

Rural Poverty Alleviation: Reflections on Zimbabwe's Experiences and Needed Strategy

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Abstract: This paper evaluates rural poverty alleviation strategies that have been implemented by the government of Zimbabwe since independence in 1980 such as the establishment of cooperatives, growth points, infrastructural development through the District Development Fund, CAMPFIRE programmes, Community Share Ownership Trusts and resettlement programmes among others. This paper is a desk review of the various rural development strategies that have been implemented. The paper establishes that on the whole these development strategies have not been very effective in alleviating poverty in rural areas owing to a myriad of challenges, such as economic decline, lack of ownership of development policies by rural communities owing to top down approaches to development planning by government. The paper recommends that there is a need to interrogate the reasons for the failure of the rural poverty alleviation strategies, capacity building of rural district councils, and employing participatory approaches to rural development planning and practice, in order to ensure the sustainability of rural development programmes.

Keywords: Rural Poverty alleviation, strategies, development planning, top down approaches, participatory approaches

INTRODUCTION

Rural poverty is on the increase in Zimbabwe despite government pledges towards rural development since independence. Poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon in Zimbabwe given that 70% of Zimbabweans reside in rural areas [1]. Development prospects in the country's rural areas remain futile and the poor continue to be marginalized and further entrenched in poverty as a result of the failure of government poverty alleviation programmes due to factors which include poor administration, corruption, politicization of programmes and economic instability. This paper appraises the loop holes of the Zimbabwean rural poverty alleviation programmes and procedures which had potentials of propelling the country's population out of the trap of poverty and recommends the implementation of sustainable poverty alleviation interventions in Zimbabwe. This paper is not exhaustive of the rural poverty alleviation strategies implemented in Zimbabwe since independence, it however centres on programmes and procedures which possessed great poverty alleviation capabilities as recorded in literature.

CONCEPTUALIZING RURAL POVERTY

Conceptualizing rural poverty is elusive and complex making it a difficult task to design poverty reduction strategies. Defining rural poverty is however, central to formulating appropriate policy interventions [2]. The monetary approach of defining rural poverty

using a poverty datum line is inadequate in rural areas which are not cash based economies and where a few people are employed. Conventional measures of absolute poverty in rural areas are problematic as they fail to take into account people's expectations, norms, values and customs in particular communities. The possession of assets, such as land, labour, livestock, human or social capital is indispensable in measuring poverty as they influence the capacities of individuals and households to withstand shocks [3]. The definition of rural poverty needs to be constructed on asset threshold than on income thresholds as poverty has diverse meanings in various societies [3]. Rural community poverty is to a large extent measured by the socially perceived necessities of life, and the availability or lack of certain goods and services [3]. Income-poverty, though important, is only one aspect of deprivation and it is a simplistic definition [4]. Rural Poverty therefore refers to lack of physical necessities, assets and income, it interacts with other dimensions of deprivation such as physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability and powerlessness [5].

RATIONALE

Various rural poverty alleviation programmes such as cooperatives, growth points, campfire programmes, community share ownership trusts, have been implemented in Zimbabwe since 1980, however no meaningful development has been achieved to date.

Cooperatives that were established soon after independence have all but virtually collapsed, CAMPFIRE programmes and community share ownership trusts are beset by lack of transparency and very few communities are benefitting in a substantial and visible way from these. There is need to interrogate the reasons for the failure of the various development strategies which aimed to alleviate poverty in rural areas. Dualism which had been a feature of the colonial economy has continued to date and rural areas continue to be left out of the mainstream economy.

OBJECTIVES

- To outline the rural poverty alleviation strategies that were implemented in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980.
- To examine the reasons for the failure of rural poverty alleviation strategies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Participatory approaches to development whose main proponent is Robert Chambers assist in reversing the top down diffusion of knowledge, planning and practice. Participatory approaches give primacy to bottom up approaches which would empower local communities to plan and control the development process and make them be in charge of their own livelihoods. According to Chambers [4], participatory approaches should assist in the practice of rural development from the top down centralised standardization to local diversity. Numerous rural development programmes were implemented countrywide in Zimbabwe since 1980 to alleviate poverty. Rural development programmes in Zimbabwe suffer from centralised planning, with a one size fits all approach which does not take into account the peculiar conditions of a rural area, this is true of rural development programmes such as the Growth point strategy, CAMPFIRE programmes and community share ownership trusts. Participatory approaches, if employed would have allowed the diversity of rural communities to be taken into account. The government would have still played the role of development facilitator taking into account the knowledge, experiences and needs, of the local communities and Rural District Councils. Government tended to adopt a top down approach and dictate rural development policy and programmes. Hence participatory approaches assist in unpacking the reasons for the stagnation and sometimes the failure of top down rural development programmes in Zimbabwe.

Trends in Rural Poverty: Legacies and Experiences

Rural poverty in Zimbabwe is deeply rooted in the inception of colonialism. The Zimbabwean pre-colonial economy was characterised by autonomous, self-sufficient indigenous family economic units which

operated independently from the pressures of the international economy and modern state economy [6]. It is undeniable that these economies were susceptible to natural disasters but local level mutual social support systems provided a reliable social safety-net for the poor unless in rare cases where whole communities were similarly affected. Chinake (1997) reiterates that colonialism sparked the disintegration of African Traditional Societies which acted as a social safety net and reduced poverty through the intimate interaction between the family, community support and traditional institutions.

The British colonial masters deliberately developed white populated urban areas and commercial farms at the expense of the black dominated rural areas. Poverty in pre-independence Zimbabwe was a product of a political, economic and social system that was characterized by imbalances and inequality skewed in favour of the white minority [3]. Resultantly in 1980, the Zimbabwean government inherited a largely neglected rural sector characterized by high levels of poverty, poor service delivery and underdeveloped infrastructure. The post-independent state efforts to reverse the colonial era of segregation, imbalances and impoverishment of rural areas included the employment of various pro-poor and pro-growth policies and strategies (Chinake, 1997). Regrettably, the nature and character of colonial dual economies and their structural rigidities continue to act as the foundation of structural poverty in Zimbabwe.

Rural poverty in Zimbabwe has further been perpetuated by the urban bias of development strategies which siphon out rural resources into the urban sector. "Development plans formulated and partly implemented in Zimbabwe did not pay attention to poverty alleviation in rural areas, the assumption being that the benefits of any national development strategy embarked on would trickle down to the poor in the periphery" [7]. The trickle down-effects of poverty alleviation in reality, did not occur and the poor continue in a state of deprivation whilst the gap between the affluent urban and the rural poor will be widening as a result of such urban biases.

Poor economic policies in Zimbabwe have aggravated rural poverty. Rural poverty in the country is "...largely man made, preventable and grossly unnecessary situation, the result of years of failed policies and the self-seeking actions of the ruling political elites whose corrupt and undemocratic tendencies have worsened the situation by heightening the levels of inequality to alarming levels [8]. The Zimbabwean central government has also failed to acknowledge the responsibility of the policy poverty causal factors choosing rather to shift the blame on

sanctions. The programmes implemented targeted towards reducing rural poverty have been hampered by the high levels of corruption which have been manifested in the diversion of funds, community exclusion and nepotism.

The efforts of alleviating rural poverty in Zimbabwe were also compromised in the 1990s by the introduction of an International Monetary Fund and the World Bank spearheaded Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). ESAP eroded past gains, rendering most rural communities poor in terms of both income and assets poverty [9]. ESAP adjustments included the deregulation of the domestic economy, removal of trade barriers and privatization of parastatals and a number of measures which aimed at reducing public expenditure. The introduction of user fees in rural health clinics and schools negatively affected rural human capital as there are some segments of the population who could not afford the fees thus compromising their health, and access to education for their children.

Climate change related impacts including droughts, floods, temperatures and rainfall have adverse effects on rural development activities in Zimbabwe [3]. Rural vulnerability to climate change is high due to social, economic and environmental conditions that intensify vulnerability to negative impacts and contribute to a reduction in the capacity to cope with climate hazards. Vulnerability and poverty aggravation have also been exacerbated by the HIV pandemic which has resulted in the deaths of the economically active, diversion of funds and an increase in women's burden of care which constrains them from engaging in other developmental projects. These factors have interlinked and greatly contributed to the current staggering poverty statistics in the country and the retrogression of rural development.

Rural Poverty Alleviation: Programmes and Procedures

Co-operatives

Co-operatives are forms of organisations where persons voluntarily associate together on a basis of equality for the promotion of the economic, and social interests of themselves [10]. Co-operatives in rural Zimbabwe played a pivotal role in rural poverty alleviation soon after independence. The formation of co-operatives in Zimbabwe was centred on improving the quality of life of people and controlling and owning the means of production [11]. The Ministry of Community Development and Women Affairs encouraged the formation of clubs at village levels which were expected to mature before they could be formally constituted and registered as co-operatives.

The Ministry in 1983 acted as a catalyst of co-operative formation and resultantly 185 co-operatives were registered by the Department of Co-operatives in the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rural Development [11]. Co-operatives in rural areas are categorized as income-generating, construction, infrastructural development and micro-financing.

Co-operatives in rural areas offer opportunities for the improvement of income and reduction of poverty. Participation by members in co-operatives for the marketing of livestock and crops or for the provision of transport services and credit is cheaper and more practical than assisting one individual peasant [11]. This results in efficient allocation of productive resources. Co-operatives act as a rural employment creation strategy which can greatly reduce income poverty. Co-operatives are a core of bottom-up community development which is key in motivating the people concerned to come up with innovations in order to make more productive use of their own resources [10]. In Mutoko village women and men were jointly involved in vegetable growing, pig-farming, food production and marketing their produce. Agere [11] reported that the increase of such agricultural co-operatives in rural Zimbabwe led to the increase in production of food in some areas from an average of 9 bags of maize per acre to 27 bags per acre because members had learnt how to use fertilizer and other techniques.

Co-operatives, however face challenges in rural Zimbabwe despite the significant role they play in poverty alleviation. Political interference in co-operatives is common in rural areas as a result of political and economic fragile landscapes in the country especially since the year 2000 [12]. Political affiliation has been used to determine who joins a co-operative and the access to loans to increase the assets of such co-operatives for example, accessing the Kurera/Ukondla Youth Fund for youth co-operatives [13]. Lack of capital and government support for co-operatives have been an obstacle of the growth and development of co-operatives especially during years of economic crisis. Poor roads make access to markets, very difficult, especially for perishable agricultural produce. Mawowa [12] observed that there was a need to improve gravelled roads in ward 19 of Gutu in order to create an efficient marketing environment to enhance agricultural growth by the Mukonoweshuro Co-operative gardening project.

The formation of cooperatives was encouraged by the government especially in the early years after independence. The idea of forming cooperatives and pooling funds in order to engage in income generating activities, though noble soon lacked traction among

members, owing to lack of entrepreneurial and management skills. As a result a lot of cooperatives collapsed.

CAMPFIRE

Zimbabwe's Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE), is a grassroots natural resource management scheme that promotes the use of natural resources as an economic and sustainable land use option in Zimbabwe's rural areas [14]. CAMPFIRE was developed largely around the concept of managing wildlife and wildlife habitats in the rural areas of Zimbabwe. CAMPFIRE is designed specifically to stimulate the long-term development, management and sustainable use of natural resources in Zimbabwe's communal farming areas. The articulated logic of the program is that when the incomes from the sustainable use of the natural environment are realised rural people will have the incentives to support rather than undermine conservation efforts and Rural District Councils (RDCs) will gain a reliable source of funds for community development [15]. The major aim of the programme is to align land use more closely with the natural opportunities and constraints of agriculturally marginal areas, encompassing three major natural resources which are wildlife, woodlands, water. The CAMPFIRE programme was designed to mitigate the widening gap between environmental conservation and economic development at a local level [16]. Wildlife management under the programme is viewed as a key poverty reduction tool.

CAMPFIRE has played a pivotal role in securing rural livelihoods through the implementation of community projects. In Nyaminyami District the community managed to drill boreholes through the use of the dividends from the programme [17]. The project enabled the community to access safer drinking water which is a prerequisite for healthier populations and human development. Access to this important resource has introduced new economic activities in the district such as brick moulding which have been important in augmenting the income levels of some households. The drilling of boreholes which are near to many homesteads in Nyaminyami have improved the daily activities of households especially those of women. Tasks such as food preparation have been made easier to such an extent that less time is spent on them hence leaving more time for income generating activities [18]. Furthermore, the community, in joint venture with other CAMPFIRE wards in the district managed to purchase six tractors, six dam scoops, five reversible ploughs and one tow grader [19]. These tractors are used in different projects such as road and bridge construction, and field ploughing which has contributed to infrastructural development in the district.

The project has created employment opportunities especially for the young and unemployed youths who are employed on a contract basis thereby ensuring effective community participation in the programme. The creation of formal and to some extent permanent forms of employment has been one major contribution of CAMPFIRE to the Chundu community. Under CAMPFIRE, the local community is contracted to do various jobs such as brick moulding, stone and sand gathering, water collection and building [14]. Drivers and research monitors are permanent and full time employees of CAMPFIRE which are drawn from each village. Safari areas employ local people as cooks, tour guides and game scouts. CAMPFIRE generated revenues and diversified income sources within communities hence improving income stability, especially at the occurrence of unforeseen natural disasters like drought which can create an increased need for cash even as agricultural prospects diminished [20]. The CAMPFIRE earned revenues greatly facilitated the coping of CAMPFIRE communities with the harvest failures and droughts of 1992 as people managed to be food secure supplementing the food aid programmes that were facilitated by the government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) [15]. Hence one can argue that CAMPFIRE improves the livelihoods of rural populaces by reducing their vulnerability to natural disasters such as droughts.

Despite the above mentioned gains, CAMPFIRE has not been fully effective as a rural poverty alleviation strategy. In the CAMPFIRE model, democratically elected local committees are supposed to be responsible for ensuring community participation in project management (Bond, 2001). It is however interesting to note that, in practice these committees rarely develop and sustain 'consensual legitimacy' as a result of the dominance of RDCs [19]. The sub-district, district, and national levels through which decisions are made involve a series of processes that are not highly participatory and can be accurately described at best as "representative participation" (Madzudzo, 2003). This layer of bureaucracy separates local residents from direct engagement in project management and allows the Rural District Councils to co-opt benefits, thus undermining rural livelihoods. It is also notable that the flow of authority from the RDCs strips communities of their resource sovereignty as all the decisions regarding the natural resource base are made at the top of the administrative hierarchy.

The financial benefits of the CAMPFIRE programme have failed to mitigate income poverty in the targeted communities. Project revenues were to be dispersed according to a non-binding budget guideline which stated that at least 50% of the revenues was to be paid to the communities, up to 35% would be allocated

to wildlife management (habitat management, fire control, monitoring, hiring of game scouts), while 15% was to be retained by the RDC as an administrative levy [16]. However, RDCs viewed CAMPFIRE as a solution to their growing financial problems and thus oscillated between driving communities to accept the provisions of a particular CAMPFIRE arrangement, including how the land and its resources should be used to generate revenue, and being responsive to the development needs and concerns of those communities. The corrupt tendencies of RDCs have left communities with little or no revenue for the improvement of their well-being. Madzudzo (2003) shows that as a result of corruption the Guruve RDC receives 40% of the total revenues received from safari concessions instead of the agreed 15% but very little trickles down to the village level thus most households fail to directly benefit from the revenues generated.

Furthermore the CAMPFIRE program uses the household homogeneity assumption which is evident when cash dividends are distributed to household units through payments to household heads rather than to the individual household members [14]. This does not fully support the livelihood of individuals in some households especially women and children as men are reported to be abusing these funds on beer and prostitutes to the extent of threatening the food security of some households. Nevertheless, Murphree [20] argues that the household level benefit is generally small and intermittent as it is estimated that 95% of the total revenues received at a village level went towards community development and most of the households (about 71%) received no monetary benefit from the project and the few which did estimated that it constituted 40% of their household incomes which they could not do if they practiced agriculture in areas that have been set aside for wildlife. The program's emphasis on safari hunting and eco-tourism tends to benefit the Central government primarily in the form of taxes as compared to the people who live at risk of being attacked by wild animals and are more involved in their conservation.

The consideration of the impact of CAMPFIRE on poverty has to take into account the costs that rural residents experience as a result of the intervention. In contrast to the RDCs, where the costs of wildlife production are relatively minor, individuals and communities sustain considerable direct and opportunity costs [16]. Households must bear the costs of losing crops and livestock to wildlife, as well as living with real and perceived threats to their lives. In spite of game electrical fences some communities still experience problems of crop destruction by animals such as wild pigs, baboons, elephants and duikers that find their way to the communal lands which causes

great insecurity among the villagers [19]. However, there is no clear policy on compensation for crop damage and this has contributed to reduced standards of living as a result of the inability of RDCs to compensate all members of communities for crop damage. These types of impacts contribute to poverty by reducing household food security and options for generating cash, and can be particularly problematic for households that have little security from the outset.

Land and Agrarian Reform

Agrarian reform entails transforming the role of various agrarian classes in struggles for development and democratization, towards equitable land ownership and social relations of production and developing the agricultural production forces to enhance food security, livelihoods and the accumulation of capital [21]. A land and agrarian reform programme was therefore mandatory after independence in order to address the underlying inequity and increase access to land by indigenous Zimbabweans. The land reform programme in Zimbabwe occurred in three phases which are 1980-1985, 1986-1999 and 2000 -2010. In what can be seen as the first phase, land reforms from 1980 to 1992 redistributed 3.5 million hectares of white-owned commercial farmland to 71000 indigenous families, mostly from communal areas [22]. This policy managed to establish a successful resettlement programme to boost food security and equitable economic growth, concurrently reducing land pressure in overcrowded communal lands.

The 'willing-buyer – willing seller' principle was dropped after the ten-year moratorium signaling the onset of the second phase of land reform which began in 1992 [23]. This was as a result of the improved 1992 Land Acquisition Act allowing for the compulsory acquisition of land. Recompense was based on a complex set of 15 principles to derive a 'fair' price for land [21]. The pace of resettlement remained below 2500 households per year between 1990 and 1993 despite the targeted 5 million hectares of commercial farmland required for the resettlement of 110 000 households [21].

The third phase of land reform began in the year 2000 after the rejection of the government's draft Constitution in a referendum in February 2000 – the ruling party's first popular defeat since coming to power in 1980 [24]. The new radicalized approach of the land reform was a strategy of securing the rural vote before the parliamentary elections scheduled for June of the same year. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) spearheaded by Liberation War veterans was characterized by considerable coercion, violence and illegal activity resulting in the acquisition of 3074 farms between 2000 and 2002 alone [22]. Land

redistribution increased the access to and better distribution of the benefits from natural resources such as water, indigenous forests and wildlife, as well as other social benefits realized from such resources thus improving the livelihoods of peasants.

The government began to finance the agricultural sector after 2000 as a result of political and economic pressure. Donor funding declined as a result of the controversial FTLRP hence the government of Zimbabwe had no choice but to finance its own agricultural production. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe played a key role in providing finance for sourcing inputs and mechanization equipment through various programmes [25]. During the 2010 to 2011 agricultural season, the government implemented a subsidized inputs programme, where private companies were contracted to provide seed and fertilizer. The programme was implemented through the Grain Marketing Board which distributed 3523 tonnes of seed maize, 98 tonnes of seed sorghum, 3903 tonnes of ammonium nitrate (AN) fertilizer and 12 705 tonnes of Compound D, reaching 400 000 households [3]. These government programmes however seem to follow an ad hoc approach, responding to very diverse objectives, some being political rather than focusing on people's needs and they have a short term nature which affect their efficiency.

The land reform was not free of corruption, as evidence points to a significant number of the best farms going to the elites affiliated to the ruling party in the political, military and civil service [22]. There are reports of some A2 land beneficiaries who are corruptly using some of the acquired but unallocated lands for opportunistic or temporary enterprises, fuelling the delay of the redistribution of such lands. There are individual elites who gained access to multiple farms and plots larger than the sizes recommended for redistribution, while a few 'grabbed' illegally some of the moveable properties of the former farmers [22]. In addition there are reports of allocated land lying fallow, while some of the new farm owners were actually leasing their land to able farmers or even the former white farmers. This scenario is symptomatic of the fact that some new farmers had no capacity to make farms productive owing largely to lack of capital and technical know-how. Thus despite the overall increase in the number of landholders as a result of the FTLR programme there has been reduced food production due to the declining support to agriculture from the fiscus, late and poor land preparation due to limited tillage capacity, unsustainable financing mechanism for the sector and the generally unfavorable macro-economic environment which have resulted in abject poverty [26]. The land reform programme also negatively impacted on farm workers especially those who did not originate

from Zimbabwe. The occupations led to a huge drop in the employment levels, estimated at 70 percent in the Midlands and 65 percent in the two Matabeleland provinces, by mid-2000. Less than 5 per cent of farmworkers were granted land, their exclusion from being beneficiaries was based on ZANU PF branding them as either belonging to the farmer or foreigners in the politics of the nation [24].

Rural Infrastructural Development

Rural infrastructure refers to the complex of physical structures required for the socio-economic functioning of rural communities such as transportation and communication systems, water and power lines, and public institutions including schools and post offices [27]. Rural infrastructure extends beyond the physical infrastructure to include social infrastructure such as health and education. Rural infrastructure is not an end in itself but it is a means to an end of achieving broader goals of poverty alleviation by providing essential services such as water and sanitation, transportation of goods and people and the transmission and communication of knowledge and information [27].

The Government of Zimbabwe through partnerships with Non-governmental Organisations made significant strides towards developing rural infrastructure for poverty alleviation. In terms of social infrastructure there has been an increase in access to health centres and education. The District Development Fund was also set up as a government agency responsible for maintaining rural infrastructure within the communal, Resettlement and Small Scale Commercial Farming Areas of Zimbabwe [25]. Its programmes are funded by the government, donors and the private sector. The DDF has been crippled and is almost non-existent as a result of lack of funding as a result of the economic crisis experienced in the country and the decline of donor funding attributed to the infamous FTLRP.

The government of Zimbabwe embarked on a rural electrification programme as a strategy of improving the rural energy sector. The rural electrification programme was initiated in 2002 following the enactment of the Rural Electrification Fund Act [28]. The major thrust of the Rural Electrification Fund is to ensure that there is equitable distribution of resources in the electrification of the rural areas in [28]. The programme was initiated with the hope of accelerating rural electrification. There has been an increase in the number of rural institutions that are electrified, including schools and health facilities especially in growth points. This has contributed to the significant improvement in business investment in rural areas. The rural electrification programme, however has encountered problems characteristic of the whole

country of poor service provision and load shedding. This has retarded the maturing of industries in growth points and communal areas. While rural electrification is good and can have a positive developmental effect, it lacks a positive uptake especially to rural household consumers, as very few people can afford the very high costs of being connected to the electricity grid or power lines. For instance an individual household has to pay more than US\$2000 to be connected to the electricity grid. These prohibitive and very high costs affect the spread and success of the programme. Hence relatively speaking, only a few rural households in Zimbabwe have been electrified.

Furthermore there has been construction of infrastructure in rural areas such as roads and bridges. However the top down approaches that are used in the construction of rural infrastructure has negatively affected community ownership leading to the abandonment of such infrastructure when it begins to dilapidate by local people who have the potential of renovating such infrastructure.

The politicization of development projects has contributed to gaps in rural social infrastructure especially in Zimbabwe.

The Growth Point Strategy

The term growth point in Zimbabwe is widely used to refer to settlements which are designated for economic and physical development [29]. The growth point strategy was adopted in the late 1970s by the colonial government and strengthened in the 1980s by the post-colonial government with the intention of addressing the dual economy disparities and improve the attractiveness of these points as potential investment areas [30]. Growth point centres were identified in communal areas and they received Public Sector Investment targeted at improving social and physical infrastructure [29]. Zhou and Zvoushe [31] assert that Growth Points had to be self-sustaining and were to be consumer convenience centres, provide linkages to national markets, to be centres for non-agricultural employment as well as being high order public and private service centres. In the 1980s growth points resulted in the improvement of life and a significant decline in poverty as a result of the provision of social amenities [30]. The growth point centres experienced a surge in the establishment of business units as a result of anticipating rapid industrialization. Manyanhai *et al* [30] report that there was an improvement in the provision of shelter, agricultural diversification, employment creation and a significant reduction in rural-urban migration. However, these successes experienced a very short life span as a result of poor implementation.

Growth points have become areas of business decline and decay instead of development. The growth point centres are a hub of retail shops and beer outlets as a result of lack of investment incentives of attracting both local and international investors [30]. The reverse of cumulative causation process is occurring in these centres through the desegregation of the business complex and the fast setting of 'ghost town' characteristics resulting in the aggravation of poverty amongst the rural population [32]. The decline in business in growth points is intertwined with the deficiency of requisite potential of strong human resource base from where the processes of cumulative causation and subsequent growth can be ignited. [30]. The lack of development in these areas has contributed to the unceasing rural-urban labour migration which has greatly constrained rural poverty alleviation prospects in the country.

The government of Zimbabwe was over-ambitious in designating more than fifty centres as growth points and this was made worse by the existence of poorly resourced institutions with inexperienced staff. The fundamental reasons for the failure of these growth points include their treatment as homogenous entities resulting in the disregard of local differences such as arid conditions in which some centres are located. Districts located in the dry and tsetse infested parts of the country such as Lupane, Tsholotsho and Mwenzezi have been coined as special problem growth points as they have failed to unleash development capacities mainly due to their unfavourable climatic locations [32]. Growth Points which are located in fertile and high rainfall areas such as Sanyati have been successful as a result of their sustainable economic bases, however, those without strong agricultural bases have been characterized by operational failures and are only in existence as a result of the government services on offer. Zwizwai *et.al* cited in Chirisa *et. al* [32] add that lack of funds to finance the growth centres as a result of the macro-economic crisis experienced in the country characterized by inflation, budget deficits and escalating debts retarded the development of growth points contributing to the failure of the strategy.

The establishment of growth points in Zimbabwe sidelined the importance of community participation in development through utilising top-down approaches. The decisions concerning these small towns are controlled from central government and there is frustration associated with the facilitation of the actual planning, designing and execution of plans which are done at national level where the politics of the ruling elite take centre stage [30]. Rural District Councils which are supposed to spearhead development in these centres have remained an appendage of central government which enjoys no meaningful decentralized

functions thus contributing to the powerlessness of rural communities [31]. The general belief associated with excluding rural people in the planning, designing and implementation of policies is that rural people lack the requisite knowledge on how to develop themselves leading to the central government to have an upper hand in making decisions which affect them as evident in the implementation of the growth point strategy [4].

Chikwanha-Dzenga (1999:40) concludes that the growth points developed into a bottomless pit that consumed national resources without achieving the envisaged benefits. Local communities shunned the growth points and the migration to urban centres continued unabated. Thus the growth point strategy has not been a panacea to both unemployment and rapid urbanisation. According to Nelson Chenga (The Financial Gazette 19 July 2012), failure by growth points to reduce migration into large cities has resulted in Harare experiencing swift growth thereby causing a ripple effect on water and sanitation facilities.

Opportunities for rural youth and women

Youths and women in rural areas are trapped in poverty as a result of lack of ownership of productive assets. Strategies to empower rural youth and women have included co-operatives and access to microfinance to initiate income generating projects for the improvement of their livelihoods. The government of Zimbabwe undertook to empower youths through the establishment of a Youth Fund with the Ministry of Youth, Indigenization and Empowerment in the year 2006. The Youth Development Fund (YDF) which was merged with the Employment Creation Fund of the late 1990s, is a revolving micro loan facility for the youth [33].

The facility supports youth entrepreneurship development. It provides loans at a concessionary rate of 10% per annum for tenure of up to 36 months depending on the nature of the project [31]. The facility is co-administered by the Ministry and financial institutions including the CABS- Kurera /Ukondla Youth Fund. Youths who have accessed these funds have ventured in projects which include brick moulding and poultry production.

While the Kurera/Ukondla youth fund created employment for urban youth, rural youth have been sidelined. Youths who live in rural areas which are isolated and also have poor communication services are unaware of the existence of the Youth Fund [13]. There are youths facing income poverty who have failed to photocopy documents required to access the loans. The Youth Fund has been given to youths who have not received training in accounting, business management or how to run income generating projects leading to

high default rates and the failure of the revolving of the funds. There have been challenges ranging from delays in project assessments attributed to low quality of business proposals and the stringent requirements the bank demands to fund successful applications [34]. The unstable economic situation in the country has not been conducive for the growth of micro-enterprises resulting in business failures. The competition is stiff in the informal sector especially when youths engage in over-subscribed projects such as poultry production.

Women engaging in micro-finance funded projects from the Ministry of Gender, Women Empowerment and Community Development encounter problems of lack of a conducive economic environment. The influx of cheap Chinese products has affected women engaging in home décor projects. Rural Women face extra burdens as a result of their household responsibilities which hinder them from engaging fully in the non-farming economic activities and income generating projects. The politicisation of government microfinance programmes has been a deterrent to some rural women who are not members of the ruling party and are scared of politics and its violent nature in Zimbabwe.

Non-state Actors and Asset Accumulation

Non-State Actors including Faith Based Organisations have been key in promoting rural poverty alleviation in rural Zimbabwe. NGOs, unlike the government, reach the poorest of the poor at a grass root level and thus they are at an advantage in terms of assisting communities. Non-State actors have played a central role in the provision of assets for rural development. There has been an implementation of projects such as the Small Livestock rearing which target vulnerable families in selected rural districts. The project is managed by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Zimbabwe through a partnership with the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP). The project began in October 2004, and Hwange and Bubi, the two districts considered here were among the earliest to benefit from the transfers. These two districts had received 1,634 goats, 10 pigs, 41 sheep, 3,103 chickens, 5,225 guinea fowl and 16 ducks [35]. This project ensures livelihood security for poor rural people in semi-arid provinces of Zimbabwe [36]. Small livestock are a direct source of food, a store of wealth and an asset that can be sold quickly at times of dire necessity. The districts targeted by the project are places where serious livestock depletion had occurred due to natural disasters and animal diseases.

Rural asset accumulation projects by NGOs have encountered problems of 'elite capture'. ORAP reported several cases where beneficiaries were de-registered on discovering that they were from the

wealthiest families in the community [36]. This included several cases where village headmen inserted their names into beneficiary lists. Thus relatives or friends of more powerful individuals in villages tended to rise to the top of the list in terms of being the first to receive livestock transfers while 'pass on' rules were sometimes found to have been flouted such that livestock that were passed on went to these better off individuals. Additionally, reports from civic groups have not only cited the politicisation of aid by government as a constraint to the scope and scale of effective aid assistance to vulnerable communities, they have also pointed to the prevailing, and sometimes counterproductive, humanitarian approach (Makumbe, 2009). The NGO state relationship has always been full of suspicion with some NGOs being labelled as agents of regime change leading to them ceasing their operations.

Indigenization and Community Share Ownership Trusts

The need to empower the once marginalized Zimbabweans is what led to the crafting of the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act (Chapter 14:33) of 2007 which specifies that at least 51% of shares of public companies and any other business shall be owned by indigenous Zimbabweans [38]. The indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act was gazetted on March 7, 2008 and was signed into law on April 17, 2008 [37]. The law stipulates that all companies with a share capital above US\$500 000 operating in Zimbabwe should arrange for 51 per cent of their shares or interests to be owned by indigenous Zimbabweans. Community Share Ownership Trusts (CSOTs) have been launched in accordance with the provisions of the indigenisation requirements beginning with the mining sector. These include Mhondoro/Ngezi, Zvishavane, Shurugwi, Gwanda and Marange, Hwange, Umuza, and Bubi. These have been given 10% shareholding in the mining companies, and also credited with various amounts as seed money for community projects [33]. Share ownership schemes are not a new phenomenon as they have been implemented in countries such as the USA and Australia where they were referred to as Employee Share Ownership Trusts, however, these schemes have been used to redistribute economic resources in Southern Africa [12].

The indigenization and Community Share Ownership Trust is a noble idea which can take significant strides towards rural poverty alleviation. In Tongogara, the Trust has commenced the building of an entirely new school, Musasa Primary school with 8x2 door classrooms and 3 teachers' houses. Prior to its construction, about 450 children, from grade 0 to grade 7, were learning in a disused General Dealer Shop, Butchery and Bar building [38]. The building was

obviously too small for the relatively large pupil population and different groups would share one small room where they conducted lessons simultaneously thus disrupting the learning processes. In ward 10 of Tongogara a mortuary and a Maternal Waiting Room were constructed as a result of funds from the Trust. Roads in Tongogara have also been re-surfaced through funds from the trust [12].

The indigenization and economic empowerment policy has been associated with controversies which are a drawback to rural development. Under Section 15 of the Act, the Minister of Youth Development, Indigenization and Empowerment establishes a database of people who want indigenous Zimbabweans who wish to partner such people. This section is problematic as it gives the Minister too much leeway to impose politically acceptable partners upon reluctant businesses which gives room for the selection of partners based on political merit [34]. The policy has also made the country an undesirable investment destination. The policy is also vague on the issue of the National Indigenization Fund which is aimed at providing poor locals with start-up capital. Questions to ask include "What is the criteria for accessing these funds?", "Who is an indigenous Zimbabwean?" The policy has been highly politicized as the beneficiaries of the shares in companies are elites in ZANU PF. This is substantiated by Masunungure [39] who argues that poor Zimbabweans long to be empowered through job creation rather than taking over foreign owned businesses as they lack the capital required in the buying of shares.

The Chief is the Chairperson of the Community Share Ownership Scheme. The involvement of traditional leaders in Community Share Ownership Schemes where chiefs will chair indigenisation committees in their localities on a rotational basis will not strengthen the programme's transparency given that most traditional leaders in Zimbabwe have been accused of partisanship in favour of ZANU-PF, raising questions on whether it is possible for Chiefs to be non-partisan in implementing the schemes [13]. According to the Transparency International Zimbabwe report on CSOTs in the mining sector, politicians have abused funds and by so doing, denying communities their benefits [34]. The entrusting of funds to Chiefs has also been detrimental as some lack the technical capacity required for the management of these funds.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural poverty alleviation strategies have been noble ideas which have failed as a result of poor implementation. The programmes and procedures

highlighted in this paper have profound potential in ameliorating rural poverty in the country. However, there is a need of evaluating the programmes already implemented in the country's rural areas, going back to the drawing board and addressing the real problems behind the failures of poverty reduction strategies.

There is an urgent need of rehabilitating rural infrastructure to promote the growth of the agricultural sector and the Rural Non-Farm Economy. There is a need of Capacitating the District Development Fund and Rural District Councils with qualified and competent staff who are Community Development Practitioners, well versed in participatory methodologies.

Corruption is now an entrenched culture in Zimbabwe which is retarding development. Political will is needed to fight corruption in the country, and this political will enable the Anti -corruption Commission to fully carry out its mandate. Only then can this Commission be able to stop the diversion of funds meant for rural development.

This paper has established that rural poverty alleviation programmes in Zimbabwe often lack sustainability as a result of the utilization of top-down approaches to development such as the Growth point strategy and the CAMPFIRE programmes. Bottom-up approaches should be used in order to promote sustainability and the ownership of rural development programmes.

There is a need to divorce public service delivery and politics in rural areas. The selective distribution of farming inputs such as grain loans and fertilizers should cease as it is a stumbling block to poverty alleviation. Although in terms of government policy such inputs should be distributed on non-partisan lines, in reality in some rural areas distribution is done on partisan lines.

The land reform programme needs to be reformed and depoliticised The new resettled farmers should be assisted through security of tenure, financial and technical support. A land audit is an issue of paramount importance in the country in order to identify unutilized land for redistribution to efficient farmers.

Microfinance institutions should be increased in terms of their availability and accessibility in rural areas. The loan programmes should encourage the group lending methodology to ensure that the group members act as collateral support for each other. This will ensure that more poor women and youth access

micro-credit even if they do not own a lot of productive assets.

Zimbabwe should think of re-engaging with the West in order to unlock funding and credit lines which are needed to finance development programmes. The collapse of Zimbabwe's relations with the West negatively affected some donor funded development programmes. Re-engaging the West does not necessarily imply abandoning the Look East Policy, as it can be beneficial if prudently managed. There is also need for donor support for poverty alleviation strategies such as growth points and asset accumulation which can be achieved if there is a turnaround in the negative publicity of the country in the West.

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