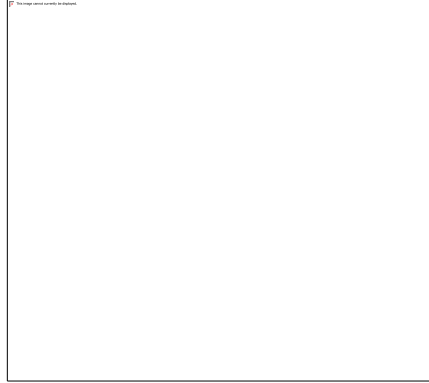


BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND HERITAGE STUDIES



AN ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL IMPORTANCE IN OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION.
CASE OF MBIRE DISTRICT.

BY

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**A dissertation submitted to Bindura University of Science Education in the partial
fulfilment of Bachelor of Science Honours in Culture and Heritage Studies Degree.**

Supervisor: Mrs T. H Zimucha-Sagiya

Bindura, Zimbabwe

Abstract

This research explores the cultural significance and socio-environmental implications of oil and gas exploration, emphasizing the intersection between energy development and cultural heritage. The study investigates how exploration activities impact culturally significant landscapes, indigenous communities and traditional practices often leading to conflicts over land use, displacement and the erosion of intangible cultural assets. Through a multidisciplinary approach that integrates perspectives from anthropology, environmental science and resource management, the research highlights case studies from various global regions to analyse patterns of cultural disruption and resilience. The study also examines regulatory frameworks and corporate social responsibility practices aimed at protecting cultural heritage during exploration and extraction. Ultimately, the study calls for more inclusive decision making processes that recognize and integrate cultural values into energy development strategies, fostering more sustainable and ethically sound practices in oil and gas industry.

Declaration

I, Tanatswa Muringisi, am working towards a Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Culture and Heritage Studies. I understand that plagiarism is an academic violation and goes against the ethics of the Culture and Heritage Studies Department at Bindura University of Science Education.

- I hereby declare that my research topic, "An Analysis of Cultural Importance in Oil and Gas Exploration: A Case Study of Mbire District," is my own original work and has not been copied from others.
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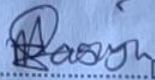
Approval Form

I confirm that I have overseen Tanatswa Muringisi during the research project titled: An analysis of cultural importance in oil and gas exploration. A case of Mbire District. This research is part of the requirements for earning a Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Culture and Heritage Studies and I recommend that it move forward for examination.

Supervisor's Name.....^{T.H. ZIMUCHA-SAGIYA}Signature.....Date.....14/10/25

Chairperson of the departmental Board of examinations

The departmental board of examiners believes that this dissertation report fulfils the examination requirements. Therefore, I recommend that Bindura University of Science Education accept the research project titled: An analysis of cultural importance in oil and gas exploration. A case of Mbire District. This work is submitted to partially meet the requirements for the Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Culture and Heritage Studies.

Chairperson's Name.....^{Dr. M. E. SAGIYA}Signature.....Date.....14/10/25

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my late parents, Mr. and Mrs. Muringisi, and I hope their souls rest in peace. I also want to honor my sister, Kudzai Muringisi, for her love, prayers, and support.

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First, I want to thank the Lord Almighty for giving me life, guidance, and protection. I also want to show my appreciation to my supervisor, Mrs. T. H. Zimucha-Sagiya, for her ideas and support in developing this project. Additionally, I am grateful to Geo Associates Private Limited for allowing me to conduct my research within their organization. I would like to acknowledge the following people for their help in making my research successful: country manager Barry Mickle, my attachment supervisor Carol Makoni, Jabulani Zimwaraka, Gibson Langton, Lovemore Mhako, and the members of Mbire District who took part in my study.

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Abbreviation

CSR.....	Corporate Social Responsibility
CIA.....	Cultural Impact Assessment
EIA.....	Environmental Impact Assessment
CH.....	Cultural Heritage

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Oil and gas exploration is often viewed primarily through the lens of economic development, technological advancement and environmental impact. However the cultural dimensions of these activities are increasingly recognized as critical components that influence both the processes and outcomes of exploration projects. This study seeks to investigate how cultural values and local communities connect with the oil and gas industry, highlighting the need to include cultural aspects in exploration plans. Cultural perspectives play a pivotal role in how communities relate to their natural resources. In many regions particularly in indigenous and local communities, land and resources are imbued with cultural significance. This relationship can be observed in various studies such as those by Berkes (2012) argues that traditional ecological knowledge informs sustainable resource management practices, emphasizing the need for cultural respect in resource extraction activities.

The rights of indigenous people are increasingly recognized in international law. Colchester (2004) has highlighted how resource extraction impacts indigenous land and cultures, often leading to conflicts and environmental degradation. The recognition of indigenous rights necessitates that oil and gas companies engage meaningfully with local communities to address cultural concerns and ensure equitable benefit sharing. While economic benefits from oil and gas exploration are often cited as justifications for projects, cultural values frequently clash with these economic assessments. The work of Ferguson (1994) illustrates how development projects can lead to cultural dislocation, disenfranchisement and social unrest. The tension highlights the importance of a complete approach that looks at both economic and cultural aspects when planning projects.

Research in this area often employs qualitative methodologies such as ethnography and participatory action research, interviews to capture the experiences and perspectives of affected communities. Sullivan (2013) advocate for methodologies that incorporate local voices and prioritize cultural narratives in the discourse surrounding resource extraction.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The study aims to explore the cultural importance of oil and gas exploration.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The search for and extraction of oil and gas often takes place in areas that are very important to local communities, especially indigenous groups. This overlap between resource extraction and cultural importance creates challenges that current oil and gas exploration methods try to address. When oil and gas are explored, it can force communities to leave their ancestral lands, which threatens their cultural identity and traditional ways of life. According to Watts (2008), the activities linked to extracting resources can disturb social structures, lessen cultural heritage, and cause the loss of languages and traditional ecological knowledge. Local communities often have little representation in decision-making about oil and gas projects. Colchester (2004) points out that when indigenous people are not meaningfully involved, the resulting policies may ignore cultural issues, leading to conflicts and resistance. This lack of integration with local preferences can heighten tensions between communities and oil companies.

1.4 Objectives of the study

- To examine the difficulties of finding oil and gas while keeping cultural significance safe.
- To find out how cultural importance affects oil and gas exploration.
- To study the role of culture in oil and gas exploration.
- To show how companies can be socially responsible by honoring cultural values.

1.5 Research Questions

- How can the cultural significance of the land where oil and gas is taking place be described?
- How do local communities perceive the relationship between their cultural heritage and resource development?
- In what ways have traditional practices or sacred sites have been affected by exploration activities?

- What cultural values or customs should oil and gas companies respect during exploration and development?

1.6 Assumptions of the study

The study suggests that cultural heritage and community values play a big role in how oil and gas exploration projects are planned, approved, and carried out. It also indicates that stakeholders, such as local communities, governments, and companies, understand and react to the importance of the affected sites' culture. There is a measureable relationship between cultural considerations and project outcomes in terms of community acceptance, legal compliance and environmental responsibility.

1.7 Significance of the study

The cultural significance of exploring oil and gas is an important topic that greatly affects local communities and the oil and gas sector. This research seeks to highlight the complex connections between cultural values and resource extraction, stressing the need to include cultural factors in exploration methods. Understanding the cultural importance in oil and gas exploration can lead to improved relationships between companies and local communities. By recognizing and respecting cultural values, companies can foster trust and goodwill which are essential for obtaining social licenses to operate. According to Gonzalez (2016), successful engagement with communities often hinges on acknowledging their cultural heritage and addressing their concerns.

The significance of this study extends to the empowerment of indigenous communities. By highlighting their cultural importance, the research can support movements advocating for indigenous rights and self-determination in resource management. Corn tassel (2008) emphasizes that recognizing cultural ties to land is vital for indigenous people in their struggles for sovereignty and environmental justice. The findings of this study can guide oil and gas companies in developing robust Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies. Understanding cultural significance can lead to more meaningful CSR initiatives that address the needs and values of local communities. Porter and Kramer (2006) argue that aligning business strategies with the community well-being enhances the social fabric and can lead to long term benefits for both parties. This research was driven by a desire to promote more

culturally informed decision making within the energy sector, ensuring that development is both sustainable and respectful of the people and histories it affects. Additionally, the study seeks to bridge the gap between economic interests and cultural preservation, advocating for practices that balance growth with responsibility.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

The research concentrated on particular areas that have been greatly affected by oil and gas exploration. This region includes the Mbire district that is located in Dande Valley in Mashonaland Central in Zimbabwe. This study focused on the whole of Mbire including its districts because it carries the cultural importance thus it is where the exploration of oil and gas was conducted. The study to this specific area the research aimed to provide in depth insights while acknowledging that findings may be directly applicable to other regions with different contexts.

1.9 Limitations of the study

The research looked at current problems linked to oil and gas exploration, mainly focusing on changes that have occurred in the last twenty years. The temporal limitation overlooked historical context that have shaped current cultural dynamics. Understanding historical grievances and cultural transformation is essential for a comprehensive analysis as highlighted by Watt (2008) who emphasized the long term socio cultural impacts of resource extraction. The difference in language created obstacles for collecting data, especially in areas where English isn't the main language. Misunderstanding or misinterpretations during interview and focus groups led to incomplete or inaccurate data. Schutz (2011) emphasize the importance of culturally and linguistically appropriate research methods to ensure accurate representation of community voices. Time frame and targeted groups was a limitation because the given wards to research was limited and the given local residents lacked knowledge about the cultural heritage.

1.10 Ethical Considerations

Researching the cultural importance of oil and gas exploration involves the ethical consideration that ensure respectful and responsible engagement with local communities. Informed consent is a foundational ethical principle in researching involving human subjects. Participants must be fully informed about the study purpose, procedures and benefiting before agreeing to participate. The researcher should provide clear and accessible information using language that participants can understand especially in communities with diverse linguistic backgrounds (Schutz,2011). The researcher must approach their work with respect and an understanding of local customs. The researcher should familiarize themselves with the cultural norms and practises of the communities involved in the study. This respect fosters trust and openness which are essential for gathering accurate and meaningful data (Sullivan, 2013). Protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of participants is vital especially in sensitive cultural contexts. Participants may share personal stories or experiences that could expose them to risks if disclosed (Fowler, 2014).

1.11 Definition of key terms

- **Cultural importance** refers to the value attributed to objects, practices, sites or traditions because of their connection to the identity, history, beliefs or heritage of a specific group or society. This values may arise from historical, aesthetic, spiritual, social or scientific factors which contribute to the continuity and understanding of cultural expressions across generations (UNESCO, 2003); (Byrne, 2014)
- **Oil and gas exploration** is the search for oil and natural gas hidden beneath the Earth's surface. This process uses different methods, including studying rocks, using physical measurements, and examining chemical properties. It includes finding possible underground reservoirs, checking if they are suitable for extraction, and figuring out if it makes sense to extract them in terms of cost and technology (Tissot and Welte, 1984; Selley, 1998).
- **Corporate social responsibility** means that a company is dedicated to acting ethically and sustainably. This involves thinking about how its actions affect society, the environment, and the economy, according to Carroll (1991).
- **Local communities** are groups of people who reside in a specific geographic area and are connected by shared social, cultural, economic or environmental interests (Wilkinson, 1991)

1.12 Dissertation Outline

- Chapter 1- The introduction includes the background of the study and explains the problem statement, the purpose of the study, its significance, as well as the research questions and objectives.
- Chapter 2-The literature review highlights key studies that back up and confirm the topic. It emphasizes areas that can help with new research and gives students a chance to examine and combine previous studies related to their current issue.
- Chapter3-it describes the basic research plan. The research methodology is determined by the theoretical framework and research design. It identifies the techniques, methods, instruments that will be used for measurements.
- Chapter 4-it produces the results and followed by a discussion of their significance. They must answer the research questions.
- Chapter 5- summarise the research, provide recommendations and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORATICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

A literature review is an important summary that combines and evaluates current research by experts on a specific topic. It helps lay the groundwork for new studies by showing what is already understood, pointing out areas where information is missing, and placing a new study in the context of ongoing academic discussions (Hart, 2018). Rather than presenting new research finding, a literature review evaluates and integrates the contributions of previous studies, offering context and justification for the current research.

Boote and Beile (2005) emphasize that a good literature review is important in academic research. They explain, "A detailed and well-done literature review serves as the base and motivation for important and helpful research." This highlights that literature reviews are not just an isolated task; they play a vital role in forming significant and relevant research questions.

Oil and gas exploration has become a critical component of global economic development, particularly in resource-rich regions (Zhou et al, 2023). However, the environmental, social, and cultural implications of such exploration often remain a subject of considerable debate. In various regions around the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, the relationship between natural resource extraction and indigenous cultures creates a complicated situation (Soltani and Sadeghi, 2023). This literature review aims to examine how oil and gas exploration impacts the culture in Mbire District, Zimbabwe. It will look at both the advantages and difficulties that come up when cultural issues mix with economic activities.

Mbire District, located in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland Central province, is home to several indigenous communities with rich cultural heritages. As Zimbabwe seeks to expand its oil and gas exploration efforts, it is critical to understand how these economic activities impact local cultures, traditions, and livelihoods.

2.2 CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Cultural heritage means the physical objects and non-physical traits passed down from earlier generations. In Mbire District, this includes traditional customs, languages, practices, and

religious beliefs that help define the identity of the community. According to Kuper (2003), cultural heritage is not merely an artifact of the past but also a dynamic force that influences social, political, and economic contexts in the present.

In many rural African regions, culture plays an integral role in daily life, providing cohesion within communities. As argued by Nyumba et al. (2018), indigenous knowledge systems, such as local ecological wisdom, agricultural practices, and community rituals, offer valuable insights into sustainable living. In Mbire, these traditional knowledge systems remain vital in maintaining social order and promoting community resilience. However, the onset of oil and gas exploration often disrupts these cultural landscapes. As Giddens (1991) suggests, the globalized nature of natural resource exploitation can lead to cultural erosion, particularly in community's dependent on traditional ways of life.

Exploring oil and gas in sub-Saharan Africa has received a lot of focus because it could boost economic growth. However, it has also created many problems for local communities, especially related to cultural and social issues. According to Kolk and van Tulder (2002), multinational corporations often prioritize economic gains over local cultural concerns, leading to tensions between development objectives and indigenous rights.

In many African countries, resource extraction industries have been associated with environmental degradation, land dispossession, and disruptions to local economies (Aroca, 2001). In the case of Mbire District, concerns about the environmental impact of oil and gas exploration are heightened by the district's reliance on subsistence farming and the cultural importance of the land.

Local communities in Mbire District, like many other indigenous groups across Africa, possess a deep connection to the land, which is central to their livelihoods and cultural practices. According to Escobar (1995), the concept of "the commons" in indigenous communities involves more than just access to resources but is deeply embedded in social relationships and cultural norms. Communities in Mbire are often subsistence farmers who rely on the land for food, water, and medicine, as well as for cultural rituals that take place on sacred sites. The intrusion of oil and gas exploration into these territories can cause disruption in these social relationships. For example, the displacement of communities to make way for exploration projects can result in the loss of ancestral lands, a direct attack on cultural identity.

Furthermore, as argued by Ferguson (1999), multinational corporations frequently operate with a "top-down" approach, disregarding the cultural concerns of local communities. This leads to

a lack of consultation and engagement, which exacerbates social conflict and mistrust between local populations and the exploration companies.

The cultural impacts of oil and gas exploration in Mbire District are multifaceted. Firstly, there is the issue of land use. Much of the land in Mbire is considered sacred by the local communities, with particular areas being reserved for religious ceremonies, burial sites, and ancestral shrines. The potential for oil and gas exploration to disrupt these sites is a major concern. As Boas (2002) notes, sacred sites are often seen as the foundation of community identity and spiritual well-being.

Additionally, the influx of outside workers, many of whom may come from urban areas or even foreign countries, can lead to cultural dilution. New lifestyles, languages, and behaviors may clash with traditional values, leading to cultural erosion. Studies by Ager (2001) indicate that such cultural shocks often result in social tensions, where younger generations are increasingly drawn to the more modern, often more lucrative, opportunities provided by the oil and gas industry. Economic dependence on oil and gas extraction can also cause shifts in traditional gender roles, as women in many African societies are often more engaged in domestic activities and local agricultural practices. The introduction of industrial workforces might change these roles, as women may find themselves with fewer opportunities to practice traditional arts, crafts, and agriculture.

Sustainable development has been widely advocated as a way to reconcile economic growth with cultural and environmental protection. As Sachs (1999) suggests, sustainable development must integrate social, economic, and cultural dimensions to ensure the well-being of future generations while respecting local heritage. For Mbire District, a responsible method for exploring oil and gas must honor the cultural importance of the land. This could involve conducting thorough Cultural Impact Assessments (CIAs) before exploration begins. According to the International Finance Corporation (2012), CIAs are a key tool for identifying and mitigating adverse cultural impacts by engaging local communities in the decision-making process.

However, the effectiveness of CIAs depends on the willingness of oil companies and governments to genuinely engage with communities and incorporate their perspectives into the development process (Wilson, 2016). This requires a shift away from the traditional model of development that often marginalizes local cultural concerns.

Several case studies provide insight into the potential impacts of oil and gas exploration on indigenous cultures. One example is the situation in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, where oil extraction has led to widespread environmental degradation and cultural loss among the Ijaw and other ethnic groups (Idemudia, 2014). The displacement of communities, pollution of water sources, and destruction of sacred lands have triggered protests and armed conflicts, highlighting the importance of considering cultural preservation in resource extraction activities. Similarly, in Canada, oil and gas exploration on indigenous lands has led to protests and legal battles, particularly among the First Nations people in British Columbia. Research by Morrison (2009) indicates that the financial gains from extracting resources are often hidden by the lasting harm to culture and the environment. This damage can lead to a decline in indigenous identity and community strength.

2.3 CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Companies involved in oil and gas exploration are facing more pressure to take responsibility for their social and environmental effects. This has led to the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which highlights the importance of considering the cultural well-being of local communities during development projects. Carroll (1999) explains that CSR guidelines urge companies to honor the rights of indigenous groups, including their right to protect their cultural heritage and access land for traditional activities. In Mbire, CSR efforts might involve compensating local communities for any cultural losses, offering education and training on sustainable practices, and encouraging local people to take part in decision-making about oil and gas exploration. Respecting and preserving local cultures goes beyond just providing financial compensation; it requires recognizing the deep value of cultural heritage.

2.4 Theoretical framework

2.4.1 Cultural Theory of Risk

In the early 1980s, Mary Douglas and her team created the Cultural Theory of Risk to offer a different view from the main technical, rational, and psychological methods used to understand how people see risks. Mary Douglas's Cultural Theory of Risk gives us a basic way to see how

cultural beliefs affect how we view risks and make decisions. This theory suggests that people's views on risk are influenced by their social connections and cultural backgrounds, leading to four unique perspectives; Individualists, who usually downplay cultural or environmental risks and focus more on economic chances and personal freedoms. Egalitarian, for instance are likely to view oil and gas exploration as a threat to cultural heritage and environmental sustainability, advocating for the protection of sacred or ecologically sensitive sites. Hierarchists may support exploration under strict regulatory oversight, emphasizing institutional authority and structured risk management and Fatalist can feel powerless to influence decisions often exhibit apathy towards both cultural preservation and industrial development. Each worldview interprets risks and benefits differently, affecting how communities respond to industrial activities like oil and gas exploration. For instance, a study in Eastern Montana, USA (McEvoy et al, 2017) applied this theory to understand local perceptions of oil and gas development, revealing that dominant cultural worldviews significantly influenced acceptance and resistance to such projects.

In the Nigerian oil and gas industry, studies have shown how cross-cultural differences affect the success of project teams (Umuteme and Adegbite, 2023). The study emphasizes that adopting multiple leadership styles and fostering adaptive organizational behaviours are essential for improving project delivery in culturally diverse settings. This insight underscores the importance of understanding and integrating cultural considerations into project management practices to enhance collaboration and efficiency.

2.4.2 Cultural Significance in Mbire District

Mbire District is home to various indigenous communities with rich cultural traditions and practices. The local chiefs and spirit mediums play a pivotal role in guiding community decisions and maintaining social cohesion. In the oil and gas exploration field, these cultural leaders have performed traditional rituals to ask for blessings from their ancestors for the projects. This shows how their strong beliefs affect how the community interacts with outside efforts. Such practices highlight the necessity for companies to engage respectfully with local customs to ensure harmonious and successful operations.

2.5 European scholars' views

Prof. Rodney Harrison, (2023) argues that oil is deeply embedded in European cultural heritage, shaping landscapes, economies, and identities. He supports a rethinking of cultural heritage to include petro cultures- the social and cultural system that have evolved around fossil fuel use. His work highlights how oil and gas exploration is not just a technical or economic issue but one with profound cultural and historical dimensions. Dr. Gertrude Saxinger, (2021) studies the social and cultural relationship between communities and extractive industries especially in remote regions like the Arctic. She emphasizes the cultural significance of land for indigenous and rural communities and advocates for respectful, inclusive policies. Her research supports analysing exploration not just for economic output but for its cultural impact on communities tied to the land.

Professor Janet Stewart, (2017) explores the portrayal of the oil and gas industry in exhibits, photographs, and public stories. She argues that these visual and cultural representations shape public understanding and often sanitize or legitimize extraction. Her work shows that culture is both impacted by and a vehicle for promoting extractive activities, making cultural analysis essential to understanding explorations broader influence.

2.4 American scholars views

Dominic Boyer, an anthropologist at Rice University, (2017) introduces the concept of petrocultures to describe societies deeply intertwined with petroleum. He argues that modern life, from transportation to daily conveniences, is heavily reliant on oil, making it a defining element of contemporary culture. According to (Boyer, 2019) emphasizes that this dependency shapes societal values and identities, often overshadowing the environmental and cultural costs associated with fossil fuel extraction. John Grim, a senior lecture at Yale School of the Environment and expert in Native American religions, (2001) highlights the spiritual significance of water for indigenous communities. Discussing the Standing Rock protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline, Grim notes that for many Native peoples, water is not merely a resource but a sacred entity integral to their cultural and spiritual identity. He states, this is not only about water, it's all about water, underscoring the deep-rooted reverence for natural elements in indigenous worldviews.

Christine Ballengee Morris, (2018) a professor at Ohio State University, discusses the broader implications of oil and gas exploration on indigenous sovereignty and cultural preservation. She points out that projects like Dakota Access Pipeline not only threaten environmental

integrity but also risk destroying areas rich in cultural artefacts. Morris emphasizes the need to consider these cultural aspects in environmental and infrastructural decision making process.

2.7 African scholars' views

According to Bassey, (2019) the oil industry's detrimental effects on African communities, emphasizing environmental degradation and cultural erosion. He argues that oil extraction disrupts traditional ways of life and undermines local governance structures. Adunbi, (2015) examines how the riches from oil in Nigeria have caused social exclusion and cultural breakdown, especially in the Niger Delta region. He points out the gap between the money made from oil and the living conditions of local communities, resulting in a feeling of powerlessness among them. According to Chirikure, (2010) emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural heritage. His work underscores the need to consider cultural contexts in resource extraction activities.

Brino and Umejiesi, (2012) reveals that oil industry activities have led to the loss of land, disruption of traditional occupations and desecration of sacred sites. They emphasize the deep cultural connections communities have with their environment and the adverse effects of its degradation. According to Lenferna, (2024) the narratives used by oil companies to position themselves as agents of development. He argues that such narratives often mask the cultural and environmental harms inflicted on local communities, calling for genuine decolonial approaches to resource management.

2.8 Concept of cultural importance in oil and gas exploration

The idea of cultural significance in oil and gas exploration focuses on acknowledging and protecting the special cultural identities, traditions, and historical backgrounds of local communities impacted by resource extraction (Persaud, 2017). Culture plays a vital role in human societies, including beliefs, values, customs, and traditions that influence how people engage with their surroundings (Tylor, 1871). In the context of oil and gas exploration, cultural importance refers to the need to acknowledge and integrate indigenous knowledge systems, sacred landscapes, and traditional governance structures in resource management. When oil

exploration occurs in culturally sensitive areas like Mbire District in Zimbabwe, it can have profound implications on local communities, particularly those who view land as a spiritual and ancestral asset rather than merely an economic resource. Indigenous communities often have deeply rooted connections to their land, considering it sacred due to the presence of ancestral graves, spirit mediums, and ritual sites that guide social and spiritual practices (Tylor, 1871). Oil exploration, with its intrusive nature involving drilling, land clearing, and environmental modifications, can disrupt these cultural sites and provoke resistance from local populations.

From a theoretical perspective, the cultural importance of oil and gas exploration is best understood through frameworks such as the Cultural Theory of Risk, which highlights how communities perceive the risks associated with industrial activities based on their cultural and social values (Douglas, 1980). While government officials and multinational corporations may emphasize the economic benefits of resource extraction, indigenous communities often assess risks through a different lens, prioritizing the preservation of their heritage over short-term financial gains. Similarly, Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) underscores the necessity of engaging with local communities, ensuring that traditional leaders, spiritual elders, and ordinary citizens participate in decision-making processes. If their concerns are ignored, tensions can arise, leading to protests, delays, or even violent conflicts, as seen in various resource-rich regions across Africa. Moreover, the Social License to Operate (SLO) Theory (Prno and Slocombe, 2012) asserts that even if a company has legal permits to extract oil, it still requires informal approval from local communities to ensure smooth operations. This informal approval is tied to cultural acceptance, meaning that companies must respect traditional customs, engage in cultural rituals, and build relationships of trust with indigenous populations.

Beyond stakeholder engagement, the Sustainable Development Theory (WCED, 1987) emphasizes that economic development should not come at the expense of environmental and cultural heritage. Sustainable oil exploration should incorporate measures to protect sacred sites, avoid forced displacement, and ensure fair benefit-sharing mechanisms that empower local communities. If exploration activities lead to the destruction of cultural landmarks, loss of traditional livelihoods, or marginalization of local voices, then the project is not truly sustainable. The Postcolonial Theory (Said, 1978) further adds a critical dimension to this discussion by illustrating how historical injustices, particularly colonial-era land dispossession, continue to shape the way African communities perceive natural resource extraction. Many

indigenous groups view large-scale oil exploration as a continuation of colonial exploitation, where foreign corporations and national elites benefit while local populations bear the costs of environmental degradation and cultural erosion (Said, 1978). As seen in South Sudan, Nigeria, and Uganda, oil discoveries often fuel socio-political tensions when cultural factors are not adequately considered (Ross, 2001).

In Mbire District, the presence of sacred forests, spirit mediums, and community-based resource management practices means that oil exploration must be approached with cultural sensitivity. Before operations begin, companies should conduct Cultural Impact Assessments (CIA) to understand the potential effects of drilling on local traditions and religious beliefs. Engaging with chiefs, spirit mediums, and community elders is crucial to ensuring that industrial activities do not violate traditional norms. Furthermore, oil companies should implement culturally appropriate compensation mechanisms, ensuring that displaced communities are not only financially reimbursed but also provided with alternatives that align with their way of life. Failure to recognize cultural importance can lead to resistance, legal battles, and social unrest, ultimately affecting the success and sustainability of oil projects. Thus, integrating cultural considerations into oil exploration is not merely a formality but a critical factor in ensuring social harmony, environmental protection, and ethical resource management.

2.9 Research gap

The study of cultural importance in oil and gas exploration has gained attention in various regions, particularly in Africa, where indigenous communities hold strong cultural ties to land and natural resources (Omofonmwan & Odia, 2009). Despite increasing discourse on the socio-economic and environmental impacts of oil and gas exploration, there remains a significant research gap regarding how cultural dimensions' influence exploration activities, particularly in rural districts like Mbire, Zimbabwe. Existing literature primarily focuses on economic benefits, environmental degradation, and governance issues, with minimal emphasis on cultural heritage, traditional land tenure systems, and local belief structures in resource extraction policies (Osei-Kojo & Andrews, 2020). This research gap highlights the need for a deeper exploration of cultural preservation, community engagement, and policy integration within the extractive industry in Mbire District.

2.9.1 Limited Cultural Impact Assessments in Extractive Industry Studies

Most studies on oil and gas exploration in Africa focus on environmental impact assessments (EIA) and economic sustainability (Hilson & Maconachie, 2020). However, there is a limited body of research that examines the Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA) of extractive industries. Cultural impact assessments evaluate the effects of industrial activities on traditional rituals, sacred sites, and indigenous governance structures, which are central to communities in Mbire (Mwesigye & Mwanje, 2019). Unlike environmental assessments, which are legally required in many jurisdictions, cultural considerations are often neglected or superficially addressed. This gap necessitates a comprehensive study on the importance of customary knowledge, spiritual heritage, and indigenous decision-making processes in oil and gas exploration.

2.9.2 Inadequate Understanding of Indigenous Land Rights and Resource Ownership

While existing studies discuss land tenure systems in Zimbabwe, most focus on commercial agriculture and urban development (Deng, 2014). Research on oil and gas exploration rarely considers indigenous land rights and how they intersect with cultural traditions. Mbire District is home to indigenous communities that operate under customary land tenure, where spiritual leaders and local chiefs play a significant role in managing natural resources (Chigumira, 2019). However, legal frameworks governing oil exploration often prioritize state ownership of mineral resources, sidelining traditional authorities. The research gap lies in the lack of studies that examine the potential conflicts between statutory resource governance and indigenous land rights in the Mbire region.

2.9.3 Minimal Integration of Stakeholder Theory in Community Engagement Studies

Stakeholder engagement is critical for sustainable oil and gas exploration, yet research in Mbire District does not sufficiently apply Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) to analyze community interactions with extractive companies (Osei-Kojo & Andrews, 2020). Studies in Ghana and Nigeria emphasize the importance of engaging local populations to secure a social license to operate (SLO), but similar case studies are lacking for Zimbabwe (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). The gap lies in the absence of a structured approach to evaluating stakeholder participation, including traditional leaders, spirit mediums, and marginalized community members, in decision-making processes related to oil exploration.

2.9.4 Lack of Data on Cultural Resistance and Conflict in Oil Exploration

Oil and gas projects often face cultural resistance when local communities perceive them as threats to their way of life (Hilson & Maconachie, 2020). However, there is limited documentation of how cultural resistance manifests in Mbire District. In regions like Uganda's Albertine region, resistance has been recorded through protests and legal challenges, yet Zimbabwe lacks comprehensive studies on how cultural beliefs influence opposition to resource extraction (Mwesigye & Mwanje, 2019). This gap underscores the need for qualitative research on community perspectives, particularly regarding the preservation of sacred sites, traditional ecological knowledge, and local economic practices.

2.9.5 Insufficient Policy Frameworks Incorporating Cultural Sensitivity

Although Zimbabwe has policies on environmental protection and indigenous rights, few frameworks explicitly integrate cultural considerations into oil and gas regulations (Chigumira, 2019). Most policies focus on compensation and relocation strategies without addressing cultural restoration or ensuring that traditional leaders have a voice in resource governance. In comparison, countries like Canada have advanced frameworks for indigenous participation in extractive industries (Rodon, 2018). The gap in Zimbabwean policy suggests that research should investigate how legal frameworks can be adapted to incorporate cultural preservation and indigenous governance structures.

2.9.6 Need for Comparative Studies Between African and European Perspectives

European literature on oil and gas exploration often emphasizes corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, and ethical resource management (Frynas, 2009). African studies, on the other hand, tend to focus on resource conflicts, environmental degradation, and governance failures (Omofonmwan & Odia, 2009). However, there is a lack of comparative research that integrates African and European perspectives on cultural preservation in extractive industries. Understanding how European countries manage cultural heritage in oil exploration could provide valuable insights for Mbire District. For example, Norway has developed policies to ensure that indigenous Sámi communities benefit from oil exploration without cultural

displacement (Andersen et al., 2016). A comparative approach could help identify best practices for cultural inclusivity in Zimbabwe's extractive sector.

2.10 Summary

The research examined in this study shows that more people are becoming aware of how oil and gas exploration affects culture, especially for local and indigenous communities. Researchers point out that developing oil and gas can often disturb or damage important cultural places, like sacred sites, burial grounds, and locations with historical value. This is particularly true in areas where indigenous groups have deep spiritual and ancestral connections to the land. The review also mentions how companies influence cultural stories by building boreholes and roads, as well as funding education programs.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the methods used to conduct this research. It is important because it details all the steps taken from the beginning of the study to when the results were presented. It describes the research approach and the specific methods used during the research. The researcher chooses the approach that most effectively answers all of the research questions.

3.1 Research design

Leedy (1997:195) describes research design as a plan for conducting a study, which serves as the main structure for gathering data. MacMillan and Schumacher (2001:166) agree with this definition, explaining that it involves choosing participants, research locations, and methods for collecting data to address the research questions. They emphasize that a strong research design aims to produce results that are considered reliable. In this study, the researcher will use interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation to gather information from the community. To gain deeper insights and richer data, the study focuses on a case from Mbire District involving individuals who have significant knowledge about their culture's importance. This design enables the researcher to incorporate photographs during the documentation process.

3.2 Research methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research aims to understand a problem or topic by looking at it through the eyes of the local people involved. It is also good at gathering specific cultural information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social situations of certain groups. Because of this, using a qualitative method is clear in this study since the results are shared in words instead of numbers.

Since one of the objectives of the study is to analyse the challenges imposed by oil and gas exploration in the preservation of cultural importance, qualitative research approach comes in handy in achieving this aim. According to Bikci and Green (2007), qualitative methods aim to answer questions about the 'what', 'how' or 'why' of a phenomenon. This insinuates that through the use of qualitative research approach, this study will be able to answer 'why' the public reacted to the oil and gas exploration appreciating the cultural importance. The qualitative research approach is effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the opinions and behaviours and social contexts of particular populations (Mark et al 2005).

Gray (2004) argues that qualitative research is a detailed method that involves collecting data over long periods in real-life settings. This approach helps ensure accuracy. Qualitative research also allows the researcher to share experiences with participants and understand how meanings are created, as noted by Corbin and Strauss (2008). For instance, this occurs when researchers engage with local communities about their experiences related to oil and gas exploration. Priest (1996) points out that the purpose of qualitative research is to access the inner perspectives of cultural group members. Similarly, Mark et al. (2005) state that the primary goal of qualitative studies is to achieve a deeper and more complex understanding of social contexts.

3.3 Target population

A population is a key part of research methods. It includes a group of people who have similar traits and live in a specific area or organization. According to Martinez-Mesa et al. (2016), this idea helps researchers create their questions and hypotheses for studies. The target population focus their efforts on the most relevant individuals, ensuring that their work is both effective and meaningful. This study targeted 4 chiefs in Mbire District ,7 elderly people from the community, 4 herdsmen and 9 community members.

3.4 Sampling

Sampling is a method that helps researchers choose objects or subjects that are important for answering research questions or supporting a theory (Denzin,1978). It involves picking out units, like people and organizations, from a larger group so that by looking at the sample, we can accurately relate our findings back to the whole population it came from, as noted by Trochim (2006). Sampling plays a crucial role in this study because the researcher needs to focus on just a part of the total population that reflects the overall group.

3.5 Sampling techniques

Koeber and McMichael (2008) explain that when researchers use purposive sampling, they look for participants who have specific traits or abilities. This method involves choosing a sample based on what the researcher knows about the population, its characteristics, and the goals of their study (Barbie,1990). He adds that this approach is helpful when a researcher

wants to examine a small group within a larger population where many members are easy to identify, but counting all of them is very difficult. Marshall (1996) agrees with these two authors, stating that purposive sampling involves carefully selecting the most relevant sample to address the research question. The researcher used purposive sampling because the research required specific insights from individuals or groups who have direct knowledge, experience, or involvement with cultural issues related to oil and gas activities.

3.6 Data collection methods

Data collection involves gathering information to understand more about the research topic (Taherdoost, 2022). Participant observation provides information to gain a deep understanding of the group culture by participating in their activities for example the researcher was able to participate in the Chiumbwa ceremony and was also part of Corporate Social Responsibility. The study used methods such as interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions.

3.6.1 Participant observation

Participatory observation in research is a qualitative approach where a researcher gets involved in a social group or setting. They take part in the group's activities while also watching how people behave, interact, and practice their routines. This helps the researcher understand the group's culture and viewpoint from an insider's perspective. Essentially, they become part of the group to gather information (Jorgensen, 1989).

Participation observation is used to enable researchers need to understand which questions to ask thus they need to be connected to the social context in order to ask meaningful questions. The researcher engaged herself in participant observation whereby she went to ceremonies and rituals that were done in the process for example the *CHIUMBWA* ceremony which was done before the beginning of the project. It was done in a way to ask for permission to the ancestors whereby to go on with the project and there were certain things like mealie meal and snuff were used in the ceremony. Participatory observation provides a deep understanding of the study area, which greatly lowers the chances of validity errors.

According to Dewalt and Dewalt (2011), many human experiences lack books, official guidelines, or formal training for children or newcomers. This applies to numerous aspects of our personal and public lives—like how organizations function, how we earn a living, and how we grow into members of different social groups. We learn these things through experience, and if you want to truly understand them, there's often no better way than by engaging in them yourself as a participant observer.

The saying "you had to be there" is a common phrase used by people who feel that their words don't completely capture the experience of a specific event or scene. This saying highlights a real truth: some important parts of human experiences can only be seen by those who were actually present. Participatory observation is great for noticing these aspects, especially the unspoken rules and norms that regular participants or cultural insiders take for granted (Malinowski, 1922). While these rules can be gathered through interviews, it's usually more effective to learn about them in the moment as they occur. Many everyday actions and social decisions happen without us even thinking about them. In such cases, interviews might miss the action altogether, so it's best to be fully present and observe every movement and moment. Personal rituals and routines that aren't typically seen as part of the story can often be overlooked in regular interviews because people might not think to mention them or may not see them as important enough (Spradley, 1980).

Participant observation engaged in community activities and events to gain first hand insight into cultural practices and community responses to oil and gas exploration. Participants provided with clear information about the study explained its purpose, procedures, and possible risks, and participants gave their consent before taking part. All data was anonymised to protect participant identities and sensitive information will be handled with care. The researcher approached communities with respect for cultural norms and practises ensuring that the research process is culturally appropriate.

3.6.2 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are organized conversations that take place with a small group of people who have special knowledge or interest in a specific topic (Merton et al 1956). Usually, these discussions involve 6 to 12 participants. They revolve around a few guiding questions

meant to gather detailed information. Focus groups help understand the opinions of individuals who might be hesitant or unable to speak in larger meetings. They can also give voice to minority or disadvantaged groups, like women, children, or people with disabilities. Sometimes, focus group discussions include only members of specific disadvantaged groups who may struggle to share their needs and views in a mixed environment (USAID, 2011).

Focus groups bring community members together to talk about their shared feelings and experiences regarding resource extraction. You can use focus group discussions at any point in a project or program. They can help shape a project during the design or planning stage, provide ongoing feedback while it's being implemented, and assist during reviews and evaluations (Kitzinger, 1995). These discussions are especially helpful for gathering a lot of detailed information quickly.

When running focus group discussions, a team is chosen to lead the talks. It's usually best to have at least two people guiding the discussion. One person leads while the other takes notes, which helps the facilitators pay attention to how group members interact and what they say. It's important to record the discussions as they happen, and having two facilitators makes this process easier. The notes from the focus group should be detailed, capturing not only what was said but also non-verbal cues like facial expressions and body language changes.

They find the groups and people who will join the discussions. Participants in focus group discussions should come from similar backgrounds and feel comfortable talking openly with one another (Wong, 2008). After identifying the needed groups, they can choose the participants. It often helps to involve key informants from the community in this selection process. Discussions are normally based on the checklist or discussion guides produced during the previous step. However, it is accepted that discussions may take different directions depending on the interests of the group. Whenever it's possible, it's crucial to make sure that the conversations are not directed by the facilitators but instead take place among the various members of the group.

3.7 Interviews

Interviews are a method used to get a clear understanding of how participants view the research topic (Kvale, 1996). In these interviews, the interviewee is seen as the expert, while the interviewer takes on the role of a learner. Researchers use interviewing techniques because

they want to gather as much information as possible from the participant about the topic. They ask questions in a neutral way, listen carefully to what the participant says, and follow up with more questions based on those answers. Researchers avoid leading participants with their own ideas or pushing them towards specific answers by showing approval or disapproval of their responses (Seidman, 2006).

Interviews typically happen in person and include one interviewer and one participant. They help us understand a person's viewpoint rather than just general ideas. Interviews are a great way to encourage people to share their personal feelings, thoughts, and experiences. They also allow us to learn how individuals make sense of the world around them. We can achieve this by paying close attention to the simple reasons participants give for their experiences and beliefs, and by asking them questions about how they connect different events, things, and beliefs. Interviews helped me in carrying out the study because I was able to capture personal narratives whereby respondents shared personal stories and cultural meanings attached to specific lands and natural features and we were also able to identify sensitive areas.

3.8 Validity and reliability of research instruments

Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that validity is how well a research tool measures what it's supposed to measure. In cultural studies about oil and gas exploration, making sure the research is valid means that the tools need to accurately reflect important cultural ideas like the beliefs, values, practices, and views of the communities that are impacted. There is construct validity which accurately represents abstract cultural constructs for example cultural heritage significance thus it involves theoretical alignment and factors analysis. Reliability is the degree to which an instrument yields consistent results under consistent conditions, (Mohajan,2017). A reliable instrument minimizes random errors and increases trust in the data collected. The research instruments were valid because they were pre-tested with a small group of relevant participants (local leaders) to ensure that the questions were clear, culturally appropriate and aligned with the research objectives. The topic involves culturally specific knowledge; instruments were adapted to suit the local socio-cultural environment. For instance, language was modified to resonate with local beliefs and practices. The research instruments were reliable because the research assistants who were part of conducting the interviews and observation were trained to minimize bias and maintain consistency in how data was gathered and recorder. Using multiple methods such as FGDs, interviews and observations allowed cross

verification of findings, improving both reliability and depth and also all the sessions were recorded with consent and transcribed accurately.

3.9 Data presentation and analysis procedures

Data analysis involves examining raw data to understand and make conclusions about the information. It is used to convert the available cluttered data into a format which is easy to understand, more legible, conclusive and which supports the mechanism of decision making (Bhatia, 2017). Data needs to be prepared before analysis, including cleaning, transforming and organizing it, it can be descriptive thus aiming to summarize and illustrate data, focusing on identifying patterns and relationships to make informed predictions. Thematic analysis involves examining patterns to reveal their meaning (Jansen, 2025). This process is driven by research aims and questions. Researcher read and re-read the data so that they are familiar with the content and also identifying and highlighting key aspects and it is used within qualitative data thus the researcher will use thematic analysis.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Researching the cultural importance of oil and gas exploration involves the ethical consideration that ensure respectful and responsible engagement with local communities. Informed consent is a foundational ethical principle in researching involving human subjects. Participants need to know all about the study's purpose, procedures, and benefits before they agree to take part. Researcher should provide clear and accessible information using language that participants can understand especially in communities with diverse linguistic backgrounds (Schutz, 2011). Researcher must approach their work with respect and an understanding of local customs. Researchers should familiarize themselves with the cultural norms and practises of the communities involved in the study. This respect fosters trust and openness which are essential for gathering accurate and meaningful data (Sullivan, 2013). Protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of participants is vital especially in sensitive cultural contexts. Participants may share personal stories or experiences that could expose them to risks if disclosed (Fowler, 2014).

3.11 Chapter summary

In summary, this chapter explained the research methods and design, highlighting how qualitative research was used. It described the steps taken to conduct the research, which

included interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. The chapter also emphasized the importance of ethics by ensuring respect, obtaining permission, and maintaining confidentiality.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS ON FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In Chapter 3, the emphasis was on the research methods, detailing how the study was conducted. This chapter presents, analyzes, and discusses data collected from interviews,

participant observations, and focus group discussions. The information mainly comes from older community members and local chiefs.

4.1 Demographics

This section shows the statistics of the interviewees that were present during interviews and focus group discussions.

Table 4.1 Response rate

Participant	Number	Gender	Mode of inquiry
Elderly members	7	Male: 7	Questionnaire
Herdsmen	4	Male: 4	Questionnaire
Community members	9	Male: 8 Female: 1	Questionnaire
Chiefs	4	Male: 4	Questionnaire

Source: research data, 2025

The total number of respondent was 24 as illustrated in the table above

4.2 Responses from Focus Group A (n=7) Mbire district elderly men

In response to their understanding of what cultural heritage is to them it is the norms and values that are set in the community. Cultural heritage can be described in many ways thus the response came from the other participant. He went on to explain that cultural heritage includes how people dress in their community, the food they eat, and the language they speak there. During the focus group discussion one of the participant stated that cultural heritage comprises of the traditional beliefs that they have in the society for example taboos and myths and they also agreed upon that traditional rituals and ceremonies are part of the cultural heritage. In agreement to the above responses, other two participants stated that cultural heritage is spiritual it is something that connects the living with their ancestors thus it needs respect.

Regarding the question that needed knowledge about who are the custodian of cultural heritage in *Mbire* district to them they said it is us. They said that they elders are the keepers of cultural

heritage because they have all the knowledge regards to the cultural heritage. One of the participant responded by saying they were present during the times of *Mbuya Nehanda* and her brother *Matope* thus they worked in hand with them and they know everything about the land. They carry the power to protect the cultural heritage because they know its values and the richness that comes with it.

In response to the cultural significance of the land where oil and gas exploration take place is to them the land holds historical significance for example the *Nyatsimba Mutota*'s arrival in *Dande* valley and cultural significance for local communities like the *Doma* people, the *Varenje* and others who have lived in harmony with their environment for generations. Another respondent stated that land is not just a resource but it is central ways of life, spiritual practices and ancestral heritage. He added by saying sacred sites, burial grounds and ritual landscapes are found throughout the area. The participants stated that oil and gas explorations should respect the lands because disruption of the land can be seen as a violation of cultural identity thus through the protection it is a way to preserve the community heritage and way of life.

Regarding the traditional practises or sacred sites that have been affected by exploration activities, the respondent stated that sacred trees and sacred places like the *Tsokoto* have been disturbed and destroyed to make way for roads. Additionally, the presence of exploration teams and machinery restricted access to the land because the area was part of a game park and they were restricted for gathering medicinal plants thus disrupting age-old customs. Other respondent added by saying the noise and the change of soil because they soil was mixed with chemical thus it made it difficult to carry out ceremonies that relied on natural settings.

In response to the cultural values or customs that oil and gas companies should respect during exploration, the participants before the beginning of the project the company should consult traditional leaders and elders as they are custodians of cultural knowledge and decision making. Additionally, the respondent stated that the company should honour taboos and traditional belief about the land, wildlife and water bodies. In order for the project to go well they should honour what is called *Chisi*. It is a day where by the community will be resting from working.

Regarding to how local communities perceive the relationship between their cultural heritage and resource development, they responded by saying in as much as they recognize the economic benefits that oil and gas exploration bring thus they feel that the developments come at a high cost to their cultural identity and way of life. Other participants mentioned that progress should occur alongside the safeguarding and advancement of their cultural heritage,

rather than its destruction. They also said that they want to be meaningfully involved in decisions to ensure that their traditions and values are preserved alongside any economic progress.

In response to any specific sites, landscape or traditions that you believe should be protected during oil and activities, the respondent stated that there are sites that need protection for example *Matanda aChiwawa* ruins, ancestral graves and caves like the *Mutota* Cave thus they are deeply spiritual places for our communities. He further stated that they go there to perform rituals, honour the ancestors and ask for guidance or blessings during times of drought or illness. Other participant said that disturbing these places would not only break cultural taboos but also disconnect us from our heritage. Additionally, he said they may look like empty land to outsiders but to us, they are living libraries of cultural and survival. That is why I believe oil and gas company must work closely with local leaders and respect these cultural spaces before starting any activities.

4.2.1 Analysis and discussions

Responding to their understanding of what cultural heritage is they stated that these are norms and values that are observed in the community. Cultural heritage (CH) can be way people dress, eat and how they talk in their community. Thus it was stated that CH is spiritual it is something that connects the living with their ancestors thus it needs respect. Respondent A stated that they are the custodians of CH because they are the keepers and they have the knowledge regarding it and they also have the power because some of them were present during the time of *Mbuya Nehanda*. In regards to the cultural significance of the land where oil and gas exploration take place they stated that land is not just a resource but it is central way of life and has ancestral heritage

Regarding the traditional practices that have been affected by exploration activities, the respondent stated that sacred places like *Tsokoto* have been disturbed and also destroyed to make way for roads. Respondent B added by saying the noise and the change of soil because the soil was mixed with chemicals thus it makes it difficult to carry out ceremonies that relied on natural settings.

Chisi should be valued because it is a day whereby the whole community will be resting. It was instructed by the ancestors and they are still observing that thus the exploration company should value the traditional customs of the community. The *Mutota* Cave and the *Matanda*

aChiwawa should be protected because they are deeply spiritual places for the community, they go there to perform ritual, honour the ancestors and to ask for guidance. They further stated that it might look like it is empty land to outsiders but to them they are living libraries of cultural and survival.

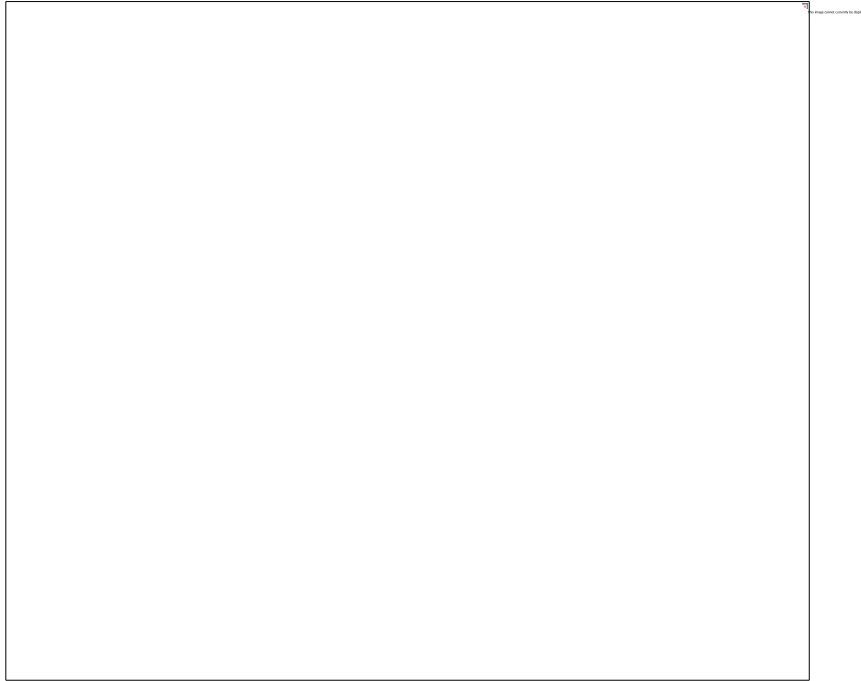


Fig 1.1 show the *Mutota* Cave

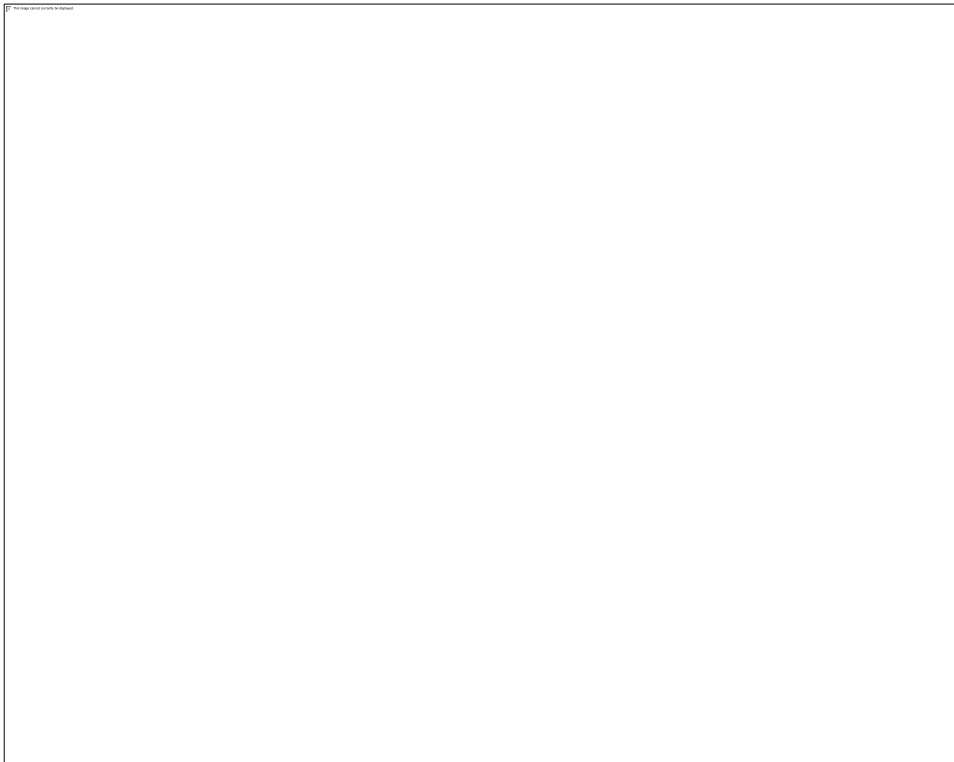


Fig 1.2 show the elderly members from the community

4.3 Responses from focus group B (n=13) community members and herdsmen

In response to the role that local leaders or elders play in decision about exploration project, the respondent stated that cultural leaders can serve as liaisons between exploration company and the community ensuring clear and respectful communication on both sides. They further explained that they offer invaluable knowledge about local traditions, sacred sites and historical connection to the land which helps ensure that exploration activities respect cultural heritage and they also safeguard cultural practices and beliefs from being disrupted or disrespected by external activities.

Regarding the responses from the community members about how exploration activities have impacted the community's sense of identity and belonging they all agreed that, if exploration disturbs ancestral lands or spiritual sites, it can cause emotional distress and weaken cultural ties to the land and also rapid change or environmental damage may limit the community's ability to continue cultural rituals to the land. However, they said if it is done accordingly, cultural leaders are involved and heritage is protected, it can strengthen pride and reaffirm identity.

In response to the measures that oil and gas exploration can take to minimize cultural disruption or loss, one participant stated that,

I think oil and gas companies should start by genuinely involving the community from the beginning by not just informing us but actually listening to our concerns and respecting our traditions. They should work closely with our elders and cultural leaders to identify sacred sites and ensure those areas are completely off limits to exploration. They should carry cultural impact assessments just like the environmental ones and share the results with the community in a respectful way. And lastly I think training their staff on local customs and cultural sensitivity could go a long way in preventing misunderstanding and showing that they are here to work with us not just take from our land.

4.3.1 Analysis and discussions

In the focus group discussions, the participant mentioned that local elders play a crucial role in the exploration process because they connect the community with the company. They are responsible for updating the community how far the project has gone and also telling them what the company is planning for them. The local leaders also safeguard the land from

disruption because their land has spiritual values and also it strengthens their pride. The respondent also stated that the exploration company should carry out CIA just like the environmental one to ensure that scared site and the spirituality of the land is protected.



Fig 1.3 shows the community members during the discussion

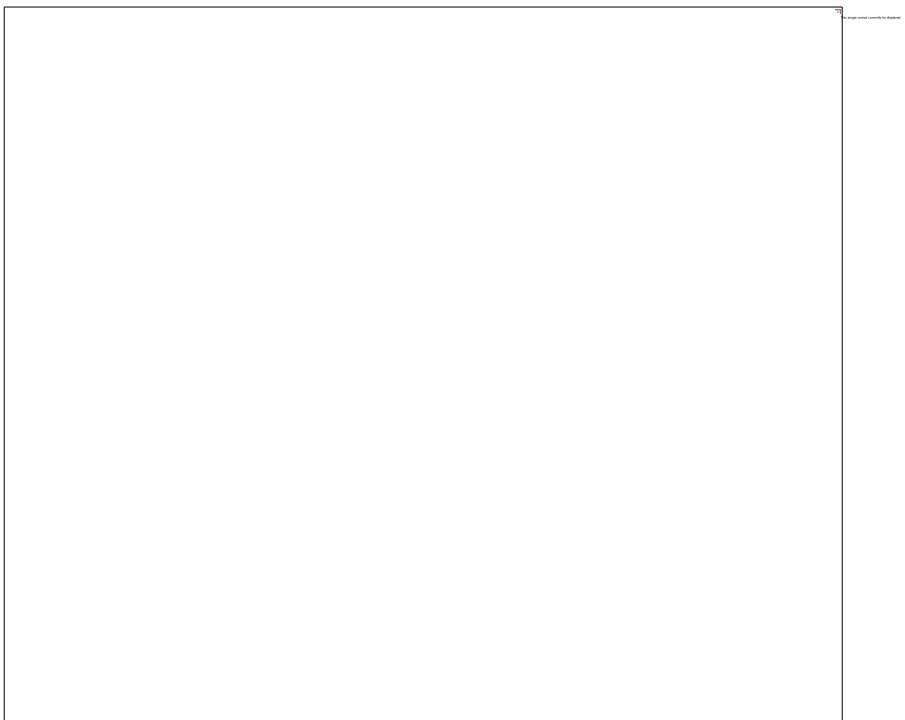


Fig 1.4 shows one of the herdsmen that was present

4.4 Participant observation

In this section, the researcher shows the information collected through participant observation in *Mbire* by portrayal of pictures and notes on how *chiumbwa* is done, the importance of *Musiga* tree and the protection of petrified trees

4.4.1 Chiumbwa Ceremony

Chiumbwa is performed as part of the implementation of any infrastructural development, whether its residential, industrial, mining or underground water drilling. The ritual process is carried out by spirit medium intercessors and village heads at the village level or by Chiefs, spirits medium and intercessors at the district or national level. During the ritual, traditional grains of millet or sorghum, snuff (*bute*), spirit medium sticks (*tsvimbo*), and fruit tree leaves are utilized. *Bute* is placed on the leaves of a selected fruit tree within the site, while mealie meal is placed against another fruit tree. The spirit medium stick is positioned on the ground near the tree. As part of the ritual, prayers and request are made to the spiritual world, seeking success, accident prevention and the overall benefit of the venture for the community. The *chiumbwa* ritual typically takes place around 4 to 5 pm and is left undisturbed overnight. The following morning before 8am, the signs of acceptance or denial of the venture are observed. If the heap of the snuff and the cone shape of mealie meal remain undisturbed by creatures or insects, it is considered a sign of acceptance. However, any disturbance indicates a denial by the spirit mediums. In case of denial, consultations with spirit medium are sought to understand the reasons behind it.

4.4.2 Analysis and discussions

Chiumbwa ritual is done to seek blessings and guidance from the spiritual realm for successful execution of the venture while ensuring the safety of the community. *Chiumbwa* reflects the community's deep connection to their cultural heritage and their belief in the spiritual realm's influence on their endeavours. It serves as a way to invoke blessings, ensure harmony between human activities and the spiritual world, and uphold the well-being of the community as a whole.

4.4.3 Musiga Tree

The *Musiga* tree serves as a significant cultural indicator in the *Mbire* community. Its presence near a homestead signifies that a woman has passed away. When a woman dies, it is customary to plant a *Musiga* tree next to her kitchen as a symbol of her presence and to honour her

memory. Underneath the *Musiga* tree, clay pots are placed which remain sealed until the *Kurova guva* ceremony takes place. The *Kurova guva* ceremony is a traditional ritual conducted to appease the spirits of the deceased. During this ceremony, the clay pots are opened, symbolizing the connection between the living and the departed. In the surrounding forests, it is believed that *Musiga* trees were once homes. The presence of these indicates that human settlements once thrived in those areas. This belief highlights the deep connection between the communities and the natural environment and the importance of preserving these sacred trees as a part of their cultural heritage.

4.4.4 Analysis and discussions

Musiga tree is important and it is sacred in the *Dande* Valley because it marks the death of a female figure in the family which is the wife of that homestead. The *Musiga* tree is planted next to her because so that her memories are honoured and they continue to feel her presence. Clay pots are placed under the *Musiga* tree and they are placed facing the ground and they are opened during the *Kurova guva* ceremony thus they will be bringing back her spirit.

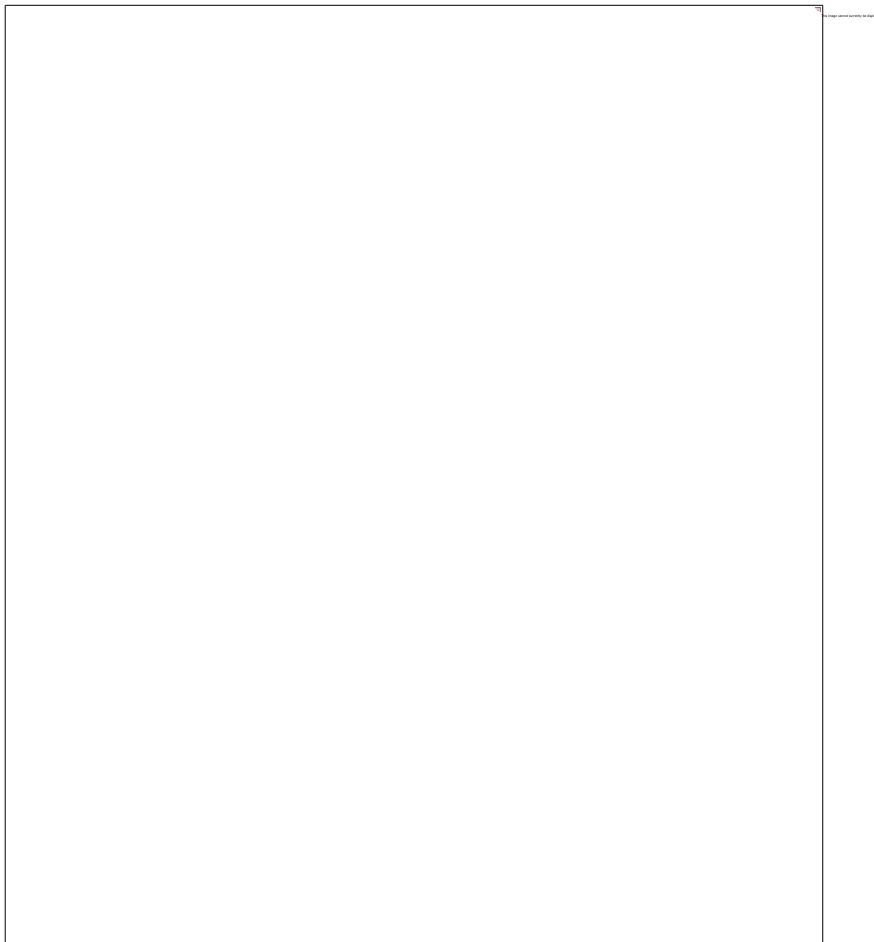


Fig 1.5 shows the *Musiga* tree near the kitchen of the deceased and her husband the elderly man

4.4.5 Petrified trees



Fig 1.6 shows the researcher alongside the petrified trees which mysteriously turned into stones and they are protected by the National Museums and Monument Act. They are located along Kanyemba road.

4.4.6 Doma Tribe



The picture above shows the shelter of the *Doma* tribe. They are known as nomads. They do not have permanent homes and they are hunters and gatherers. Through education from organizations they are making pole and dagga houses but it depends because some of them are still backward they live like nomads.

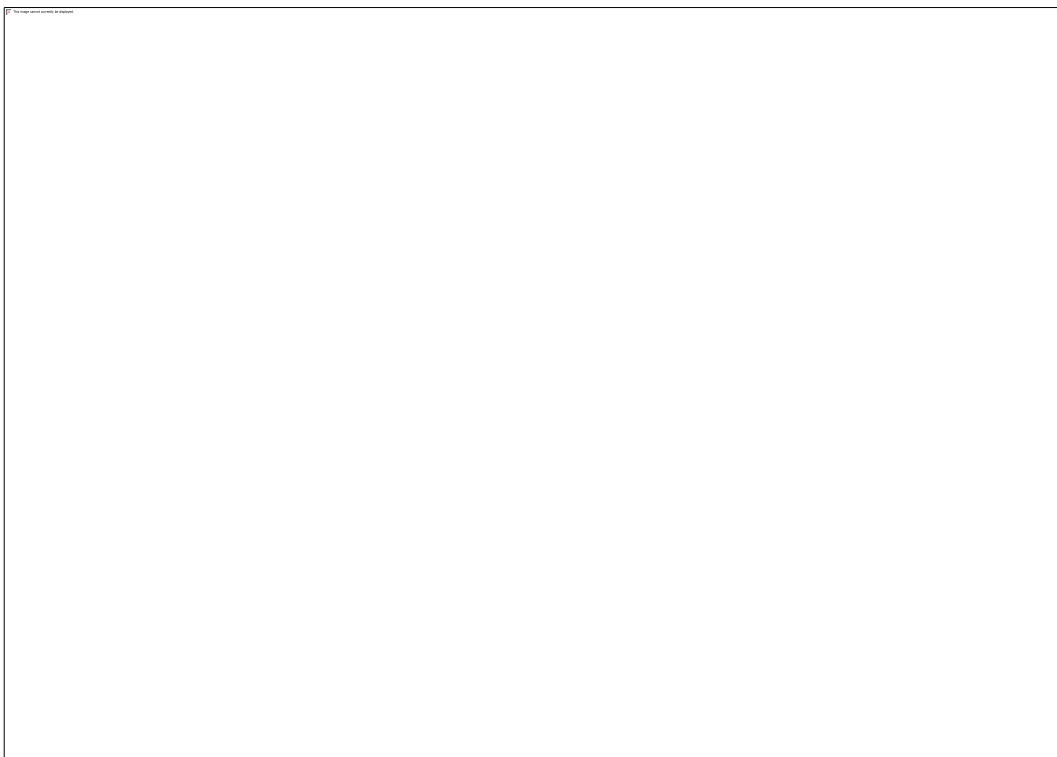


Fig 1.7 shows the pole and dagga houses

4.4.7 Corporate Social Responsibility



Fig 1.8 shows women singing and dancing thanking the oil and gas company for drilling boreholes and putting solar energy power

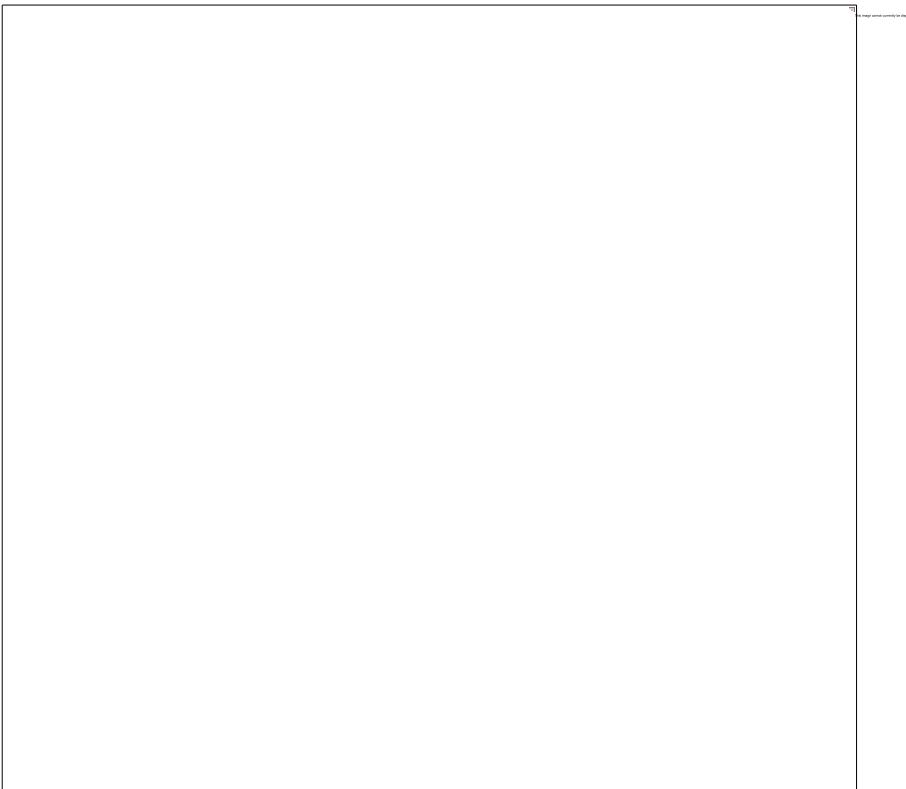


Fig 1.9 shows the boreholes that was drilled by Invictus Energy



Fig 1.10 shows the researcher and the community member praising the company and inside the fence there are solar energy power that helping in pumping the water.

4.5 Interviews

Chiefs were the ones that were interviewed but their responses were likely the same with the ones that were given by the elderly members of the community. They were asked questions that were not in line with the research topic but they narrated the history of the *Dande Valley*, how it became what it is today and their line of chieftainship. They also talked about the family tree from *Nyatsimba Mutota* upto one of the reigning chief.



Fig 1.11 shows Chief Chitsungu

4.6 Challenges

This study encountered challenges in accessing some of the participants because there was cholera outbreak thus people were not allowed to gather and also some challenges that the research faced was distance. Some of the wards were far and it had a lot of people how had the information but the researcher tried to reach where was possible.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on presenting, discussing, and analyzing the data collected from focus group discussions, participant observations, and interviews. The next chapter will wrap up this study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.0 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to summarize the study discussed in the previous chapters. It offers conclusions and suggestions based on the data that was collected, shown, and examined

regarding the cultural significance in oil and gas exploration. The recommendations aim to inform and shift how people view the role of culture in drilling exploration.

5.1 Summary

The research explores the intersection between oil and gas exploration activities and cultural heritage, focusing on the importance of preserving cultural values, traditions, historical sites in regions affected by resource extraction. As oil and gas projects often occur in culturally sensitive or indigenous territories, this study analyses how such developments impact local communities' way of life, sacred lands, archaeological sites and intangible heritage.

The research examines cultural and environmental impact assessments and the role of stakeholder engagement in identifying and protecting cultural resources. It also investigates how multinational oil companies navigate cultural considerations, often balancing economic interests with social responsibility and ethical practices.

Ultimately, the study aims to highlight best practices for integrating cultural heritage preservation into oil and gas operations, proposing policy recommendations for governments, researchers and families to ensure that cultural importance is not undermined in the pursuit of energy development.

5.2 Conclusions

The analysis of cultural importance in oil and gas exploration reveals a critical and often underappreciated dimension of resource extraction- its profound impact on cultural heritage, identity and continuity. While oil and gas development can bring significant economic benefits, it also poses serious risk to cultural landscapes, sacred sites, traditional livelihoods and the social fabric of communities, particularly indigenous and marginalized populations. This research has emphasized that cultural heritage is not a peripheral concern but a core component of sustainable development and its protection is essential for ensuring the long term well-being of societies affected by extractive activities.

A key discovery from this study is the urgent requirement for early, inclusive, and ongoing involvement of stakeholders in both the planning and execution of oil and gas projects. Respecting cultural rights requires meaningful dialogue with local communities and indigenous groups where their knowledge, traditions and spiritual connections to the land are acknowledged and valued. Environmental and cultural impact assessments must go beyond

environmental concerns to include comprehensive cultural heritage assessments conducted in collaboration with local knowledge holders and heritage professionals.

Oil and gas exploration must evolve to accommodate the cultural dimensions of the environments in which it operates. The future of energy development relies not just on being economically practical and environmentally friendly, but also on maintaining social and cultural values. By embedding cultural sensitivity into every phase of exploration and extraction, stakeholders can promote a more just, respectful and balanced approach to resource governance. The path forward lies in creating frameworks that harmonize development with cultural preservation, ensuring that progress does not come at the cost of identity, history and community.

5.2 Recommendations

The researcher suggests recommendation to different stakeholders such as the government, the community member and research so that it will help them in protecting and continuation of embracing the cultural heritage whenever there are projects in the community.

5.3.1 To the government

- Train government officials and local authorities on the importance of cultural heritage in natural resource governance.
- Improve collaboration between the Ministry of Mines, the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe and the local governance structures.
- Use GIS, remote sensing, and other technologies to document and protect cultural heritage in exploration areas.
- Harmonize oil and gas policies with heritage conservation legislation.
- Recognize and include indigenous knowledge systems in decision making and heritage mapping processes.

5.3.2 To the researchers

- Integrate anthropology, archaeology, environmental science and energy studies to provide a holistic understanding of the cultural impacts.
- Involve indigenous and local populations in research to capture authentic perspective and cultural values.

- Ensure ethical considerations in research design, especially when working with vulnerable communities.
- Evaluate both the short-term and long-term cultural and social impacts of oil and gas exploration.

5.3.3 To the Families

- Teach younger generations about family traditions, oral histories, sacred sites and cultural practices.
- Record family stories, ritual and location of cultural significance that may be impacted by exploration.
- Actively engage in public meetings or consultations related to oil and gas projects to voice cultural concerns.
- Share local knowledge with researchers and heritage organizations working to safeguard culture.
- Strengthen community bonds and awareness around shared cultural values that may be at risk.

5.4 Areas for further research

The research suggests looking into advanced technologies and participatory methods for mapping both tangible and intangible cultural assets. It also encourages exploring the cultural effects of displacement and land conflicts that are linked to oil and gas exploration.

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APPENDIX 1: Focus group A (7) Mbire elderly men

Dear Respondent(s)

My name is Tanatswa Muringisi and am doing Bachelor Honours Degree in Culture and Heritage Studies with Bindura University of Science Education under the Department of Culture and Heritage Studies. Therefore, I am conducting a study on Cultural Heritage issues focusing on the title, **An analysis of cultural importance in oil and gas exploration**. The information gathered during this study is used for academic purposes and also by Invictus Energy to culturally operationalize and contextualize oil and gas processes and activities. The understanding will go a long way in transforming operations of the whole project by bending

all its elements to cultural values, norms and traditions. I am kindly requesting for your cooperation and participation in responding to the questions below.

Questions

1. How would you describe the cultural significance of the land where oil and gas exploration is taking place?
2. In what ways have traditional practices or sacred sites have been affected by exploration activities?
3. What cultural values or customs should oil and gas companies respect during exploration and development?
4. How do local communities perceive the relationship between their cultural heritage and resource development?
5. Are there specific sites, landscapes or tradition that you believe should be protected during oil and gas activities? Why?
6. Who is responsible for managing the cultural heritage in the community?
7. What role should local cultural leaders or elders play in decisions about exploration projects?

APPENDIX 2: Focus group (9) Mbire community members and (4) herdsmen

Dear Respondent(s)

My name is Tanatswa Muringisi and am doing Bachelor Honours Degree in Culture and Heritage Studies with Bindura University of Science Education under the Department of Culture and Heritage Studies. Therefore, I am conducting a study on Cultural Heritage issues focusing on the title, **An analysis of cultural importance in oil and gas exploration**. The information gathered during this study is used for academic purposes and also by Invictus Energy to culturally operationalize and contextualize oil and gas processes and activities. The understanding will go a long way in transforming operations of the whole project by bending

all its elements to cultural values, norms and traditions. I am kindly requesting for your cooperation and participation in responding to the questions below.

Question

1. How do you think the exploration activities have impacted the community's sense of identity and belonging?
2. What measures could oil and gas companies take to minimize cultural disruption or loss?
3. Can you share examples of good and bad practices by companies regarding cultural sensitivity in past projects?
4. What long term cultural preservation strategies would you recommend alongside oil and gas exploration?
5. Who are the custodians of cultural and heritage norms and values in the area?

