

Double-Rootedness and Networking among Urban Migrants in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT Notions of double-rootedness were deeply ingrained in Zimbabwe's urban migrants' lives. Double-rootedness implies holding on to the concept of 'home' while simultaneously being located in a foreign setting. Home in the context of urban women migrants from Chinhoyi and Harare implies a connection with some village or rural place. When applied from outside the country 'home' refers to Zimbabwe. For the women urban migrants in the study double rootedness was adopted as a survival strategy in the face of a declining and collapsing national economy. For many urban migrants double-rootedness implied having a real or imagined connection with some rural place called 'home'. The paper builds on the experience gained by the author during 12-months of an OSSREA funded research project conducted in 2002 in Chinhoyi the capital city of Mashonaland West Province and Harare, Zimbabwe's capital. The methodology adopted for the study was mainly qualitative in nature. The research participants for this study displayed double-rootedness in their really or imagined life-worlds. For this group of women research participants, social networks played a critical role in enabling them access the much needed resources, information and social support. Thus, urban women migrants in this study demonstrate little support for the thesis that under conditions of scarcity and poverty there is little basis for reciprocity. Shared knowledge and information and the activation of social networks enabled many migrants to access accommodation, jobs and other resources thus, allowing many to continue to stay in town and to support their households. Not only did networks enrich people's lives, they acted as a resource that enabled many to hang on, cope and at times even propel some migrants to climb out of poverty. Networks generally involved kin, friends and neighbours. The study showed that non-kin networks became more pronounced under conditions of poverty. Social networks had become a key organisational principle among urban residents. An interesting observation noted amongst many urban residents was their shared perceptions that the rural area was still their home. This view persisted even amongst urban migrants with minimum contact with their rural homes.