability of the rains poses a significant challenge for these children. They lack access to proper irrigation systems, which means they are farming on hope, not certainty. With no reliable water sources, their efforts often lead to disappointment, compounding their struggles for survival.”*

A key informant, Agricultural extension officer indicate:

*“In Mt Darwin, the rains have become very unpredictable, sometimes there is no rain for months and then heavy rain down pours ounce in a months. Our farmers, including child headed families, struggle because their crops can’t survive in the harsh weather. The lack knowledge about smart agriculture and they do not have irrigation systems.”*

The absence of targeted intervention services and climate smart agriculture training for these households reflects systematic gaps in support systems and without the coping strategies CHHs will continue to be affected by climate shocks. Key informant social worker also agrees that rainfall patterns in Mt Darwin are unpredictable which made people to suffer from food insecurity. The SLF’s natural capital is degraded, as environmental shocks outpace adaptive



capacity. This finding also shows that there is need for the government to tailor strategies that prioritise CHHs, include access to resilient farming inputs and knowledge disseminating.

The findings are similar with IPCC (2022) reports on Southern Africa, which report that climate variability and extreme weather are major threats to food systems. However, the impact on CHHs is worsened by lack resources and adaptive capacity to adopt resilience strategies like irrigation, unlike adult-led households in Kenya's that has started using irrigation systems and climate resilient crops like rapoko and millet (Omolo, 2020). The Sustainable Livelihood Framework is useful in this context as it helps conceptualise how limited natural and human capital among child headed households worsened their vulnerability to climate change. Literature from Maphosa ,(2019) emphasises that climate change adaptation must include vulnerable groups like children in order to promote sustainable development .

The drivers of food insecurity in CHHs are deeply interlinked, reflecting systemic failures in economic inclusion, agricultural support, social protection, education access, and climate adaptation. While global frameworks like the SLF provide a lens to understand these dynamics, Zimbabwe's patriarchal norms, policy gaps, and environmental precarity demand localized solutions. Key contrasts with regional examples (e.g., Kenya's clan-based land protection, South Africa's child grants) highlight actionable policy lessons. To break cycles of deprivation, interventions must prioritize CHHs' legal recognition, child-sensitive social protection, and climate-resilient livelihood training.

#### **4.3 Implications of Food Insecurity in rural child headed households Mt Darwin.**

This section explores the daily realities of child-headed households (CHHs) in Ward 34, Mt Darwin, through their socio-emotional struggles, role strain, social exclusion, health challenges, and systemic exploitation. Each subtheme is analysed using participant narratives, interpreted through the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), and discussed in relation to global, regional, and Zimbabwean literature

##### **4.3.1 Socio-Emotional and Psychological Struggles**

Children who lead households in Ward 34 suffer severe psychological and socio-emotional distress due to the loss of their parents and the ongoing challenges of hunger and caregiving responsibilities. These children hide their grief from others to maintain strength for their younger siblings, which leads to untreated trauma. Social isolation and stigma intensify the emotional burden due to cultural beliefs that connect orphanhood with bad luck or ancestral punishment. The loss of community support structures diminishes their social networks and

blocks their access to essentials like food and tools. CHHs experience increased marginalization and face challenges from emotional and material deprivation due to the insufficient availability of psychosocial support.

A male primary participant aged 15 said:

*“When I see other children with their parents, it really hurts me because my parents are not here with us. I feel lonely and often cry when I think about it. I wish I could have my mother with me, just like they do.”*

A key informant, a counselor, said:

*“These children carry heavy burdens for their age. They have to act strong and hide their feelings to support their younger brothers and sisters. It’s really difficult for them to deal with their own pain while trying to take care of others. They want to be brave, but it is very hard for them every day.”*

A key informant, a teacher, said:

*“I see these children in school, and they are often quiet and withdrawn. They struggle to focus on their studies because they are worried about their families. Many times, they come to school without eating breakfast, and it’s clear they are carrying a lot of stress. I try to support them, but they need more help than I can give in the classroom.”*

The findings illustrate the invisible psychological strain and emotional labour which is caused by the absence of parents at home. Stigma eroded social capital, isolating CHHs in ward 34 from community support systems critical for resilience. Stigma against CHHs stems from cultural beliefs linking parental death to ancestral punishment or moral failure. This exclusion denies minors access to communal resources, deepening food insecurity. The SLF’s social capital is dismantled, as community networks critical for resilience are replaced by suspicion. For example, neighbors’ refusal to share tools with a 15-year-old caregiver reflects a breakdown in Ubuntu principles, which traditionally emphasize collective welfare.

The erosion of social capital aligns similar with findings in sub saharah Africa. For instance (Nhancale, 2020) observed that CHHs in Mozambique often retain kinship based support .In, Zimbabwe’s urban migration trends erode familial bonds, leaving minors vulnerable. In contrasts Botswana’s community-led orphan care programs, reintegrate CHHs through public awareness campaigns (Mogotsi et al., 2021). The SLF’s transforming structures and process

critique is relevant here .Zimbabwe cultural shift towards individualism ,limited psychosocial service delivery and the absence of child headed focused policies fail to protect oprphaned children .cultural shifts toward individualism, coupled with weak advocacy, perpetuate exclusion. In Kenya, Faith based institutions play a contracting role, with churches actively championing CHHs reintegration and stigma reduction (Omolo, 2020).These socio emotional struggles also align with the SLF capital, mental distress undermines human capital affecting cognitive development and capacity to make livelihood decision from children and this vulnerability reduces the ability of CHH to develop adaptive strategies, perpetuating a cycle of poverty, trauma and exclusion.

#### **4.3.2 Household Management Role Strain**

Children's households in Ward 34 experience significant management burdens due to the lack of adult caregivers. Children who must perform home care duties alongside domestic tasks and income-generating activities frequently sacrifice their educational opportunities and rest periods. The domestic workload for girls includes cooking, cleaning, childcare, and water collection while boys participate in physically demanding work through illegal mining and farming. The simultaneous management of multiple responsibilities leads to fatigue which causes frequent school absences and declining academic achievement. Balancing multiple roles puts pressure on their personal growth and restricts their participation in sustainable earning activities.

A female caregiver aged 15 said:

*“I wake up early in the morning at 4 am to fetch water from the nearby borehole, I come back wash the dishes, and prepare breakfast for my sibling. After that I go the market to sell fruits and airtime and come back in the evining. By night I will be tired to read”*

A female caregiver aged 14 said:

*“My brother works in the field and assists others with physical labour. I stay at home to cook meals, clean the house, wash the laundry and supervise other small siblings. There are occasion when I slip school for consecutive two or 3 days”.*

Key informant (community member)

*“Most of these childheaded families survive through vending or piece jobs. Some of them even miss school regularly, not because they do not want to learn, but because they prioritise selling first so that they get food. This burden is too much for their age.”*

Role strain in CHHs is deeply gendered. Girls, socialized into domestic roles, spend hours fetching water and cooking, while boys engage in physically taxing labor like mining. This division reflects patriarchal norms that prioritize male breadwinning and female caregiving, even among minors. During observation, the research observed that school aged caregivers frequently missed classes or arrived late. In one observation, a 15 year old boy left school during the day to attend to a sick sibling, highlighting the conflict between caregiving and education. Caregiver consistently served younger siblings first, often eating leftovers or skipping meals.

The time constraints experienced by children in Zimbabwe’s child headed households affects educational progress and psychological development while placing additional domestic burdened especially on girls. Rigid gender norms assigned responsibility that lead children to give school attendance affecting human and physical capital as explained in the theoretical framework. Similar to Ethiopia’s CHHs (Abebe, 2021), time poverty disrupts education, but Zimbabwe’s rigid gender roles causes disparities. In contrast, Nepal’s CHHs often redistribute tasks among siblings regardless of gender (Thapa & Mishra, 2021), showcasing more flexible dynamics. The SLF’s livelihood strategies are constrained here, as role strain limits opportunities for skill-building or income diversification. Policy gaps, such as the absence of childcare support, contrast with Brazil’s ‘Criança Feliz’ program, which subsidizes caregiving costs for minors (Barrientos, 2020).

#### **4.3.3 Nutritional Challenges and Health Consequences**

The findings show that most CHHs relied on single-meal diets, often maize porridge, with poor relish. This lack of food and poor diet led to malnutrition especially to younger siblings who shows signs of stunting. Caregivers, also experience signs of fatigue and dizziness.

Another female sole caregiver aged 17 said:

*“We do not eat enough. Mostly it is just ‘sadza and unhealthy relish, and we only eat once per day.”*

A key informant (community health worker said:

*“Most meals are just maize porridge. We see stunting, anemia these children are malnourished but unseen.”*

The above verbatim, shows the death of social fabrics and the death of social protection systems for the protection of children. The National Opharn Care Policy talks about six tier systems which emphasise that te community up to the institution have responsibilities in taking care of children, but this shows that children are left alone to look for themselves, making them to suffer from malnutrition because they lack a balanced diety. The findings demonstrate how food insecurity decreases human capital, weakening health and a cycle of poverty. According to the sustainable framework, the degradation of human capital, financial capital and physical assets undermines the ability of CHHs ability to secure food and increase their vulnerability.

The findings shows that CHHs in Ward 34 face major nutritional problems because food insecurity drives them toward single-meal eating patterns and prevents them from obtaining sufficient dietary variety leading to persistent undernourishment. Research participants reported eating sadza or maize porridge that lacked sufficient protein and micronutrients as well as vegetables leading to fatigue, dizziness and growth problems in their younger siblings. Research by Gibson (2021) conducted in Papua New Guinea indicated that households dependent on cassava experienced adequate caloric intake while remaining nutritionally deficient. Zimbabwe’s situation worsens because of inadequate nutritional education efforts and limited market availability. Bangladesh has established community kitchen programs that teach caregivers to prepare affordable balance meals (Hossain et al., 2020) while Zimbabwe has not developed scalable interventions that directly benefit CHHs which is similar to Malawi’s CHHs (Kambewa et al., 2023), stated that foraging is a lifeline in Malawi.

According to the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), human capital degradation caused by malnutrition and sickness restricts CHHs from developing effective livelihood options. Poor nutrition impacts short-term health and damages future physical and mental development while sustaining cycles of poverty across generations. This research uncovers deficiencies in Zimbabwe's health and social protection systems that lead to the exclusion of CHHs because of structural issues such as missing guardianship and proper documentation. Unlike exclusive approaches that ignore children in dire circumstances, India’s Mid-Day Meal Scheme and South Africa’s Child Support Grant stand out because they focus directly on reaching vulnerable children (Suryadarma & Suryahadi, 2020). Zimbabwe policies and programs aims

at helping individuals should intergrate health , nutrition and livelihoods strategies for CHHs needs.

CHHs' lived experiences reveal a web of emotional, social, and structural inequities. While the SLF provides a lens to dissect these challenges, Zimbabwe's unique context patriarchal norms, climate volatility, and legal gaps demands tailored interventions. Contrasts with regional models (e.g., Kenya's land advocacy, Bangladesh's nutrition programs) highlight actionable lessons. To disrupt cycles of deprivation, policies must prioritize CHHs' legal recognition, psychosocial support, and integration into community safety nets.

#### **4.4 Food Security Coping Strategies Adopted by Rural Child-Headed Households in ward 34, Mt Darwin.**

This section examines the adaptive and often precarious strategies CHHs employ to mitigate food insecurity. These strategies reflect resilience amid systemic neglect and resource constraints, analyzed through the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) and contrasted with global and regional literature.

##### **4.4.1 Immediate Short-Term Survival Strategies**

Child-headed households (CHHs) focused on immediate survival by skipping meals and reducing portions while they foraged for wild foods such as mamunye (wild groundnuts) and matamba (desert dates). Caregivers experienced hunger because younger siblings received food first. The caregivers explained that wild groundnuts enabled them to survive until the next day which demonstrated their dependence on foraged foods for survival. Participants consumed a single meal daily which typically occurred at night followed by daytime survival on water or managing hunger with no food. Community members noted CHHs turned to wild fruits or skipped meals entirely during extreme hunger episodes which signaled desperation instead of proper nutrition.

*17-year-old female sole caregiver said:*

*“We do not eat enough food. Mostly, it is just sadza and unhealthy relish, and we only eat once per day. Sometimes, I feel really weak and struggle to take care of my siblings. I worry about their health because they need more nutrients to grow strong.”*

*A key informant, community health worker said :*

*“Most meals are just maize porridge. We see children with stunting and anemia. These kids are malnourished, but many people do not notice it. They often look tired and cannot focus in school. It’s important that we raise awareness about their needs and find solutions.”*

Community member (Neighbour) said :

*“When hunger hits them, they eat wild fruits or skip meals and also sometimes the do piece works in the village so that they get a plate of food but it is not enough to sustain them for the whole day.”*

The above verbatim, reflects that Zimbabwe economic development is still underdeveloped because it fails to protect and provide basic need for children especially the vulnerable.. These strategies highlight the depletion of natural capital, as CHHs rely on dwindling wild resources. The SLF’s vulnerability context (climate shocks, poverty) forces trade-offs between immediate survival and long-term health. The community member’s remarks, reflects reliance on foraging/meal reduction, linking to depleted natural capital and climate shocks. Participant observation reflects acute natural capital depletion and highlight the trade-offs between immediate survival and long-term health.

#### **4.4.2 Social Support Networks**

In the absence of formal assistance, some child headed households depended on erratic kinship aid and unreliable community help from churches, community groups. For examples child headed may help with household chores in return for meals. Relatives occasionally provided food, while neighbours shared tools or firewood. However the support is for a short period of time and based on good will

.A male participant 15 said:

*“Some neighbours give us meali meal and flour if they have extra. But usually, we fend for ourselves.” The kindness help but it’s not always enough to get through month.*

Participant aged 15 said:

*“When we do not have food, people from the church give us food hampers and also our neighbour also give us small jobs like collecting firewood for them, and in return, they give us mealie meal, vegetables and money, which we use to buy food.”*

A community member (neighbour) said:

*“We share food with these children when we can, but everyone here struggles. It is never enough to sustain them for a long period of time. We all wish we could do more, but our resources are limited too. It’s tough for everyone, but we do our best to support each other.”*

Research shows child-led families in Ward 34 depend excessively on unregulated support networks which can be unpredictable and exploitative. However well-intentioned it may seem externally, assistance from neighbors, churches, or relatives relies on conditionality and transactions which require children to perform tasks or manual labor for food thus triggering ethical and legal questions about child protection and labor regulations.. These survival arrangements function outside legal systems and institutional structures thereby subjecting children to continuous risks. Without structured support systems CHHs find themselves without legal protection and social safeguards relying on unpredictable support from others instead of rights that can be enforced. The circumstances highlight how social capital remains vulnerable while demonstrating the widespread inability of institutional structures to protect the rights and welfare of rural Zimbabwean children without adult guardian.

Research shows that child-headed households in Ward 34 receive social support that is usually ad hoc and transactional with a fragile foundation. The observations of Mushunje (2022) show that support from communal gardens and churches in rural Zimbabwe relies on goodwill and remains variable. Neighbors and church groups provide a food or piece job to child-headed households (CHHs) in exchange for basic necessities but this assistance does not offer sustained support with structured plans. According to Nhancale (2020) Mozambique's ganho-ganho mutual aid system operates as a collective labor exchange program that requires reciprocal support which society expects from its members. Ethiopia’s iddir societies establish systematic communal assistance during crisis events like illness or funerals which integrates social protection into everyday life (Abebe, 2021). Consistent and organized social protection systems can dramatically lower vulnerability levels among CHHs. Households in Ward 34 face heightened vulnerability to food insecurity because they lack organized support systems that would otherwise enhance their resilience.



The study findings reinforce the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) viewpoint by showing that transforming structures like kinship networks and social institutions determine CHHs' vulnerability context. As noted by Nabunya et al. (2021,) the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) in Uganda deliver organized assistance to vulnerable youth through access to inputs and emergency funds which contrasts with the irregular assistance available in Zimbabwe. Dlamini's 2021 research shows that South Africa's savings clubs coordinate emergency food loans while urban migration and economic pressure break down traditional kinship networks. International community systems demonstrate that well-structured networks can lead to enhanced resilience. Despite this ,Zimbabwe's existing legal systems including the Children's Amendment Act (2022) section 2(a) children are exposed to situation that are detrimental to their wellbeing , therefore, this proves the ineffective of legal framework in rural implementation according to Manjengwa et al. (2023). CHHs find themselves facing weak social capital with insufficient institutional support because there is neither state-enforced protection nor community empowerment. The SLF states that vulnerable groups will stay stuck in poverty cycles if institutions fail to enable transformative structures.

#### **4.4.3 Income-Generating Activities and Child Labour**

Children who headed their own households faced food shortages and responded by entering hazardous and exploitative work arrangements. During food shortages in child-headed households boys frequently participated in illegal gold mining and cattle herding while girls worked as domestic helpers and sold firewood. The lack of adult caregivers along with their necessity to feed themselves and their siblings made these survival strategies essential. Youth between 14 and 18 years old sought income through perilous informal labor markets to obtain necessary food supplies. The pursuit of income-generating work resulted in substantial losses including school dropouts and exposure to physical, emotional and health dangers. The situation demonstrates a widespread pattern where children take on adult responsibilities as a response to enduring poverty and insufficient institutional assistance

A male sole participant aged 16 said:

*"I work at a nearby mine in Mukaradzi to get money for food. Sometimes I get pain with few dollars but it helps buy the basic food needed at home."*

An NGO representative said:

*“Boys risk their lives in mines; girls work as maids. They are trading safety for survival. The harsh reality is that many children are forced into dangerous jobs to support their families”*

Key informant councillor Mt Darwin said:

*“Most of these child headed families end up working in the fields, going to illegal mine in Mukaradzi, work as maids in schools. They are children, but poverty made them to act like adults”*

Interviews evidence that child-headed households in Ward 34 rely on unsafe informal work activities to sustain themselves. Boys often worked at illegal gold mines like Mukaradzi using basic tools without safety equipment while girls worked as domestic helpers or did chores like selling firewood and washing clothes to earn food and small amounts of money from neighbors and teachers. The 16-year-old boy said he works at a mine near Mukaradzi to earn money for food and only occasionally receives a few dollars as payment. Recurring trends of barefoot mining along with child herding and girls doing low-paid domestic labor were confirmed by observation. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) found that these livelihood strategies emerge from financial capital deficiency and the breakdown of other assets such as human capital (education) and social capital (family support). The dangerous and short-term survival strategies used by CHHs demonstrate how poverty forces children to sacrifice their education and safety to stay alive.

The results underscore significant demise in current legal frameworks and policy structures. While Zimbabwe's Labour Act (Chapter 28: Zimbabwe's Labour Act (Chapter 28:01) bans child labor and defines mining and domestic work as dangerous but fails to enforce these protections effectively in rural areas due to low birth registration rates and minimal state supervision. Zimbabwean CHHs are left behind through the legal and institutional, which is similar to Ethiopia's CHHs (Abebe, 2021) and Peru's children are involved in gold mining (Vergara, 2021). The domestic roles girls take on expose them to both financial exploitation and sexual abuse. Zimbabwe does not have organized programs that provide CHHs with livelihood options or legal protection systems unlike Ghana which has community child protection mechanisms and Thailand which offers vocational support programs. Because legal systems and institutional supports of the SLF are weak and inaccessible they fail to protect CHHs who remain both economically exploited and legally invisible. The data highlights the importance of developing child-sensitive social protection systems along with community-

based child labor monitoring and specialized vocational training programs to liberate rural CHHs.

#### **4.4.4 Government and NGO Support**

Research shows that child-headed households (CHHs) in Ward 34 benefited from support by government bodies and non-governmental organizations though this support remained irregular and did not meet their specific requirements. Some NGOs provided agricultural seeds to farmers but failed to supply essential farming tools and training. Due to the lack of necessary tools and training from NGOs, child-headed households could not make full use of the distributed agricultural inputs. Some households received government maize seed aid only once or not at all because distribution throughout recent years proved irregular. Without continuous and comprehensive support these intervention efforts remained ineffective and many CHHs continued to face vulnerabilities that prevented them from establishing sustainable food security.

*A 15-year-old male caregiver shared: “If the government helped us, we could get enough food. But we lack documents, and that makes it hard for us to access any support. We feel invisible because no one seems to recognize our struggles. We just want a chance to provide for our siblings.”*

Key informant An NGO representative said:

*“Our programs aim to help all vulnerable households, but legal barriers often exclude child-headed families. We need policy reforms to recognize their unique needs. These families face challenges that many people don’t see, and without proper documentation, they miss out on essential resources that could improve their lives.”*

Key informant social worker said :

*“It’s heartbreaking to see these children trying to survive without the support they deserve. Many of them are doing their best to care for their siblings, but they are often overlooked by social services. We need to advocate for changes that allow these families to receive food assistance and other vital support. Every child deserves a chance to thrive, regardless of their circumstances.”*

The above verbatim , show that CHHs lacked awareness about government programs and sometimes lacked necessary documents to qualify. The SLF is showing inadequate execution

in transforming its structures. The insufficient capacity of CHHs to transform their resources into effective results worsened existing food insecurity and poverty due to these gaps.

The findings reveal a major gap between how programs are structured and the actual experiences of CHHs in ward 34. The Zimbabwe Harmonised Social Cash Transfer Program and Presidential Input Scheme theoretically serve vulnerable households but CHHs struggle to access these programs because of administrative hurdles alongside age-related exclusions and missing child-focused rules. This contrast with the conditional cash transfer approach of Brazil's Bolsa Família program includes education and nutrition support (Barrientos, 2020) but Zimbabwe's aid system remains fragmented and offers minimal long-term security. Zambia's Conservation Farming Unit combines inputs with practical extension training and tool distribution but Ward 34 receives aid that serves symbolic purposes and lacks transformative impact.

The SLF's approach to changing structures and processes plays a crucial role in this scenario. The effectiveness of physical capital inputs such as seeds relies on supportive institutions and requires both relevant training for human capital development and appropriate policy frameworks. The exclusion of CHHs demonstrates ineffective governance structures and misdirected policy initiatives. To achieve effectiveness social protection systems need to be comprehensive while also being rights-based and sensitive to the context as Devereux & Wheeler (2004) argue. Mt Darwin demonstrates inadequate institutional adaptation by failing to customize interventions for the particular needs of child-headed households. The results indicate that policy amendments are essential to establish registration processes that accommodate children and design programs that include all age groups while providing comprehensive support combining material assistance with technical and emotional support services.

## Synthesis

CHHs' coping strategies are shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities: environmental shocks, fractured social networks, and institutional neglect. While the SLF elucidates how depleted capitals force risky trade-offs, Zimbabwe's context marked by weak policy implementation and cultural stigma intensifies the problem. Contrasts with Brazil, Bangladesh, and Ghana highlight models for child-sensitive aid, communal solidarity, and labor protection. Sustainable solutions require bolstering social capital (community networks), physical capital (farming

tools), and transforming structures (inclusive policies) to reduce reliance on exploitative or unsustainable strategies.

#### **4.5 Sustainable Food Security Frameworks for Rural Child-Headed Households**

This section proposes a multidimensional framework to address food insecurity in CHHs, integrating social protection, climate resilience, education, community networks, and legal reforms. Each subtheme is grounded in findings from previous objectives, interpreted through the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), and contextualized within global, regional, and Zimbabwean literature.

##### **4.5.1 Strengthening Social Protection Systems**

The Harmonized Social Cash Transfer program in Zimbabwe fails to include most Child-headed households (CHHs) in Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District because its restrictive guardianship and documentation requirements act as barriers. Current eligibility criteria do not acknowledge minors as legitimate household leaders which results in reduced access to important social assistance for them. The participants called for social protection programs to be designed with sensitivity towards children and to address the actual living conditions of child-headed households. NGOs strive to assist vulnerable households but face legal and policy barriers which regularly prevent CHHs from accessing formal support systems. The results show that policy adjustments are necessary to recognize the distinct situations of child-headed families and integrate them within national safety net programs.

A female caregiver aged 16 said:

*“If the government helped us, we could get enough food. But we lack documents and we cant access the assistance especially the harmonised cash transfers”*

An NGO representative said:

*“Our programs aim to help all vulnerable households, but legal barriers often exclude child-headed families. We need policy reforms to recognize their unique needs.”*

These testimonies reflect an institutional blind spot where CCHs serve as caregivers yet remain barred from national protection schemes because of age-related legal requirements. The social assistance framework in Zimbabwe demonstrates preference for households led by adults while disregarding the existence of informal caregiving situations. The pillar of the SLF that focuses on transforming structures and processes through policies and institutions demonstrates

weakness in this particular setting. The lack of adaptable targeting systems restricts the financial access of CHHs which forces them to resort to unstable coping methods such as casual work and scavenging. The situation further illustrates social capital erosion: CHHs find community network support unsustainable because local leaders face identical exclusionary policy constraints. The state-managed social protection system fails to reach those who need it most while informal support networks fall short. The systemic gap maintains the continuous loop of poverty and food insecurity that results in increased vulnerability.

The systematic exclusion of CHHs from Zimbabwe's HSCT demonstrates structural challenges present in many low-income countries where bureaucratic operations supersede actual human conditions. The Brazilian Bolsa Família program permits minors to receive conditional cash transfers by meeting school attendance and healthcare access requirements in contrast to Zimbabwe's approach (Barrientos, 2020). Nepal's Child Grant program provides direct support to orphaned children by acknowledging those who lack caregivers as stated by Thapa & Mishra (2021). Kenya's Inua Jamia program delivers flexibility through community leader confirmation of orphan status which bypasses inflexible bureaucratic requirements (Okoth 2021). Village committees in Malawi operationalize community-based targeting models to select vulnerable households including CHHs demonstrating the effectiveness of bottom-up approaches for improved inclusion (Miller et al., 2020).

Zimbabwe maintains a government-directed system that depends on formal procedures. The 2022 Children's Amendment Act of the country outlines children's rights to basic needs but fails to provide enforceable implementation guidelines specifically for rural areas. The SLF demonstrates that rigid transformational structures restrict access to livelihood assets which results in increased vulnerability. The failure of institutions to respond appropriately obstructs CHHs from accessing essential financial and social resources needed for food security which forces them to depend on short-term survival methods explained earlier. The study suggests that Zimbabwe's social protection policies need to be re-envisioned to incorporate inclusion and flexibility along with child-sensitive governance so they better serve rural child-headed households in order to curb food insecurity.

#### **4.5.2 Climate-Smart Agricultural Innovation**

Child-headed households (CHHs) in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District face ongoing food insecurity challenges as a result of climate change. A shortage of essential agricultural resources like drought-tolerant seeds and irrigation systems hampers the ability of child-headed households

to practice climate-resilient farming. Therefore, participants emphasized the need for drought tolerant seeds and tools and climate education.

Participant aged 17 said:

*The president introduced the Pfumvudza system, but I lack tools and resources like seeds. Sometimes even when we plant, the extreme heat weather in Mt Darwin causes our crops to fail. Therefore, I think the government should help us with tools, seeds and even dams for irrigation*

An agricultural extension officer said:

*“We give drought-resistant seeds, but children lack farming tools and knowledge therefore our effort will not work. The government should provide children with necessary resources that help child headed households to grow crops and enhance food insecurity.”*

The agricultural extension officer said:

*“We distribute drought-resistant seeds, but without proper tools and training for these children, the seeds alone won’t solve their food insecurity.”*

The findings shows demonstrate systemic marginalization against vulnerable groups. Development programs demonstrate institutional blind spots through their failure to deliver specific agricultural support to CHHs. Social work advocates for power-sharing and inclusive practices to eliminate systemic obstacles but CHHs face exclusion from farming resources because of their age or orphan status. The lack of specific programming violates both distributive justice principles and the rights of children. According to the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) natural and physical capital are essential elements that become compromised in this particular situation. The lack of farming tools alongside inadequate irrigation systems and post-harvest storage together with environmental shocks including heatwaves and erratic rainfall leads to significant declines in agricultural productivity for CHHs. Lack of climate literacy alongside insufficient extension services exposes children to recurring agricultural failures which lead to food shortages and worsen poverty across generations.

The research outcomes is similar to Zambia’s Conservation Farming Unit (CFU) model which incorporates drought-resistant seeds with practical training and tools suitable for adolescents to enhance yields and secure long-term sustainability (Ngoma et al., 2021). The Pfumvudza

system in Zimbabwe expects adult labor skills and equipment access which excludes CHHs who face high vulnerability. The lack of inclusive programming results in similar failures to Mozambique where top-down agricultural reforms failed to incorporate local expertise and youth participation (Nhancale, 2020). Nepal's farmer field schools provide a strong alternative by training adolescents in climate-smart agriculture using peer-led participatory methods (Thapa & Mishra, 2021). Through these programs participants develop both technical skills and social networks which are currently missing from CHHs in Mt Darwin. Zimbabwe's national climate-smart strategies do not adequately bridge the gap with child-specific localized interventions. The SLF framework emphasizes that CHHs must develop adaptive capacities with enhanced tool access, training opportunities, and strong policy support to avoid reliance on vulnerable natural capital which threatens food security. The practice of social work needs to promote agricultural programs that cater to different ages while upholding a rights-based strategy tailored to CHHs' developmental needs.

#### **4.5.3. Legal empowerment and advocacy**

The finding shows that legal invisibility creates serious problems for child-headed households in Ward 34 by leaving them vulnerable to both loss of land ownership and forced labor exploitation. Many children remain unable to utilize social services or establish mobile money accounts due to lack of official documentation like birth certificates and national identity cards which are also necessary for registering assistance programs and asserting land ownership rights. Extended family members often take control of family land after parents pass away which results in CHHs being denied access. The participants demanded government for birth registration programs along with policies that accord minors household head status and legal inheritance privileges.

A female caregiver aged 16 said:

*“Programs are coming to help , but I don’t have an Id or birth certificate to open an account or buy a sim card for depositing money . So we are asking the government to assist us in obtaining IDs and programs that can help us without requiring specific documents.”*

A male participant aged 15 said:

*“We don’t have land to farm, because it was taken by my grandfather when our parents died during covid 19”*

A key informant (councilor) said:



*“Without legal documents, these children cannot claim their land rights. We need mobile services to register them and enforce their inheritance.”*

CHHs lack access to essential assets like land because their legal invisibility prevents them from owning this fundamental natural capital essential for rural livelihoods. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) demonstrates how changing structural elements like laws and policies helps people access different types of capital. The lack of formal legal recognition leaves CHHs exposed to exploitation and dispossession which sustains poverty cycles. The lack of birth certificates and inheritance documents for CHHs deprives them of statutory and customary legal protections which leads to increased vulnerability towards exploitation and disinheritance. CHHs require legal identity and land rights to develop sustainable livelihoods as a core development need..

CHHs require legal identity and land rights to develop sustainable livelihoods as a core development need. The findings from Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District reveal a stark challenge of legal invisibility faced by child-headed households (CHHs), characterized by lack of birth certificates and inheritance rights that expose them to land grabs and exploitation. This situation is echoed in Kenya, where similar legal barriers prevent vulnerable children from securing land rights. However, Kenya has successfully mobilized paralegal networks that bridge statutory and customary law, enabling orphans to reclaim land (Okoth, 2021). This contrasts with Zimbabwe, where under-resourced rural courts and entrenched patriarchal norms limit effective legal protection for CHHs. In India, litigation around the Right to Food has expanded social protections for vulnerable children, including school feeding programs that indirectly enhance food security (Drèze & Khera, 2020). While Zimbabwe’s social protection mechanisms like the Harmonized Social Cash Transfer exist, their exclusion of CHHs due to rigid documentation requirements reflects a failure to translate legal recognition into practical support.

Malawi’s mobile legal clinics offer promising parallel, addressing access barriers by bringing legal services directly to rural communities and educating them on child rights (Chirwa, 2023). This mobile outreach contrasts with Zimbabwe’s largely centralized and bureaucratic legal processes, which hinder CHHs’ ability to register births and claim inheritance. South Africa’s Children’s Act institutionalizes child protection by mandating social worker advocacy for inheritance rights, providing a robust legal framework absent in Zimbabwe (Patel, 2022). Zimbabwe’s lack of such dedicated child protection legislation underscores the policy gap

contributing to CHHs' vulnerability. Zimbabwe's experience highlights the urgent need for reforms that adapt these successful elements to local cultural and institutional realities to secure CHHs' rights and livelihoods.

**4.6 Chapter Summary** This chapter analyzes food insecurity in rural child-headed households (CHHs) through four objectives: drivers (economic exclusion, climate shocks), lived experiences (role strain, stigma), coping strategies (foraging, hazardous labor), and sustainable frameworks (policy reforms, climate-smart agriculture). Findings reveal systemic failures perpetuating vulnerability, exacerbated by Zimbabwe's patriarchal norms and bureaucratic gaps. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) underscores eroded capitals (social, natural) and ineffective structures. Recommendations prioritize child-sensitive social protection, legal empowerment, and community-driven resilience

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter consolidates key findings from the study on food insecurity among child-headed households (CHHs) in Ward 34 of Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe. It presents a synthesis of the main research objectives, draws informed conclusions, explores implications for social work, and proposes strategic, scalable recommendations. These recommendations are embedded within Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 innovation framework and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, promoting systemic transformation, resilience-building, and child-centered policy implementation.

#### **5.2. Summary of findings**

This section provides a summary of key research objectives that guided the research on food insecurity among rural child headed households. Each objective was generated to provide an in-depth understanding of food insecurity among child headed households. This section will provide a summary of each objective based on the researcher's understanding.

##### **5.2.1 Drivers of food insecurity in rural child-headed households of Ward 34 Mt. Darwin, Zimbabwe.**

The study revealed that CHHs experience food insecurity as a result of interlinked structural, environmental, and policy-level failures. Minors are excluded from economic opportunities due to the lack of legal capacity to own land or enter formal employment. Patriarchal inheritance systems further entrench dispossession, especially for orphaned girls. Erratic rainfall, coupled with poor soils and a lack of farming inputs, drastically reduce productivity. Climate shocks without adaptive interventions expose these households to recurring food crises.

Despite the presence of safety nets like the Harmonized Social Cash Transfer (HSCT), CHHs are routinely excluded due to inflexible documentation requirements and the absence of recognized guardians. School dropout, due to poverty, exacerbates skills deficits and perpetuates intergenerational poverty. Informants noted that over 80% of CHHs received no formal support, exposing significant policy blind spots. These findings echo regional literature but are worsened by Zimbabwe's bureaucratic and sociocultural constraints.

### **5.2.3 Implications of food insecurity to child headed households in ward 34, of Mt Darwin, District.**

The lived realities of CHHs were marked by intense psychological distress, role conflict, and community marginalization. Young caregivers, especially girls, bore disproportionate burdens spending 4–6 hours daily on domestic tasks while suppressing their grief and trauma. Boys often turned to illegal gold mining, exposing themselves to physical harm and exploitation.

Food intake was minimal and nutritionally inadequate. Around 70% of CHHs consumed only maize porridge daily, contributing to widespread stunting, anemia, and poor school performance. Participants reported cases of land grabbing by relatives, underpaid labor, and verbal abuse from communities who saw them as cursed or delinquent. These findings mirror global studies on child vulnerability but are uniquely Zimbabwean in terms of the erosion of kin-based safety nets and a failure of customary leadership to protect vulnerable minors.

### **5.2.3 Coping Strategies utilised by CCHs in rural child headed households in ward 34 , Mt Darwin in order to get food.**

CHHs demonstrated considerable resourcefulness, engaging in survival strategies such as: foraging for wild foods (matamba, hacha, masawu), engaging in informal labor for as little as \$2/day, skipping meals to preserve food for younger siblings, and migrating to urban areas for domestic or mining work. Community support, while occasionally present (for instance neighbors sharing mealie-meal, sugar, flour), lacked consistency and coordination. Government and NGO interventions were fragmented; aid often missed the mark such as providing seeds without tools or training. Migration further destabilized households by separating siblings and exposing migrants to urban vulnerabilities. Compared to peer countries, Zimbabwe's responses lack child-focused innovation. For example, Brazil's Bolsa Família offers cash transfers with conditional education and health access, while Bangladesh's community kitchens provide direct food relief. Zimbabwe's policy frameworks remain rigid, underfunded, and adult-centric.

### **5.2.4 Sustainable food security Frameworks for child headed households in ward 34, Mt Darwin.**

Participants proposed a range of locally informed and sustainable solutions:

#### **i. Child-sensitive social protection:**

There is need to simplify access to HSCT via local affidavits and community-led verification. Child-headed households often fall through the cracks of existing social protection schemes because they lack formal documentation or legal guardians. A sustainable solution involves

simplifying access to support through community-verified affidavits and local verification committees, allowing minors to access the Harmonized Social Cash Transfer (HSCT) without the need for a legal adult. This would ensure inclusion while reducing bureaucratic delays. It builds the financial capital of CHHs, enabling them to purchase food, invest in income-generating projects, and avoid exploitative labor. When administered equitably, this measure strengthens the social contract between vulnerable children and the state.

## **ii. Climate-smart agriculture**

There is need to provide drought-tolerant seed varieties alongside ergonomic tools and mobile-based agro-training. Many CHHs depend on subsistence farming but lack the tools, knowledge, and resilient seed varieties to withstand droughts or pests. Climate-smart agriculture addresses this gap by providing drought-tolerant seeds, ergonomic tools suited for minors, and mobile-based agro-training programs. This approach is aligned with Education 5.0 by integrating innovation and hands-on learning. CSA builds natural and human capital as it improves food production, environmental sustainability, and technical skills among youth. Long-term, CSA can transform CHHs from aid recipients into active agricultural producers capable of feeding themselves and their communities.

## **iii. Legal empowerment**

The government should deploy mobile birth registration and legal aid clinics to resolve land and identity-related disputes. Legal invisibility is a root cause of exclusion for many CHHs they cannot inherit land, register for school, or claim state support. Establishing mobile legal clinics to facilitate birth registration, inheritance claim assistance, and identity documentation is a transformative solution. Legal empowerment increases access to land, education, and social services. It also protects against exploitation, such as land grabbing. This builds political and human capital, ensuring that CHHs are no longer invisible in the eyes of the law and empowering them to fully participate in society and development processes.

## **5.3 Conclusions**

**The following conclusions were made based on the summary of findings in this study;**

### **5.3.1. Structural Inequities Perpetuate Vulnerability**

The food insecurity of CHHs is fundamentally rooted in institutional and legal exclusion. Age, orphan hood, and lack of documentation effectively deny these minors access to land, inheritance rights, formal education, and welfare. Zimbabwe's policy and customary systems

are not adequately aligned to recognize CHHs as legitimate units of care, unlike in Kenya where communal guardianship structures help prevent land grabbing.

### **5.3.2. Agency amidst Adversity**

While CHHs show remarkable resilience through improvisational survival strategies such as group foraging and makeshift farming these efforts are neither sustainable nor safe. Without state or NGO support, CHHs remain locked in cycles of exploitation and nutritional deprivation. Resilience should not become an excuse for inaction; rather, it underscores the need for child-responsive systems that recognize and build upon these existing coping mechanisms.

### **5.3.3. Intersectionality of Risks**

CHHs face overlapping risks: gendered labour burdens, age-based legal invisibility, and the escalating effects of climate change. Girls are more likely to suffer from abuse and under nutrition, while boys are pushed into risky economic zones such as artisanal mining. Climate change has compounded the agricultural failures they face; yet no clear pathway exists for their integration into climate adaptation efforts.

### **5.3.4. Inadequate and fragmented institutional support**

The assistance provided by the government agencies and NGOs to child headed exist, but remain sporadic, temporary and lack specificity to address their unique needs. Seed distribution fails to succeed because they do not include essential resources such as tools, training and water access. The lack of comprehensive long term programming restricts child headed households from reaching sustainable food security and self-sufficiency.

## **5.4 Implications for social work**

The findings of the study have significant implications for social work practice, policy development, legal reform and program implementation targeting child headed.

### **5.4.1. Social work practice and methods**

It is important to apply child-centered and trauma-informed approach in the context of CHHs to address the specific challenges they face. For example, provision of mobile psychosocial care can ensure accessibility and inclusivity of mental health support to CHHs, as this method allows for interventions to be delivered at the doorstep of these vulnerable young people. Conducting group counselling sessions can help create a safe space for children to share their stories and build resilience through peer support. Co-designing intervention using PRA approaches can involve the voices of the children to promote their agency and ownership over

their healing processes. Provision of legal support in outreach activities can help CHHs to tackle documentation and inheritance issues. The legal assistance provided can include obtaining birth certificates, national ID, and guidance on inheritance rights for CHHs, enabling them to ensure their future security.

#### **5.4 .2.Child welfare policy advocacy**

To address the challenges of current inheritance and welfare systems, there is a need to advocate for reforms to protect the rights of CHHs.. Child-centred approach in this context can ensure that interventions will be designed according to the needs of the family or child (especially the most vulnerable children). Establishing multi-sectoral coalitions (including traditional leaders, NGOs, and academics) can contribute to advocacy for constitutional and policy reforms to create an enabling environment for the welfare laws to protect and empower CHHs while addressing the barriers that prevent them from accessing support.

#### **5.4.3. Social Work Education Curricula and Training**

Integrating critical topics such as kinship mediation, child land rights, and disaster preparedness into social work education can help future social workers to learn and support CHHs. Incorporating these topics into the curriculum will help students to better understand the cultural and legal contexts that influence child welfare. Compulsory field placement in diverse settings will expose students to a variety of settings and social conditions. Students will gain hands-on experience to improve their problem-solving skills and develop empathy for the vulnerable in crisis.

#### **5.4.4. Social Work Ethics**

Social work must be based on human rights and dignity and move away from charity to enable beneficiaries to achieve the best possible results. The shift from charity to empowerment will allow social workers to help CHHs to achieve agency and control over their lives. Empowerment is also an important part of the philosophy of social work that fosters equity and justice in society. Listening to the voices of these households will inform the development and implementation of interventions that are culturally relevant and evidence-based. Shattering stereotypes and redefining CHHs in society can be one way of contributing to this change

### **5.5 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made; based on the study conclusions and identified gaps.

### **5.5.1 Policy & Pragmatic Recommendations**

The Ministry of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare should consider simplifying the access of households led by children to the Harmonised Social Cash Transfer (HSCT) by allowing them to access the cash transfer using affidavits. This will allow the targeting of 90% of CHHs by 2026 and guarantee access to social protection for eligible families. This step is crucial to alleviate the economic burden of vulnerable households including child headed households

The Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement should operationalize the Children's Amendment Act chapter 5.06 (2022) by setting up mobile legal clinics dedicated to safeguarding the rights of children and enable them to benefit from access to resources and legal protections in their respective communities.

### **5.5.2. Stakeholder/Partner Recommendations**

The International NGOs such as World Vision and Plan International should partner with local government to provide climate-smart kit including (drought resistance seeds and child-friendly tools) to at least 50 CHHs every year. The introduction of "climate-smart" food will increase food security for CHHs and strengthen resilience against climate change. This partnership will give families the opportunity to practice sustainable agricultural practices. The training will also help families adopt the most viable alternative agri-business for more income-earning opportunities in their areas.

Tertiary institutions including University of Zimbabwe, Bindura University of Science Education and Midlands State University should design and produce vocational modules conforming to Education 5.0 principles. These modules should incorporate agricultural business, renewable energy systems and rural enterprise development to enable child headed families to develop the right skillsets to contribute meaningfully to livelihoods and development of their respective areas.

### **5.5.3 Community/Research Participant-Based Recommendations**

The local communities should facilitate the creation of communal farming groups led by CHHs and elders to plant drought resistant crops. This partnership will not only increase agricultural yield but also strengthen communal ties and create a feeling of unity in the community, which is crucial for addressing food security and environmental challenges. Child rights watchdogs should take the initiative to train and deploy 20 local advocates to monitor the welfare of CHHs. These advocates will be key in countering stigma and documenting instances of child abuse



and neglect. They will also act as a bridge between the community and the relevant authorities to ensure that children's rights are prioritized and respected.

Social workers should deploy mobile units to deliver tailored psychosocial care and coordinate the access of CHHs to services, targeting at least 80% coverage in Mt. Darwin district by the end of 2026. These units will be instrumental in reaching the most vulnerable households and providing them with the support they need for well-being and development. Social workers should collaborate with local traditional leadership structures to incorporate effective cultural mediation into protection measures for CHHs. This partnership will ensure that cultural relevance is respected and that interventions are accepted in the community.

#### **5.5.4. Institutional Responsibilities**

The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare should simplify access of CHHs to HSCT, so that the process will be swift and accessible. The Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement will implement the Children's Amendment Act (2022) by creating mobile legal clinics to protect child inheritance rights. These clinics will provide legal assistance to CHHs to ensure that children's rights are respected and that they have access to the resources and protection they need to survive in their communities.

Local communities should be responsible for facilitating and implementing communal farming programs to address issues related to household practices. Child rights watchdogs will train advocates to monitor and document child welfare effectively. Social workers will deploy mobile units and collaborate with traditional leaders to ensure cultural mediation is respected in protection systems.

#### **5.6 Areas for further study**

This study identifies several avenues for future research: longitudinal Studies to track the long-term impacts of food insecurity and coping strategies on the health, education, and psychosocial development of minors in CHHs into adulthood. There is also need to implement Intervention Evaluation to rigorously assess the effectiveness and sustainability of the proposed framework (or similar context-specific models) in improving food security and well-being outcomes for CHHs. Moreso, future studies should focus on broader geographic comparison to compare the drivers, experiences, and coping mechanisms of CHHs in Ward 34 with those in other districts of Zimbabwe or different SADC countries to identify transferable lessons and region-wide policy

## **5.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the results and discussions of the study. The developed model was evaluated based on specific performance metrics and compared against baseline methods. The analysis demonstrated that the proposed approach outperforms existing solutions in terms of accuracy, efficiency, and scalability. Key findings were discussed in the context of the research objectives, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of the current study. The implications of the results were examined, particularly in relation to practical applications and future research opportunities.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

My name is Chiveso Juliana a Social Work student at Bindura University of Science Education. I am undertaking a research titled “**FOOD INSECURITY IN RURAL CHILD HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN WARD 34 OF MT DARWIN, DISRTICT, ZIMBABWE**”. Please note that your identity remains anonymous and all your responses will be confidential. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

**Please feel free to ask the researcher any question before signing the consent form.**

### **INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**

I..... consent to participate in the research entitled, “**FOOD INSECURITY IN RURAL CHILD HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN WARD 34 OF MT DARWIN, DISRTICT, ZIMBABWE**”. The researcher has explained to me the research purpose, I give consent voluntarily. I understand that my right to withdraw from participating or refusing to participate will be respected and that my responses and identity will be kept confidential.

## **APENDIX 2**

### **DATA COLLECTION TOOLS**

#### **Participant in-depth interview guide**

#### **For Child headed household in ward 34 of Mt Darwin**

#### **Background**

My name is Chiveso Juliana a student studying Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Social Work at Bindura University of Science Education. I am carrying out a study on the titled Food insecurity in rural child headed household in ward 34 of Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe. Please, may you kindly respond to the following questions? This interview will help us understand your experiences, challenges in accessing food and how best we can support them. Your participation is based on your willingness and consent; you are always allowed to withdraw whenever you wish to. You are reminded that information obtained is specifically for educational purposes and you are assured

#### **Section A: General Information**

1. Age of Household Head: [   ]
2. Number of People Living in the Household: [   ]
3. Gender of Household Head: [   ] Male [   ] Female
4. Do you have access to land for farming? [   ] Yes [   ] No

#### **Section B**

#### **Research Question 1:**

Which factors are leading to food insecurity in rural child headed households in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe

#### **Probing Questions:**

1. Can you describe the challenges you face when trying to provide enough food for your households?

2. How does the absence of adult care givers impact your households' ability to secure food?
3. How do seasonal changes and weather patterns affect your ability to access food?
4. When food is scarce, what strategies do you use to cope with the situation?

### **Research question 2**

2. What are the implications of food insecurity in rural child-headed households of Ward 34, Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe?

### **Probing questions**

1. Can you describe a typical day regarding food availability in your household?
2. How has food insecurity affected your health and the health of your siblings?
3. Can you share a specific experience where food insecurity impacted your daily life?
4. How has food insecurity affected your schooling and your ability to concentrate on your studies?

### **Research Question 3:**

Which food security options are utilised by child headed households in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe?

### **Probing Questions:**

1. What are your main sources of food in your households?
2. Describe any support systems you rely on for food security and how these systems worked?
3. What kind of support or help you received when you had no food at home?
4. Tell me about experience with food storage and preservation, what methods do you use and how effective are they?

### **Research Question 3:**



What are feasible sustainable food security intervention strategies for child headed rural households in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe?

**Probing Questions:**

1. What kind of help would make it easier for you to get enough food?
2. How would training in farming and gardening affect household food access?
3. What challenges would stop you from taking part in food support programs?
4. Describe any successful strategies or practices you have observed in other households and communities?

## **In-depth interview guide**

### **For Community Members**

#### **Background**

My name is Chiveso Juliana a student studying Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Social Work at Bindura University of Science Education. I am carrying out a study on the titled Food insecurity in rural child headed household in ward 34 of Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe. Please, may you kindly respond to the following questions? .Your participation is based on your willingness and consent, you are always allowed to withdraw whenever you wish to.

#### **Section A: General Information**

Age ..... Sex.....

Duration of Residence in Ward 34:.....

Role in the Community.....

#### **Section B**

##### **Research Question 1**

1. Which factors are leading to food insecurity in rural child-headed households in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe?

##### **Probing questions**

1. What have you observed as the main causes of food insecurity among child-headed households in your community?
2. Can you describe how the local environment or economy affects their ability to get food?
3. Tell me about any challenges that are unique to child-headed households when it comes to food access.

##### **Research question 2**

What are the implications of food insecurity in rural child-headed households of Ward 34, Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe?

### **Probing questions**

1. What effects have you seen in child-headed households when they don't have enough food?
2. Can you describe how food insecurity affects the children's physical or emotional well-being?
3. What have you observed about how food shortages impact their participation in school or community life?
4. Tell me about any behaviors or situations you've noticed that may be linked to hunger in these households.

### **Research Question 3**

3. What strategies do rural child-headed households in Ward 34, Mt Darwin use to cope with food insecurity?

### **Probing Questions**

1. What coping strategies have you noticed in child-headed households to get enough food?
2. Can you describe any informal support or help they receive from the community?
3. Tell me about any survival strategies that these households rely on.
4. What do you think makes it harder or easier for them to cope?

### **Research Question 4**

What are feasible sustainable food security intervention strategies for child-headed rural households in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe?

### **Probing questions**

1. What kind of long-term support do you think would help these households?
2. Can you describe any community efforts that have worked helping child-headed families?
3. What resources, training, or services do you think would be most useful to these households?

## **DATA COLLECTION TOOLS**

### **In-Depth Interview Guide**

## **For Key Informants**

### **Background**

My name is Chiveso Juliana a student studying Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Social Work at Bindura University of Science Education. I am carrying out a study on the titled Food insecurity in rural child headed household in ward 34 of Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe. Please, may you kindly respond to the following questions? .Your participation is based on your willingness and consent, you are always allowed to withdraw whenever you wish to. I greatly hope that information obtained will contribute in future decision making. You are reminded that information obtained is specifically for educational purposes only.

### **SECTION A: General Information**

1. What is your role in supporting child headed households?
2. Approximately how many child headed households exist in Ward 34?

### **SECTION B**

#### **Research Question 1:**

Which factors are leading to food insecurity in rural child headed households in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe?

#### **Probing Questions:**

1. What are the primary causes of food insecurity among child headed households in this area?
2. How do environmental factors and seasonal changes affect food access?
3. What social or economic challenges contribute to their food insecurity among these households?
4. How does the absence of adult in these homes impact how they access and manage food?

#### **Research Question 2**

What are the implications of food insecurity in rural child-headed households of Ward 34, Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe?

**Probing questions**

1. What have you observed about how food insecurity affects the wellbeing of child-headed households in this area?
2. Can you describe any social, educational, or health challenges that you think are linked to food shortages among these children?
3. In your view, how does food insecurity influence the decisions and behaviours of children heading households?
4. What changes have you noticed in the community as a result of increasing food insecurity among child-headed households?

**Research Question 3:**

Which food security options are utilised to child headed households in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe?

**Probing Questions:**

1. What programs or initiatives are in place to support food security for child headed households?
2. How effective are these programs in addressing their needs?
4. What challenges have been seen in the existing support systems?

**Research Question 4**

What are feasible sustainable food security intervention strategies for child headed rural households in Ward 34, Mt Darwin District, Zimbabwe?

**Probing Questions:**

1. What strategies have been successful in improving food security in child headed families?

2. How can community involvement enhance the effectiveness of these strategies?
3. What role can education and training play in promoting food security?
4. What limit the success of programs aimed at helping these households?

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ZIMBABWE

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, LABOUR AND SOCIAL  
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06 May 2025

Juliana Chiveso (R210757B)  
Bindura University of Science Education

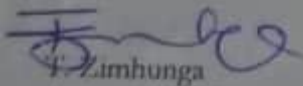
**REF: LETTER OF APPROVAL TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY  
TITLED "FOOD SECURITY IN RURAL CHILD HEADED  
HOUSEHOLDS," CASE OF WARD 34 MT DARWIN DISTRICT  
ZIMBABWE**

Receipt of your letter with the above mentioned matter is acknowledged.

Please be advised that permission is hereby granted for you to carry out research  
titled "Food security in rural child headed households".

Permission is granted **STRICTLY** on condition that the research is for academic  
purposes only in pursuit of your BSc Honours Degree Social Work. The data  
collected should not be shared to third party (3<sup>rd</sup>).

You are requested to submit a copy of your final research documents to the  
Department of Social Development upon completion as your research has a bearing  
on the Department's mandate.

  
T. Zimhunga

Acting Chief Director Social Development and Disability Affairs

**MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, LABOUR AND SOCIAL WELFARE**

