

## **ABSTRACT**

A number of female household heads in the high density suburbs of Masvingo were able to break out of poverty through cross-border trading. Although the traders have received unsympathetic treatment by press and officials, they show themselves to be enterprising individuals. This article, based on participant observation, in Masvingo townships, describes the women and their trade. It looks at their strategies for making a good income out of the trade, their markets, and the constraints that they have to deal with — particularly from officialdom. This article focuses on cross-border trade as the one reasonably successful strategy for climbing out of poverty. The study on which it is based was carried out in Masvingo town, a provincial capital with a population of 52 000 according to the 1992 Census (CSO, 1993, 13). Masvingo lies in the southern part of Zimbabwe, ravaged by repeated droughts in the decade extending from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.