

Poverty And Rural Development; Tapping From The Grassroots.

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ABSTRACT: *The situation of structural poverty in Zimbabwe has hardly improved during the last few years and Matabeleland South, like any other Province in the country, has not been spared its devastating effects. The Province has borne the brunt of the poverty due to a number of reasons. The following are some of the visible features that have characterized the Province: The accessibility of most rural services and infrastructure by most people has deteriorated due to reduced public spending. There is no stable source of income and no reliable access to food for the majority of the people in the Province. The health and educational services are of low standard and are sometimes not accessible to the poorer sections of the society. The productive capacity of the Province has been affected by persistent droughts and other disasters such as cyclones and HIV and AIDS. In view of the above, the overall goal of this discussion is to build a common understanding of poverty among several stakeholders, its root causes, its manifestation in the Province, but more importantly, how it can be reduced.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Matabeleland South Province is one of the ten administrative provinces in the country. It is located in the south and South-western part of the country. The province shares boundaries with South Africa to the south, Botswana to the southwest, and Matabeleland North to the West, and Midlands to the north and Masvingo to the West. The province covers a total of 54 172 square kilometres and constitutes 13.8% of the total area of Zimbabwe. The province is made up of seven districts. These are Gwanda, Bulilima, Mangwe, Beitbridge, Umzingwane, Insiza and Matobo.

There are three major urban settlements, Gwanda, Plumtree and Beitbridge. The other notable settlements, Esigodini, Filabusi and Shangani are growth points. The province also has two border posts, Beitbridge and Plumtree, with the former being the busiest point of entry in Southern Africa. The whole province falls in natural farming regions IV and V where the total annual rainfall averages Between 450 and 650mm. The region is also subject to periodic seasonal droughts and severe dry spells during some rainy season. The region also experiences some of the highest temperatures in the country. According to the 2002 Population Census, Matabeleland South Province has a total population of 654879 and this is 5.63% of the total population of Zimbabwe. In 2002, at the World Earth Summit held in South Africa, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPI), which identified the three pillars of sustainable development as Environmental, Social and Economic, was formulated as a broad framework for implementing sustainable development.

To address poverty, the Government of Zimbabwe formulated a number of programs. In 1996, the Rural District Councils Capacity Building Programme was formulated to enhance the capacity of local authorities to provide efficient and effective service delivery to the general population in their localities. It also sought to improve participation of all citizens in the governance of their areas by promoting accountability and transparency.

The Poverty Alleviation Action Programme was also implemented together with the District Environmental Action Programme. These programmes, however, depended a lot on donor support. Given such a state of affairs, this paper, therefore, seeks to articulate the poverty situation in the province as perceived by both residents and their technocrats. To do this, the general concepts of poverty and rural development shall have to be closely examined.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is a culmination of discussions conducted by the author with various individuals and agencies from both government and non-governmental organisations operating in the province. The author also got an opportunity to interview local rural villagers in the districts of Insiza, Umzingwane, and Gwanda in order to obtain a grassroots perception of poverty issues in the province. Due to lack of financial support, the author

did not have any input in as far as organising community gatherings was concerned but he heavily relied on information from various districts as regards to ongoing community gatherings. It was during such gatherings as food distribution meetings, HIV and AIDS awareness meetings among others that the author seized an opportunity to talk to the people at the grassroot level.

These discussions were therefore just but focus group discussions with no individualised interviews. In the case of key informants, the author made use of his visits to Gwanda town, which is the provincial capital to meet various government officials. In addition to in-depth interviews with provincial heads of government departments, the researcher was also furnished with various data regarding poverty alleviation strategies and programmes being implemented in the province.

As regards non-governmental organisations operating in the province, the author had an opportunity to meet them at various fora. Of paramount importance among these organisations pertinent to this paper is the Netherlands Development organisation which gave the author most reliable information. The author also benefited from its highly experienced staff. In addition, this organisation assisted the author through its numerous provincial poverty assessments. The organisation has been instrumental in the crafting of the 2004 Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan as well as various District Strategic Plans.

Definition of Poverty

There are as many definitions of poverty as there are types of poverty. Gilbert and Gurgler (1982), define poverty as a situation whereby an individual does not have access to the basic necessities of life. Such a person would be said to be living through “invisible means.” On the other hand, the United Nations defines a poor person as one living on less than a dollar a day.

This is usually referred to as the income definition of poverty. Arguably, it leaves too many loop holes. To cover up for these loop holes, poverty has come to be defined in terms of material, physical, social, psychological, insecurity, vulnerability, worry and fear, low self-esteem, powerlessness and helplessness. For the purposes of this discussion, and according to a Government of Zimbabwe paper presented at the Africa Governance Forum in Mozambique in 2002, poverty is defined as the inability by an individual, household or community to satisfy their most basic needs. The same paper defines poverty as a human state of socio-economic deprivation. It is a personal, family, community or a national state of inadequacies where there is very little or nothing in terms of food, clothing, shelter, clean water, sanitation facilities, health, clean air, employment, transport, productive land, etc.

This attempt at defining poverty in itself is not enough since various scholars define it in different ways depending on the nature and purpose of their intentions and programmes for which the definition is required. To try and bring this issue to some rest, this paper has gone to the extent of providing some conceptual aspects of poverty.

III. CONCEPTUALISING POVERTY

Is poverty simply about the level of income obtained by households or individuals? Is it about lack of access to social services? Or is it more correctly understood as the inability to participate in society, economically, socially, culturally or politically? The answer is that the term has been used in all these ways mentioned above. **Box 1** provides a listing of current terminology. According to Maxwell, [1999], the complexity of measurement mirrors the complexity of definition of poverty, and the complexity increases where participatory methods are used and people define their own indicators of poverty.

Box 1: Terms used to describe poverty

- Income or consumption poverty
- •Human (under) development
- •Social exclusion
- •Ill-being (Lack of) capability and functioning
- •Vulnerability
- •Livelihood unsustainability
- •Lack of basic needs
- •Relative deprivation
- SOURCE; Maxwell [1999]

Income and non-Income Poverty

Income poverty is defined as a situation where an individual fails to attain a minimum standard of living and thereby falling below the poverty datum line. Income poverty involves items such as lack of

adequate food, access to credit, savings, etc. Non-income poverty relates to items such as social exclusion, access to basic facilities such as education, safe drinking water and sanitation, health and recreation, inadequate access to information and transport, etc.

International and National Context of Poverty

Poverty is generally high and rising in the world. Zimbabwe has therefore joined forces with the international actors and other countries to try to combat poverty. In the year 2000, world leaders from 189 countries, including Zimbabwe, met to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration committing countries to reinforce efforts to eradicate poverty by 2015, to promote human dignity and equality, achieve peace and democracy. Some of the goals and targets that are relevant to the situation in Matabeleland South Province are:

Millennium Development Goals	Targets
<i>Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</i>	Target 1: To halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than US\$1 a day. Target 2: To halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
<i>Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education</i>	Target 3: Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
<i>Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women</i>	Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education by no later than 2015.
<i>Goal 4: Reduce child mortality</i>	Target 5; Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five maternal mortality rate.
<i>Goal 5: Improve maternal health</i>	Target 6: Reduce by three quarters between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality rate.
<i>Goal 6: Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases</i>	Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS. Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
<i>Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability</i>	Target 9: Integrate principles of sustainable development in country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources. Target 11: have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.
<i>Goals 8: Develop a global partnership for development</i>	Target 12: Develop further, an open rule based predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system

Source: Human Development Report 2003, UNDP

IV. POVERTY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Just as the old adage has it, if the past no longer sheds light on the future, the mind walks in darkness. It is of essence that this discussion briefly traces the historical development of the study and analysis of poverty. It is however, worth noting from the onset that it is not within the scope of this paper to exhaustively deal with a bulk of poverty concepts but its role is only to adumbrate on such issues so as to illuminate the discussion further.

Poverty is blessed with a rich vocabulary, in all cultures and throughout history. From an analytical perspective, thinking about poverty can be traced back at least to the codification of poor laws in medieval England, through to the pioneering empirical studies, at the turn of the century, by Booth in London and by Rowntree in York. As Maxwell [1999] postulates, Rowntree's study, published in 1901, was the first to develop a poverty standard for individual families, based on estimates of nutritional and other requirements. In the 1960s, the main focus was on the level of income, reflected in macro-economic indicators like Gross National Product per head. This was associated with an emphasis on growth, for example in the work of the Pearson Commission, Partners in Development (1969). In the 1970s, poverty became prominent, notably as a result of

Robert MacNamara's celebrated speech to the World Bank Board of Governors in Nairobi in 1973, and the subsequent publication of *Redistribution with Growth*. Furthermore, two other factors were at play: First was the emphasis on relative deprivation, inspired by work in the UK by Runciman and Townsend. Townsend, in particular, helped redefine poverty: not just as a failure to meet minimum nutrition or subsistence levels, but rather as a failure to keep up with the standards prevalent in a given society. The second shift was to broaden the concept of income-poverty, to a wider set of 'basic needs', including those provided socially. Thus, following ILO's pioneering work in the mid-1970s; poverty came to be defined not just as lack of income, but also as lack of access to health, education and other services. The concept of basic needs inspired policies like integrated rural development. Its influence continues to be seen in current debates about human development [Maxwell 1999]. New layers of complexity were added in the 1980s. The principal innovations were: (a) the incorporation of non-monetary aspects, particularly as a result of Robert Chambers' work on powerlessness and isolation. This helped to inspire greater attention to participation. (b) A new interest in vulnerability, and its counterpart, security, associated with better understanding of seasonality and of the impact of shocks, notably drought. This pointed to the importance of assets as buffers, and also to social relations (the moral economy, social capital). It led to new work on coping strategies. (c) A broadening of the concept of poverty to a wider construct, livelihood. This was adopted by the Brundtland Commission on Sustainability and the Environment, which popularised the term sustainable livelihood. (d) Theoretical work by Amartya Sen, who had earlier contributed the notion of food entitlement, or access, emphasised that income was only valuable in so far as it increased the 'capabilities' of individuals and thereby permitted 'functionings' in society. (e) Finally, the 1980s was characterised by a rapid increase in the study of gender. The debate moved from a focus on women alone (women in development (WID)), to wider gender relations (gender and development (GAD)). Policies followed to empower women and find ways to underpin autonomy, or agency. The 1990s saw further development of the poverty concept. The idea of well-being came to act as a metaphor for absence of poverty, with concomitant emphasis on how poor people themselves view their situation. At the same time, inspired by Sen, UNDP developed the idea of human development: 'the denial of opportunities and choices... to the poor.'

Rural and Urban Poverty

As has been mentioned above, Matabeleland south province consists of both urban and rural areas. To this end, it is crucial to contextualise rural and urban poverty in the light of the circumstances surrounding the province. These circumstances include erratic rainfall which negatively affects rural food production thereby affecting urban food security due to the rural-urban interface. In addition, the issue of unemployment has not spared such places as Plumtree, Gwanda and Beit Bridge as the major urban centres in the province. Whilst in the past discussions on poverty revolved around the manifestation of poverty in the rural areas, attention is gradually shifting to urban poverty. This is because of the realisation that the urban nature of the poverty may be equal or even be more acute than rural poverty. Rural poverty has largely been blamed on natural phenomena such as drought, poor soils, etc, whilst in urban areas; the prevailing economic conditions have played a large part in increasing poverty levels.

CHARACTERISTICS AND CAUSES OF POVERTY

According to AHMED et al [2009], understanding the characteristics of the world's poorest and hungry and the reason for which their deprivation persists is important when designing policies to meet their needs and improve their welfare. Across income groups and regions, expenditure on food represents the highest share of household budgets. In general, poorer households and those in rural areas spend a relatively higher proportion of the family budget on food than others.

REMOTENESS

Despite an increasing proportion of poor in urban areas, the incidence of dollar a day poverty is higher in the rural areas. The same pattern of rural disadvantage is found below the dollar a day line, but there is a tendency towards greater rural-urban differences as poverty deepens. The poorest and the most food insecure households are located furthest from roads, markets, schools, and health services. For instance, in Zambia, poor people are %33 more likely to be located more than 20 kilometres from the nearest market than are those who are not poor. [Dasgupta 2009] In addition to being an indicator of wealth, an electricity connection also indicates to a certain extent the "connectedness" of households to roads, markets and communications infrastructure and the resulting income earning opportunities and public services.

EDUCATION

Education has been shown to have significant positive impacts on agricultural productivity, employment, access to credit, use of government services, adult and child health and educational outcomes.

According to Dasgupta [2009], uneducated women are much more likely to experience ultra poverty than subadjacent poverty. The poorest are the least educated.

LAND HOLDING IN RURAL AREAS

The honourship or control of productive assets is an important indicator of livelihood, because assets generate income. Rates of landlessness are higher on those living on less than a dollar a day.

MEMBERSHIP IN EXCLUDED GROUPS

The incidence of poverty is usually higher in the minority groups. For instance in India, disadvantaged castes and tribes [referred to as scheduled castes and tribes] are overrepresented among the ranks of the poor, particularly among those living in ultra poverty. [Dasgupta 2009]

Arguably, the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe constitute the minority in this country. Their number and political history is a large contributory factor towards their social deprivation.

BEING FEMALE

Some weak evidence supports the hypothesis that female headed households are overrepresented among the ultra poor, but in general, large differences are not found. Ahmed et al [2009] further contend that examining only the differences between male and female headed households hides the reality that within households headed by men, the welfare of women and girls may be less than of their male family members. Although empirical evidence of this is limited, a previous study for the International Food Policy Research Institute by Subsuming, Haddad, and Pena [2007] found that at the individual level, women were poorer than men in six of the ten countries considered but significantly so in only three of those countries. Some studies in South Asia have shown that within households, women take in significantly less food and sometimes less high quality food such as meat and eggs.

CONCEPTUALISING RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Discussing poverty and rural development is sometimes difficult because the term rural has been viewed as another term for poverty, especially by those development specialists from the modernisation paradigm. This discussion however postulate that although Zimbabwe's rural areas are poverty stricken, poverty is not rampant only in rural areas but is spread across the whole social spectrum. Sometimes, rural poverty is even better than urban poverty due to the presence of local and indigenous social support mechanisms such as the domestic economy, the extended family system and less use of the money economy in the rural areas than in urban areas.

Rural development is a concept, a phenomenon, a strategy and a discipline. The term is of focal interest and widely acclaimed in both developed and developing countries. There is however no universally acceptable definition and the term is used in different ways and in vastly divergent contexts. As a concept, it connotes overall development of rural areas with a view to improving the quality of life of rural people. In this sense, it is a comprehensive and multidimensional concept and encompasses the development of agriculture and allied activities --- village and cottage industries and crafts, socio-economic infrastructure, community services and facilities, and above all, human resources in rural areas. As a phenomenon, it is the result of interactions between various physical, technological, economic, socio-cultural, and institutional factors. As a strategy, it is designed to improve the economic and social well-being of a specific group of people --- the rural poor. As a discipline, it is multidisciplinary in nature representing an intersection of agricultural, social, behavioral, engineering, and management sciences.[Maxwell 1999]

According to Chambers [1993], rural Development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas to demand and control more of the benefits of rural development. The group includes small scale farmers, tenants, and the landless.

From such a conceptual framework, Matabeleland South province, being largely rural in outlook serve for the three main urban centres stands to benefit from the rural development approach. Arguably, any attempt to ameliorate the plight of the rural people of the province should ensure that issues of climatic conditions have been recognized with a view to providing alternative production systems such as irrigations. Since rural areas and therefore populations constitute the bulk of residents of the province, it is crucial to emphasise that rural development has a greater role in the development of the province. As a consequence, this paper has given some definitions of rural development with a view to contextualizing these to the social, economic and cultural circumstances prevailing in the province.

This paper therefore defines rural development as the process of developing and utilizing natural and human resources, technologies, infrastructural facilities, institutions and organizations, and government policies and programmes to encourage and speed up economic growth in rural areas, to provide jobs and to improve the quality of rural life. This process typically involves changes in popular attitudes, and in many cases even in customs and beliefs. The process of rural development must represent the entire gamut of change by which a social system moves away from a state of life perceived as ‘unsatisfactory’ towards a materially and spiritually better condition of life. Rural development is the process of developing and utilizing two kinds of resources, natural and human, but this is not all. There are not only natural or human resources waiting to be exploited but equally vital things which must be utilized. In every society there are technologies. They also must be utilized. There are facilities stemming from infrastructure. They must be harnessed to achieve the goal. There are various institutions and organizations. They too, must be put to use. There is an all pervasive and powerful government armed with the various policies and programmes aimed at accelerating economic growth in rural areas. Rural development aims at creating and providing jobs. All these factors must lead to the improvement of rural life. When attitudes towards customs and beliefs are changed and the life of the people moves towards spiritual enrichment, the process of rural development encompasses the full circle and traverses the entire spectrum of rural life. The basic elements of rural development are the satisfaction of the basic necessities of life, the inculcation of a feeling of dignity and honor and the emancipation of people from servitude to nature and from slavery to other men. There are subsidiary meanings also attached to rural development. It is presupposed that villages are suffering from poverty. If poverty is reduced or eliminated, we can assert that there is rural development. If there is inequality in rural life and this inequality is removed, we have rural development. If there is unemployment and measures have been taken to reduce or remove it, we have rural development. Dudley Seers says that the questions to ask about a country’s poverty relate to: What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing, it would be strange to call the result “development” even if per capita income doubled. In an agrarian country, rural development is of prime importance. There is no national development without rural development and there is no rural development without agricultural development.

Rural development means development of agriculture as well as development of allied activities such as village and cottage industries, handicrafts, community services and facilities and economic infrastructure. It means development and utilization of human resources found in rural life. It stands for development and utilization of natural resources that are available in village life. It encompasses changes in the outlook of the people. Existing beliefs are either displaced or considerably modified. Even customs prevailing in society and followed rigorously undergo alteration. There is a sea change in the spiritual life of the people when there is rural development. Each factor in rural development is connected with every other factor. No one element leads to a self – sufficing existence. Each influences the other and is influenced by that other. Mr. Katar Singh has this to say: “The process of rural development may be compared with a trend in which each coach pushes the one ahead of it and is in turn pushed by the one behind, but it takes a powerful engine to make the whole train move. The secret of success in development lies in identifying and, if needed, developing a suitable engine to attach to the train. There are no universally valid guidelines to identify appropriate engines of growth, if at all they exist. It is a choice which is influenced by time, space and culture.”

Some writers have given objective, clear cut criteria to identify whether there is rural development. One is urbanization which is an indicator of economic development. If towns increase in number and outnumber the villages, some economists think that there has been economic development. But this concept completely does away with the rural scenario. Another is industrialization. The advocates of this theory hold that if there is industrialization on a big scale, it can modernize agriculture and give employment to people rendered redundant by the application of machinery to agriculture. The logical conclusion of such thinking is to establish highly capital intensive and automatic enterprises. This is just aping the western model and going against the interest of one’s own country. There are many countries which have agricultural potential but acting under the notion that industrialization is the kernel of development, they do not exploit their agricultural potential and hence the basic needs of the people remain unsatisfied. Imports of food grains take place at a huge cost. Agriculture is trapped in stagnation. People become victims of malnourishment. These theories militate against the standard concept of rural development. Agriculture must be developed. There are very powerful and cogent reasons to support this point of view. Industrialization cannot be sustained without the timely and sufficient availability of raw materials to many principal industries (e.g. livestock maize, and other farm produce. A flourishing and prosperous agriculture also produces a surplus which is easily utilized in augmenting capital formation, the basis of industrialization. The closure of the country’s major beef canning factory at West Nicholson in Gwanda district has been a glaring setback to the development of the province.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Perceptions of Poverty

In as much as poverty has been conceptualised above, it is crucial to get an appreciation of the poverty as perceived by the grassroots.

The Community's perception of poverty

The ordinary members of the community interviewed perceived poverty as being characterized by, among other attributes, the presence of social evils in the form of:

1. Lack of transport
2. Poor education
3. Unemployment
4. Food insecurity
5. High prevalence of diseases
6. Lack of sanitation facilities
7. No livestock and agricultural implements

From this list, it can be noted that Ahmed's [2009] characterisation of poverty, though coming from studies in other countries other than Zimbabwe holds water in as far as causes of poverty are concerned. His mention of remoteness is in line with the respondents' lack of transport as a chief cause of poverty. This lack of transport is largely due to poor roads. When talking about rural poverty, livestock becomes a central issue. Livestock according to the Ndebele culture constitute not only a symbol of wealth but a source of livelihood. Respondents cited recurrent droughts, lack of dipping chemicals, stock theft and high food insecurity as the major causes of livestock depletion. Respondents therefore saw an alternative as the restocking exercise. Any poverty alleviation strategy that does not adopt the restocking exercise is missing the point. In response to such sentiments, such donor agencies as World Vision Zimbabwe have, as from 2003 embarked on a heifer scheme to ensure that inhabitants of Insiza, Beit Bridge and Plumtree once more acquire back their cultural heritage.

Government officials

According to the Government officials interviewed, poverty involves a comparison between economic factors and social needs of people. Poverty can also be perceived as the inability by an individual to afford basic requirements, such as school fees and complete uniforms, rentals medical fees and water.

Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs)/Private Sector

The NGOs and the private sector, which are important stakeholders in combating poverty, view the phenomenon as;

- A situation where someone is vulnerable and cannot cater for him/herself and the dependents.
- The inability of an individual to afford three square meals per day.
- An individual living on less than one US dollar per day.

From the above presentation, it is interesting to note that although ordinary members of the community view poverty from a very materialistic and basic level, bureaucrats and technocrats tend to view it in terms of a wider national and international dimension. This slight difference raises the question as to whether officials from both government and non-governmental organisations actually understand rural poverty. More-so, such disparities reflect the marked differences between grassroots and technocratic perceptions of poverty. The imminent consequences of such disparities are that these two groups may be addressing poverty differently. The issue of felt needs should always prevail when it comes to rural development in the region.

Causes and Manifestations of Poverty

Causes of Poverty

According to Dasgupta [2009], "In the world of the poor, people do not enjoy food security, do not own many assets, are stunted and wasted, do not live long, cannot read or write, do not have access to credit, are unable to save much, are not empowered, cannot ensure themselves well against crop failure or household calamity, do not have control over their own lives, do not trade with the rest of the world, live in unhealthy surroundings, suffer from "in capabilities" and are poorly governed. [Dasgupta 2009 page 129]. Dasgupta's conception of the causes and manifestations of poverty serve to substantiate the general perception from respondents.

Perceptions of such manifestations of poverty in areas of study were as follows:

- Diseases such as HIV and AIDS
- Generally poor macro economic conditions

- Exclusion from community and other socio-economic gatherings
- Poor/ sub standard sanitation
- Unemployment-resulting inadequate finances
- Lack of education
- Persistent droughts and natural disasters like cyclones
- Inadequate land
- Historic factors like the liberation struggle and post independence political disturbance which resulted in loss of livestock and property
- Lack of civic participation and education

It is observed that the communities did not make a distinction between causes of poverty and manifestations of poverty. The following is a record of the manifestations of poverty based on community perspectives and they are categorised here under Income Poverty and Non-income Poverty.

Income Poverty

According to the study, the following income issues were identified:

Food

During the course of the study, the issue of the unavailability of food featured prominently. Due to the successive droughts that the Province has experienced in the past few years, crop production has suffered greatly that the people have had to depend on import. The shortages have meant that in some cases families have had to cut down on the number of meals from the normal three to either one or two. Also both the quantity and quality have suffered. The notion of a balanced diet has been forgotten as people have resorted to eating so as to “keep body and soul together”. Respondents did confirm that their worst year was 2008 when the country was generally dry in terms of food supplies. Furthermore, the political upheavals of that time made any meaningful income generating undertaking virtually impossible. This resulted in people getting nowhere to buy food. The only fortunate ones were those with children who crossed the border into either South Africa or Botswana in search of basic necessities of life. Even then, respondents testified that the major problem was that their children could no longer come home in fear of political persecution. This situation further confirms Dasgupta’s [2009] last point that poverty is due to poor governance. Still on food, consumption of protein and vitamin rich foods has been highly inconsistent given that food relief service providers have tended to supply staple maize.

Emergency food relief programmes have been overwhelmed by the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis. Most of the people interviewed claimed that they had not received their supplies for more than six months in 2008 due to a ban on all operations of non-governmental organisations by the then ZANU PF government in a bid to suppress any descending voice.

In urban areas, where access to food depends on whether an individual has got money, meant that with the high levels of unemployment, very few people were able to buy food items. Due to the closer relationship between the urban and rural interface, problems affecting rural areas were said to have a spill over into the urban areas. Even those with money, could not secure any food since rural areas which were the sources of food supply had a bad agricultural season. To make matters worse, even after the lifting of the ban on operations of all relief agencies, urban dwellers were classified as rich or well off hence could not qualify for food aid. To accentuate the differences in perceptions between the grassroots and the technocrats on poverty, one of the old women from Insiza testified having to send some of the bulga wheat she got from World Vision to her children in Bulawayo.

This simply means that in an African culture where the extended family system is still intact, targeting mechanisms in times of food scarcity need to be tailored to cultural and social behaviours if such aid is to be of great utility. To further complicate the already precarious situation, lack of food resulted in health problems such as malnutrition especially in children and the elderly, further weakening people’s resistance and exposing them to diseases.

To further aggravate the already precarious predicament confronting residents of Matabeleland South province, the 2008 problems resulted in reduced food production in 2009. This was because lack of food meant that the rain season caught the population napping as they had no farming inputs. Furthermore, one of the respondents from Umzingwane district confessed to the researcher that “one cannot work in the fields on an empty stomach. Even if inputs are supplied, food aid should constitute the basis of the recovery process. Giving only seed aid without food aid will be tantamount to having done nothing to any help at all.” 2009 was therefore not a very good year for people of Matabeleland South province despite the fact that the province had received significant amounts of rainfall.

Resources to meet basic requirements

Because both rural and urban economies have generally become more monetised, it has thus been difficult for most people to access some basic goods and services that are vital for human survival. Due to the prevailing harsh economic conditions whereby the average family of six requires about \$400 a month to buy basic goods and yet the average income is about \$100 per month, the ability of most households to survive has been greatly curtailed. The dollarization of the economy, though it helped to improve the supplies of both food and non-food items in the country as a whole, did little for the poor since the dollar itself is either highly inflated on the market or is not even accessible to the rural poor. One councillor in Insiza district reported that barter trade is the order of the day in his ward since hard currency is hard to come by.

Livestock and Agricultural Implements

This form of income poverty featured very much during the survey because of the value that is placed on livestock especially cattle and goats in Matabeleland South. The recurrent droughts, especially those of 1947 and 1992 have impacted negatively on the livestock head. Livestock play two important roles namely a source of income as well as an indication of an individual's status in society. Although the region is mainly suitable for livestock production, in an effort to improve on food security in the face of the persistent droughts, people in the Province have also carried out crop production. However, the major impediment is the lack of both farming implements and other inputs such as seed, fertilizer and other chemicals. This has contributed to low production resulting in their dependence on Government and NGOs handouts.

General Macro Economic Conditions

Because of the economic challenges that the country is going through, poverty levels in the Province have increased. Most of the problems date back to the early 1990s when the Government introduced the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme. The programme was meant to reduce government expenditure on social service provision. However, this compromised service delivery to the detriment of the living standards of the poor. High inflation and shortages of basic commodities have meant that most of the people are unable to access the basic requirements necessary for their survival.

Unemployment

As has already been intimated, the poor macro economic conditions in the country have led to a situation where most of the people in the Province have lost their jobs. This has led them to depend on the informal sector and sometimes engaging in illegal activities such as theft, gold panning, prostitution, boarder jumping, etc.

Access to Loans

Whilst both Government and the private sector have made available financial resources to assist in individual and community initiatives, most people are not able to benefit from them because of the stringent requirements for collateral. Worst of all, even for those with collateral, the terms for repayment are so hard that it is not viable for them to take out the loans. In the end it is the rich who are able to access the loans. In addition, most financial institutions are located in the big urban settlements in and outside the Province making them inaccessible to the intended beneficiaries. The lack of information especially in the resettlement areas about the availability of loans has led to limited access.

Non Income Poverty

As Dasgupta argues, one of the major challenges facing Matabeleland South Province, in particular, but also Zimbabwe as a whole is the HIV and AIDS pandemic. According to Netherlands Development Organisation [2004], the disease has managed to wipe out most of the gains that had been achieved in most development sectors in the Province. The disease has got wide ranging impact in the sense that overnight, children have become orphans, there is now the phenomenon of child-headed households. To emphasise the issue of orphans, according to the Department of Social Services, Insiza alone had an orphan population of 15053 in a total population of just ninety thousand giving a percentage of about twenty percent. The contribution of HIV and AIDS to the spread of poverty is extreme since production has suffered because it is the economically active age groups that are under the greatest threat and a lot of resources that would have normally been meant for development projects are diverted to deal with the disease. Discussions with villagers revealed that ever since the introduction of user fees at hospitals, many families are parting with various assets including livestock in order to get treatment thereby aggravating poverty. The disease has also led to a situation whereby most households, which hitherto were able to afford the basic necessities, had to adjust to a different lifestyle because the breadwinner within the family would have succumbed to the disease. It was also noted in some of the resettlement areas, that there was very little information on HIV and AIDS; hence there was lack of

openness and even denial about its existence. This is probably due to the lack of outreach services to these areas.

Drought

The climatic conditions of most of Matabeleland South are such that the area is susceptible to regular droughts. In one community it emerged that there had been twelve serious droughts since 1940. Even as recent as 2008, the Province received much less than average rainfall.

Apart from affecting crop production the lack of adequate rainfall had a devastating affection livestock. In 2002 alone, the Department of Veterinary Services reported that more than 5000 cattle had died due to drought related causes. In reality, more animals could have perished that year but went unreported. [Netherlands Development Organisation 2004]

The Province is also home to a lot of wildlife, a lot of these animals perished during the droughts. To compound the problem, in 2002, the Province was adversely affected by Cyclone Eline and Japheth respectively which destroyed crops, houses, animals as well as vital infrastructure such as roads, bridges, clinics and schools thereby plunging the Province deeper into poverty. Unfortunately, the institutional response to drought has tended to adopt a remedial approach the recrudescence with which natural disasters occur in the province require a developmental and sustainable approach to aid. This sentiment was echoed by participants during focus group discussions. One old man in Umzingwane remarked that it is not within the Ndebele culture to be fed like chickens but that aid agencies should establish dams and irrigation schemes. This will enable locals to better protect themselves against such disasters even in the absence of donor agencies.

Land Tenure /Ownership

The study revealed that there is very close link between land ownership and development (lack of it). It was also noted the war of Independence centred on the issue of the inequitable distribution of land between the settlers and the indigenous Zimbabweans. Pre-independence legislation such as the Land Husbandry Act and the Land Apportionment Act resulted in the indigenous people being resettled on the marginally productive land in Natural Regions III-V. This fact has been used to explain why most of the Zimbabweans are poor. However, among the indigenous people themselves, there are also disparities in land ownership, especially as it relates to women. In many societies, women and especially those who are not married do not have access to land. In this part of the world, which is patriarchal, homesteads are generally known by the man's name. Traditionally, female-headed households have been viewed as "*omazakhela*," literally, "the one who constructs for herself". The Government's land reform programme launched in 2000 was meant to readdress some of these disparities. However, in some resettlement areas, there was concern of an indigenous elite seemingly benefiting more than the deserving poor. In other words, the principle of redistributive justice, though being peddled around as the sole pillar of the so-called Third Chimurenga, it would appear this did only serve to perpetuate the inherent class disparities.

Access to Education and Health Services

In line with Dasgupta's viewpoint concerning the positive relationship between poverty and low levels of education, people of Matabeleland South province have difficulties accessing some education. Most of the communities cannot access education and health services, not only because they cannot afford them but also because they are too far from them. In some communities, especially in the newly resettled areas, people travel long distances to access these services. In some wards, especially new wards created out of the newly acquired farms, there is no school at all. For instance, people of Insiza reported that schools are fifteen kilometres apart in these areas. Although efforts have been made to convert some former farm homesteads and compounds into schools and clinics, staffing these facilities is still a challenge as their remoteness makes them highly unattractive to both teachers and nurses. As a result of such a state of affairs surrounding distances among schools, pass rates in some schools are very low and this has been attributed to the time taken by pupils to get to school. Parents therefore attributed low pass-rates to the fact that their children will be too tired to concentrate in class after travelling long distances. On another note, Parents testified that due to the harsh economic environment, they cannot afford to pay school fees for their children as well as buy school uniforms and stationery.

On the health front, concerns were raised to the effect that in some wards health facilities are not available or very far (more than 10 km). Where these are within walking distances, in most cases there will be no drugs on the shelves thereby rendering them mere white elephants. This has often led to people resorting to traditional forms of treatment as an alternative.

Transport and communication

In some areas the road network has been reported to be so bad that service providers from both the public and private sector shun them resulting in people in those areas being left out of programmes that are intended to benefit them. The 2002 floods exacerbated the situation since they swept away some bridges which cannot be replaced or repaired now due to the economic decay. Due to lack of planning in the new resettlement areas, some places are not accessible thereby cutting inhabitants of that area off the development grid.

In an attempt to remedy the situation, the national road construction dubbed the road Blitz launched in February 2008 performed dismally. This was due to poor planning and political patronage as it was perceived by the general public as a mere vote buying undertaking by the then ruling party whose popularity in both urban and rural areas had drastically waned in the face of a record highest inflation in modern history. Communication is a vital component in rural development. In order to uplift the standards of living of the rural populace, proper communication infrastructure such as a good telephone network, and radio communication should be developed to complement a good road network. Some communities in the Province have got very limited access to information because of lack of receivers in their areas. For instance, most communities in Plumtree and Beitbridge have no access to Zimbabwean radio and television and have to depend on either South Africa or Botswana for news, information and entertainment. This lack of information perpetuates rural poverty in those areas since knowledge about such issues as access to credit, any disease outbreak as well as other national developments comes through the electronic media.

Water and Sanitation.

Another indicator of poverty put forward by both government and the general populace was inadequate water and sanitation facilities in the province. This situation is said to be more critical in the rural than in urban areas. Even within the rural areas, the newly resettled areas are more deprived than the communal areas. Whereas years of the donor-supported Integrated Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme have meant that most communities have access to clean water and toilets (either pit or Blair), there are some communities where these basic amenities are not available.

As a result, many people reported that they still travel very long distances to access water for both domestic consumption and for their livestock. In some resettlements, water infrastructure was inherited from commercial farms. There is however a problem with maintenance of these facilities in both communal and resettlement areas. Lack of adequate water and sanitation facilities has resulted in the general health of the people being compromised, leaving them susceptible to diseases such as cholera, bilharzias, typhoid, and other water borne diseases.

In urban areas, whilst almost all residential areas are on reticulated water and sewage systems, failure to pay for the services makes it difficult for some of the residents to access the services. Urban local authorities are also experiencing problems accessing water treatment chemicals.

At the time of the study, one of the urban centres had gone without water for two days.

This leaves the urban poor exposed to unhygienic conditions leading to disease outbreaks. During the interviews conducted as part of this study, some people confessed that they have had to cut down on bathing and washing clothes due to the high costs of washing detergents and soap. This has also lowered their hygiene standards.

Housing

The state of housing is also an indicator of the levels of poverty. Most of the communities interviewed in the rural areas perceived the absence of a house constructed from burnt bricks and roof with asbestos sheets as a sign of poverty. In urban areas, the poor people are perennial lodgers and tenants because they cannot afford the exorbitant costs of constructing their own houses. The insecurity of being a tenant or lodger has resulted in the affected people not being able to purchase any big household items. Because of the failure to provide their own accommodation, people in urban areas are forced to live in overcrowded conditions exposing themselves to diseases such as tuberculosis. In addition lack of privacy is the order of things as in some instances parents and their children are forced to share the same room. The issue of rural housing was not really topical a few years ago but Cyclone Elaine altered the situation. During the cyclone most homes were destroyed and the affected communities have struggled to rebuild since then.

Lack of Representation

This problem manifests itself in urban, communal and resettlement areas. In resettlement areas where the social institutional infrastructure is not very clear as far as the issue of traditional leaders and councillors is concerned, the people do not have a channel through which to express their views when it comes to development issues. In some cases the communities felt ignored, dumped and neglected. In some resettlement

areas, people have created their own structures, which have no relationship with formal local government structures.

Exclusion and Stigma

This phenomenon affects those people who would have already been labelled as poor in their respective communities. These people are excluded from most important decision making meetings and their voices are not heard. The people are stigmatized and as a result they lose their self-esteem and respect and inevitably deeper into poverty. During most gatherings, the researcher observed that the most vulnerable part of the population [persons with disabilities] was not represented. This effectively alienates such a social group from the development process. The researcher noted that no attempts were made to rope those most stigmatised groups into development programmes.

Socio-Economic Marginalisation

Stigma and discrimination goes hand in glove with socio-economic marginalisation of the population. This marginalisation can be due to political beliefs, ethnicity and religion.

Coming three years after a protracted struggle for liberation, the civil strife in the early 1980s was cited as one of the major stumbling blocks to the development of Matabeleland South.

During the said period, people of Matabeleland and midlands were labelled as dissidents that should be exterminated. As a consequence, more than twenty thousand people perished through a state sponsored operation codenamed [Gukurahundi] literally implying to wash away the rubbish. [Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace 1999]. From these disturbances, it meant that as from 1981 to 1987, government withdrew all development focus from this province thereby perpetuating poverty.

This form of poverty was manifested through:

- Lack of Government-sponsored economic and social activities
- Inadequate infrastructure development
- Migration of most young productive people

Groups most vulnerable to poverty

For both income and non income poverty, the most affected groups as perceived by the general public are:

- Children
- Women
- Persons with disabilities
- The elderly
- The chronically ill.

Coping mechanisms

In order to deal with poverty issues that surround them, most people in the Province have come up with a lot of coping strategies.

These strategies are usually based on one's socio-economic position or status and they include:

- Self-employment in areas such as cross border trading, gold panning, peanut butter making, vending, etc.
- Border jumping
- Cutting down on the quality, quantity and frequency of meals
- Prostitution
- Use of traditional healers, midwives, faith healers
- Those in the urban areas have now resorted to going to the rural areas where there is a concentration of food aid NGOs to collect some food items such as maize meal.
- School going children sell fruits, vegetables, sweets and "freezes" after school hours and weekends to supplement family income.
- Food handouts from NGOs
- Theft
- Poaching
- Food for work or public works
- Vending of wild fruits (baobab fruit etc)
- Cross boarder trading (handy craft) and employment
- Remittances from across borders particularly South Africa and Botswana were also noted as critical for their survival.
- Participation in income generation projects

- Utilisation of natural resources such as Mahopac (roots of a certain tree crushed into some kind of powder and used to make porridge), and the collection and sell of Amacimbi (mopane worms).
- Selling of livestock

Whilst the communities identified both income and non-income causes of poverty, almost all the coping strategies were related to income poverty.

Institutional Framework for Dealing With poverty

There are a number of issues that came out during this study regarding the efficiencies and inadequacies of the current institutional framework in dealing with poverty.

These include:

- [1]. most of the NGOs tend to focus on the rural areas only even when there were serious poverty issues that need to be addressed in urban areas as well.
- [2]. However in the rural areas, most of the support organisations concentrate in the communal areas and pay little attention to the resettlement areas. A closer examination of the situation reveals that the resettlement areas are the most vulnerable ones, as the new farmers have still not developed sustainable systems of survival.
- [3]. Most support organizations focus on food relief, HIV and AIDS, Water and Sanitation, and agricultural support, whilst very few are involved in long-term development oriented poverty interventions as shown in the table.
- [4]. Reasons that have been proffered to explain this state of affairs and among them is the fact that people sometimes need immediate survival strategies before consideration is put on long term solutions to the problems of poverty.
- [5]. The task of coordinating development activities in the Province, as is the case in the rest of the countries is the responsibility of the Provincial Administrator and District Administrator at Provincial and district levels respectively. This coordination is carried out through the Provincial and Rural District development Committees. However, due to a number of reasons such as the lack of linkages between planning and budgeting and lack of commitment from stakeholders, these structures have not been functioning. As a result, development activities have been largely uncoordinated leading to problems of duplication, on one hand and services delivery gaps on the other.
- [6]. It was also clear from the study that the service providers themselves have not done enough to network and coordinate their own activities as a sector. All these problems have led to a situation whereby the impact of the various interventions have not been as much as they would have there been better coordination and networking.
- [7]. Most of the institutions interviewed highlighted that they lacked the human, financial and technical capacity to effectively address poverty issues. The institutions are understaffed and the personnel sometimes does not possess the requisite skills to carry out their duties. The economic climate has also meant that the little resources that are available have been eroded to the extent that coverage in terms of space, quality, quantity and the number of beneficiaries has been greatly reduced.
- [8]. Local Authorities experience dilemma at the link between revenue and service delivery. Communities say that they are reluctant to pay taxes or rentals due to poor or lack of services while on the other hand the Local Authorities claim that they cannot provide adequate services due to lack of funds. This cycle has to be broken
- [9]. solutions to the problems of poverty.

- For a distribution of institutional interventions, see table below:

Service Provided	Number of Organizations
SME Promotion	3
Micro Finance	3
Civic Participation	1
Youth Development	2
Food Relief	16
Water and Sanitation	12
Energy	2
Agricultural	11
Health, HIV and AIDS	16
Road Construction	2
Transport	1
Education	7
Law and Order	1

Source: Netherlands Development organisation [2004]Provincial poverty assessment report.

A summary of key Poverty Issues

Drought

The recurrent droughts have negatively affected the productive capacity of the Province. However, to address this problem, only short-term relief measures have been adopted.

Unemployment

Formal employment in Zimbabwe has continued to decrease and the Province has not been spared. Estimates put the unemployment figure for the Province at 80%. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is very little industrial development in Matabeleland South. Due to the proximity of the Province to South Africa and Botswana, most of the young productive people illegally crossed the borders in search of jobs.

Land for urban agriculture

Urban agriculture has historically never been recognized as a method of cushioning the urban poor from poverty and providing sources of livelihood. However, urban agriculture provides great opportunities for improving the living standards of the people in urban areas.

Adverse economic conditions

The current harsh macro-economic condition leading to inefficient and ineffective service delivery to the local population.

Bureaucratic delays

This manifests itself in two ways: the need to consult widely and the ineptitude of locally based employees to take appropriate decisions.

Short-term Focus

Stakeholders have tended to focus on short-term interventions for example food relief instead of long term projects such as dams. Considerations of sustainability have not been at the core of the interventions.

Institutional capacity

The lack of organisational capacity by service providers has affected the efficient delivery of services and provision of infrastructure.

Dependence on external support

A culture of looking for external support at the expense of the local initiatives has been ingrained amongst the people, leaving them as by-standers in the development process.

Civic participation

The Government of Zimbabwe is committed to democracy. To facilitate this, structures have been put in place to allow people to participate in the decision-making process. However, this still remains a challenge to be met.

HIV and AIDS

The pandemic continues to cause untold suffering to the general population and has almost wiped out the people in the productive sector. It has also eroded the development gains that had been made since independence.

Socio-economic Marginalization

The Province has been disadvantaged in terms of social and economic development, making it one of the poorest in the country.

Education

These services have increasingly become unaffordable and inaccessible to the general population.

Health

Diseases such as TB, Malaria, and Acute Respiratory Infections etc are prevalent and have a high mortality rate in the province.

Recommendations from the Study

a) Service provider such as the local authorities, Government departments, etc, should be more visible in service provision.

- The construction and rehabilitation of dams and irrigation schemes to improve water harvesting and food production must be a priority in the district plans.
- Long-term solutions to perennial problems should be sought e.g. feedlots for cattle to supplement restocking, and also drip irrigation.
- Empowerment of people to enable them to embark on Eco-tourism projects.
- Formation of commodity and product associations for sustainable use of natural resources such as artefacts, Macimbi and gold.
- Regulation of mining activities at all gold panning sites.
- Institutions providing various services to use councils as entry points to avoid duplication or under servicing of a sector.
- Increase capacity building efforts that target smart partners in the development of rural and urban areas.
- Urban dwellers should be allocated land for urban agriculture and should they get the land, they should be able to access the relevant support.
- Local authorities should attract investments into their areas so that they increase chances of employment opportunities.
- There has been an impression that rural populations are poorer than urban populations, as a result most NGOs have concentrated in the rural areas. This kind of thinking should be changed as in the Zimbabwean situation urban populations are equally poor.
- There is need for intensive HIV and ADS awareness campaigns in all areas.
- Gender considerations should be central to development.
- Cultural sensitivity should be guide in all programme interventions.
- Planning initiatives should be community –centred.

VI. CONCLUSION

From the study, it could be argued that although poverty is an elusive concept, communities themselves know what troubles they have and how these fit with their cultural aspirations.

These community perceptions which are mostly an income dimension of poverty should be carefully understood if interventions to address poverty are to be needs-driven. Once-more, it is clear that the rural-urban interface in Ndebele culture is evident and that a holistic approach to poverty reduction of essential.

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