

COPING WITH POVERTY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OF THIRD WORLD AFRICA: THE CASE OF MUKONOWESHURO COOPERATIVE GARDENING IN GUTU, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Since the colonial era, Africa has remained a victim of circumstances such that it has been affected by a range of problems that make its population suffer in many ways. One of the problems that continue haunting Africa, particularly most of its third world countries is poverty. Zimbabwe is one of those countries that have been deeply affected by crippling poverty levels. The problem of hunger has been exacerbated by the volatile political atmosphere, tremendous socio-economic upheavals and erratic rainfalls that Zimbabwe has experienced especially since the turn of the new millennium. Such experiences have made millions suffering acute poverty, and many others abandoning the country to other countries in the region and beyond. This study is concerned with the former group- those who have remained in the country even in the face of all the aforementioned adversities and try to mitigate suffering through different innovative strategies. The paper examines how people in the rural areas are coping with poverty, and it adopts Mukonoweshuro communal area of Gutu, southern Zimbabwe as a case study. Following observations and research with the Mukonoweshuro people, this paper argues that joined hands through cooperatives can do a great deal to help in alleviating or even eradicating poverty if properly executed. The paper gives as one of its recommendations that the government of Zimbabwe and donor agencies should assist rural communities with both knowledge/skills and financial resources necessary to alleviate poverty and bolster sustainable utilization of the resources at the rural peoples' disposal.

Keywords: Poverty, rural communities, cooperatives, third world Africa, Gutu, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Since the turn of the new millennium, Zimbabwe has suffered from a number of pressing problems ranging from poverty, corruption, poor governance, low productivity, erratic rainfalls, and the perpetually galloping inflation levels in almost all transactions locally and in the international market. While some of these problems are natural and others human caused, they are interwoven to the extent that one (of them) cannot be fully addressed without addressing the others. However, due to limited space and for purposes of this study, more attention is accorded to the problem of poverty in rural communities of Zimbabwe.

The problem of poverty in Zimbabwe became topical in both the national and international arenas at the height of inflation in 2008 when inflation reached unimagined levels leading to the jettisoning of the local Zimbabwean dollar in almost all transactions especially in trading within the region and the international market beyond. This led to the ushering in of de facto dollarization of the Zimbabwean economy with the country adopting a multi-currency system, particularly the US\$ and South African Rand in February 2009. This was all done under the banner of dollarization. While it can be true that the dollarization system helped to resuscitate the sinking economy, findings of this study shows that the dollarization system in Zimbabwe was inherently ambivalent as it created more wealth for some and worsened poverty levels for others- it widened the gap between the poor and the rich resulting in what one may call extreme poverty in many rural communities.

Extreme poverty in Zimbabwe, especially in the rural areas has stood out as a key indicator of the cataclysmic social, politico-economic challenges that have characterized the country for decades now. The political tensions and entanglements between members of the rival political parties compounded with the dollarization system contributed to extreme state fragility and ushered in fertile grounds for a cocktail of economic problems which exacerbated an already struggling economy, especially the inequalities and gaps between the rich and the poor. OECD as quoted by Makoche Kanwa and Kwaramba

(2009:4) defines fragile states as “those where the state power is unable and/or unwilling to deliver core functions to the majority of its people: security, protection of property rights, basic public services and essential infrastructure,” - a specter that led to socio-economic tumultuous situations in Zimbabwe especially since the turn of the new millennium. The perpetual widening gap between the rich and the poor, for example, was on account that with dollarization of the economy, the Zimbabwean state was no longer capable of controlling the flow of currencies in the country. This failure by the state/state agencies to control currency flows led to widespread shortages of foreign currency in rural areas since most of the people in these areas are not formally employed. It is in view of these circumstances that most people in the rural communities resorted to coping strategies such as cooperative gardening. Cooperative gardening enabled rural dwellers to meet their daily livelihood requirements without preoccupying themselves much on hard cash as might be the case with urbanites. As espoused by ILO (2002), a cooperative is an enterprise with broader objectives than other corporate forms. It is, “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.” Rural contexts can host a variety of cooperatives, in agriculture (production, processing, marketing, purchasing and sales), but also financial services (banking, credit and loan, insurance), in health, electricity, telecommunications, water, consumer goods and services, housing, tourism, and handicrafts. This understanding of cooperative is reiterated by FAO (2012) that defines a cooperative as a social enterprise that balances two main goals:

1. Satisfying its members’ needs
2. Pursuing profit and sustainability.

The enterprise, as is the case of Mukonoweshuro cooperative, thus, is normally an association of women and men who come together to form a jointly owned, democratically controlled enterprise where generating profit, benefiting cooperative members and promotion of sustainability in terms of the members’ shared social, cultural and economic aspirations, is a top priority.

This study focuses on cooperative gardening. The study investigated the challenges faced by rural communities after dollarization of the economy as well as the coping strategies which emerged thereafter to deal with the shortage of foreign currency in these areas. The study adopts Mukonoweshuro village of Gutu rural, Zimbabwe, which in view of the shortages of foreign currency have responded to transcend such challenges by engaging in cooperative gardening.

Poverty in third world Africa with emphasis on Zimbabwe

The concept of poverty has been difficult to pin down throughout the history of Africa and especially since the colonial era through post independence. This is chiefly because in many African societies, money is not used as the sole measure of poverty or wealth status of a group or individual - there are many other ways of measuring poverty. Yet it remains a fact well documented in literature that Africa is one of the poorest continents economically but, of course, one of the richest in terms of natural resources. Given this ambivalence, the poverty discourse on Africa has been so complex to unravel and the problem itself difficult to address. The economic poverty of Africa has been a result and/or exacerbated by compound factors which include, among many others, brain drain, poor technological advancements, political struggles and other such effects of colonization.

Zimbabwe is one such African country that has been entrenched in the deep levels of poverty since the past two decades or so, resulting in the setting at the top of priorities such as fighting against poverty at the formation of Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009. The emergency of this concern has been largely a result of observed considerable effects of certain economic reform programs such as Economic and Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) adopted in the 1990s, and undemocratic social, politico-economic policies that the then ruling ZANU (PF) government embarked on since independence in 1980 in an attempt to revamp, rebuild and restore sanity in its socio-economic landscape. For purposes of this study, I will not elaborate on the effects of some of the policies that the then ruling ZANU (PF) adopted as I have done so

elsewhere (Mawere 2011). It suffices, therefore, to point out that most of the policies that the Zimbabwean government adopted especially since the 1990s through the period before the formation of GNU have aggravated the poverty levels in the country, especially for those living in the rural communities.

Though the phenomenon of poverty is not something unique to Zimbabwe and even the world's history, a quick glance at the relevant literature clearly shows that there is no general consensus on any meaningful definition of poverty (Schubert 1994; NISER 2009). As such, the concept of poverty has been differently understood and so defined. Ogwumike (1991), for instance, defines poverty as a household's inability to provide sufficient income to satisfy its needs for food, shelter, education, clothing and transportation. While Ogwumike's definition captures the important indicators of poverty, it falls short by failing to include the aspects of healthy, clean water and/or sanitation which are also critically fundamental in the definition of poverty. Such a short fall is also notable in the former President of the World Bank, Robert McNamara's definition. McNamara (1995a; 1995b), defines poverty as a condition of life so degrading as to insult human dignity. In fact, one may wonder as to how poverty as a condition of life degrades and insult human dignity. A more precise definition of poverty is perhaps captured in The Ninth Report of the Development Policy of the Federal German Government which states that "people affected by poverty are unable to lead a decent life" (BMZ, 1992: 13). The report elaborates on how people affected by poverty are unable to lead a decent life by listing the following aspects of poverty in its definition of the term:

Poverty means not having enough to eat, a high rate of infant mortality, a low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, poor drinking water, inadequate health care, unfit housing and a lack of active participation in decision - making processes.

Yet even though this report captures what one can understand to be poverty, it doesn't go a step further to tell us how poverty in general differs from extreme poverty. This study identifies with the World Bank (2011) in elaborating that poverty is pronounced

deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life. I should go a step further to note that poverty is usually measured as either absolute or relative (the latter being actually an index of income inequality). Absolute poverty (or extreme poverty as it is sometimes called) is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to social services (see Report of the World Summit for Social Development, 1995).

For a few years starting 1990, The World Bank anchored absolute poverty line as \$1 per day. This was revised in 1993, and through 2005, absolute poverty was \$1.08 a day for all countries on a purchasing power parity basis, after adjusting for inflation to the 1993 U.S. dollar. In 2005, after extensive studies of cost of living across the world, The World Bank raised the measure for global poverty line to reflect the observed higher cost of living (see Martin Ravallion, Shaohua Chen and Prem Sangraula, 2008). Now, the World Bank defines extreme poverty as living on less than US\$1.25 per day (World Bank 2007). It should, however, be noted that a person or family with access to subsistence resources such as subsistent farmers or hunters and gatherers may have a low cash income without a correspondingly low standard of living because they are not living or directly depend on their cash for survival but simply use the cash as a supplement. This problematization of the conception of poverty justifies my previous claim that the concept of poverty has been difficult to pin down throughout the history of Africa chiefly because money is not the sole measure of poverty- there are many other factors that can be used to classify people/a person as poor or rich. However, using the World Bank's (2007) classification of poverty, majority of the Mukonoweshuro community members were living in extreme poverty before their embarking on cooperative gardening as shall be explained in the ensuing paragraphs of this paper. Most of the community members revealed that they lived on less than US\$1.25 per day before they participated in cooperative gardening. I

should emphasize, however, that since the definition of extreme poverty suggests that there is a thin line of difference (if any) between poverty and extreme poverty, and for this reason the two concepts shall be used interchangeably in this study.

Study area and background to the problem

This study was carried out in Mukonoweshuro communal area in ward 19 of Gutu District in southern Zimbabwe. Though the other part of Gutu district is classified under the agro-ecological zone of region 3, Mukonoweshuro communal area is in region 4. In terms of Zimbabwe's agro-ecological zones, region 4 is characterized by dry conditions and is normally classified under semi-arid areas as it receives poor rainfalls. In semi-arid Zimbabwe, water is by far a greater constraint than land (FAO, 2005) as such areas sometimes receive less than 600 mm per annum. This is confirmed by Mataruka (1985) who observes that Zimbabwe's agro-ecological regions 4 and 5 have a low total annual rainfall averaging between 400 to 600 mm, and often experience droughts and severe dry spells. Majority of the people of Zimbabwe, especially those in the rural areas where the majority of the population resides largely depend on rain-fed agriculture. The reliance of the vast majority of Zimbabweans on rain-fed agriculture, and the sensitivity of agriculture which is one of the major sectors of the economy makes Zimbabwe especially its semi-arid areas particularly susceptible to climate change. Receiving low rainfall and experiencing high temperatures, semi-arid southern Zimbabwe for example, is in one of the most vulnerable regions to climate variability in the country. This in itself means that the cocktail of problems that the country has experienced since the turn of the new millennium especially in semi-arid regions have been exacerbated by pronounced increases in temperature, recurrent droughts and unpredictable rainfall patterns- as these are the typical characteristics of the aforementioned areas. Faced with such a situation, the people in Mukonoweshuro had to look for innovative strategies to cope with the problem of recurrent droughts and socio-economic ones. The coping strategy they came up with was cooperative gardening. The research revealed the importance of cooperative gardening in sustaining the livelihoods of the Mukonoweshuro people.

This was in spite of the fact that the importance of cooperatives has been undermined by some scholars (Mather and Preston, 1980) who cited delayed action, lack of efficient management, lack of motivation, lack of capital, political interference and difficulty in maintaining business secrets as major limitations of cooperatives. In view of Mukonoweshuro cooperative, though not all the problems cited by Mather and Preston were observable, some of them such as political interference and lack of capital were more pronounced given the volatile political and economic fragile landscapes of Zimbabwe especially since the turn of the new millennium. Below is a map showing the location of Gutu District as well as Zimbabwe's agro-ecological zones.

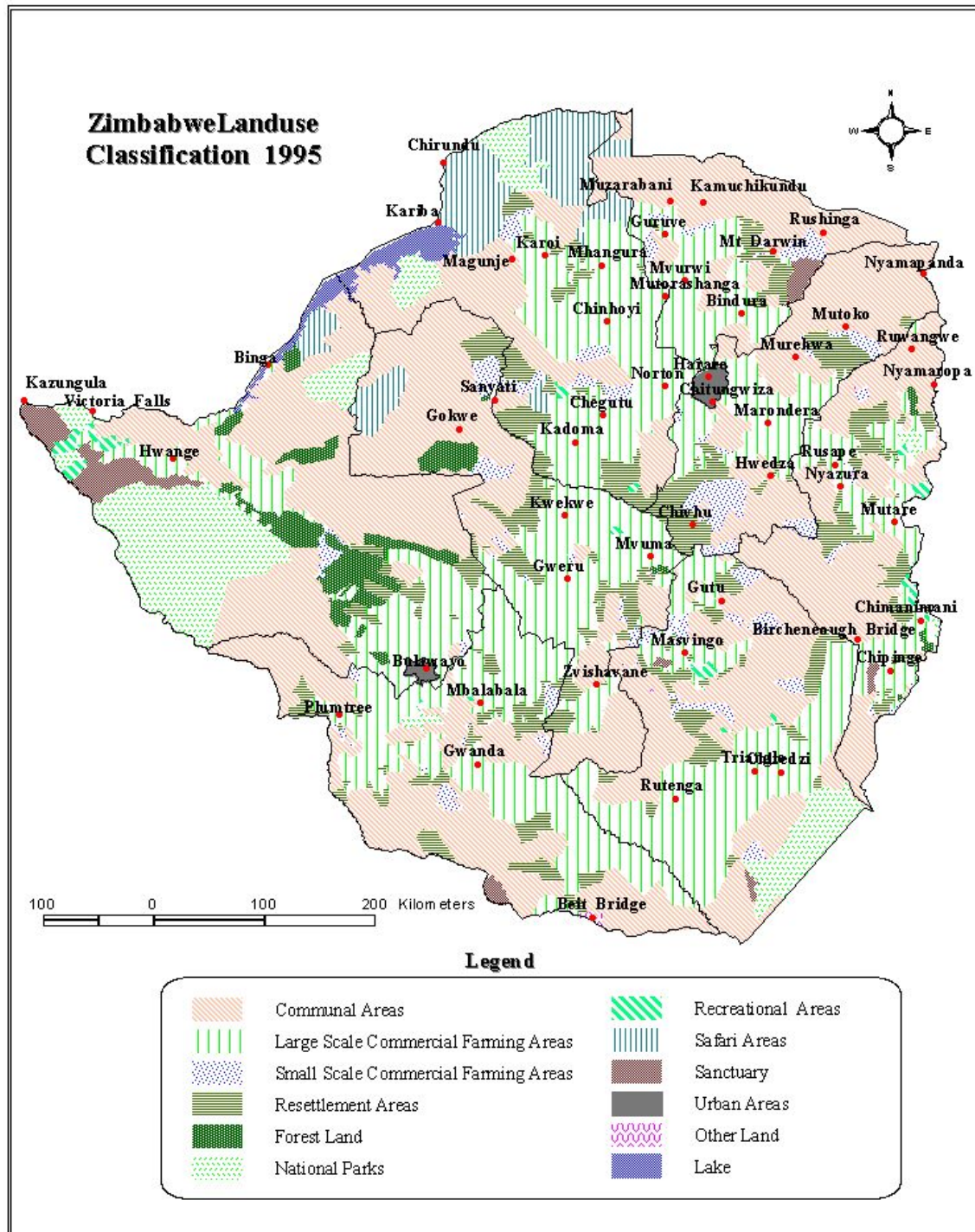


Figure 1: Adopted from Zimbabwe's Land use classification and location of main towns, 1995.

The next section of this paper focuses on the justification of the study and method(s) employed to carry out this research.

Justification of the Study and Methodological Issues

The present research is important in many ways which include the following:

1). It shows how coping strategies such as cooperative gardening/farming can help to solve the conundrum of food insecurity in semi-arid/drought prone areas such as the agricultural ecological zone of region 4 where Mukonoweshuro is located.

2). It shows how through innovative thinking, rural people in poverty-torn situations and economic turmoil such as those that Zimbabwe experienced before the formation of government of national unity in 2009 can alleviate or eradicate poverty around them.

The information obtained from this study will be of great utility to the government policy makers and non-government organizations (NGOs), as it will be a pointer to how they can best assist rural communities living in marginal and drought prone areas in addressing issues of food insecurity and poverty.

The study was carried out between September and October 2012 in Mukonoweshuro communal area of Chief Nyamandi in Gutu, southern Zimbabwe. In terms of data collection for this research, I relied on literature studies, content analysis, observation and in-depth interviews from a selected sample of 50 people (25 female and 25 male). The sample size of 50 was considered sufficient in providing the Mukonoweshuro people's general perceptions on the cooperative gardening. I observed some of the activities that take place in the Mukonoweshuro such as bed preparation, seeding, transplanting, watering, pruning (for tomatoes and carrots) and harvesting. The field observation was used to ascertain the actual activities that take place in the Mukonoweshuro one and half hectare garden. To supplement data obtained through field observation, interviews were conducted to get more information on the history of the Mukonoweshuro cooperative.

For instance, it is from interviews that I learnt the cooperative started at the height of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe in end 2007 with only 21 members. With the aid of a non-governmental organization, USAID which in 2009 provided fencing material, the numbers of co-operative members increased from 21 to 56, and were drawn from neighboring villages such as Chimuka, Guzha, Maushe, Muguhuri, Mutondoro and Musendo. Also, the size of the garden was increased from a quarter of a hectare to one and half hectares. There were a number of testimonies that the cooperative had succeeded in sustaining the members' livelihoods especially between during the years 2009, 2010 and 2011. It was, however, reported that the year 2012 was not all that good as the members encountered the problem of frost which affected a number of vegetable crops such as tomatoes, carrots, rape, coco and beans grown in the garden. The problem of frost was said to have been exacerbated by water shortages as the pump that the cooperative bought from the profits made between 2009 and 2011 had broken down.

Respondents for this study were drawn from actual members or representatives of families that were members of Mukonoweshuro cooperative (MC). This was done with the hope to receive information from people who are experienced and well informed about what was transpiring in the MC. The age group of the participants ranged from 13 to 50 years. I considered this age group appropriate for the study given that most of the people that were involved in the cooperative's activities were within the aforesaid age range. The participants were assured of their confidentiality besides that they responded to questionnaire items individually and voluntarily. Also, equal number of men (25) and women (25) were sampled for the reason that equal number of men and women had membership in the co-operative, hence their views were to be equally represented. I administered questionnaires with both open and closed items (open questionnaire and closed questionnaire) to the participants in the different areas they were found. Both questionnaires (open and closed) were used because in practice, a good questionnaire should contain both open and closed forms of questions so that responses from the two forms can be checked and compared (Behr 1988). The open questionnaire, for example, was used to enable the respondent to a fuller and richer response as it possibly probes

deeper than closed questionnaire by moving beyond statistical data into hidden motivations that lie behind attitudes, interests, preferences, wishes, hopes and decisions (see Behr 1988; see Mawere 2011). On a different note, the closed form of questionnaire was used to facilitate answering and to make it easier for me to code and classify responses especially in this case where a large number of questionnaires were dealt with. Data collected during research were tabulated to show frequencies before being subjected to evaluative analysis. Tables 1 and 2 respectively contain details of participant demographics and the data gathered during the study:

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Occupation	Gender	
	Male	Female
Direct members of MC	10	16
Village head	2	0
Primary School Students	4	3
Secondary School Students	7	4
Other indirect members of MC	2	2

Table 2: Responses to closed questionnaire items

ITEM	RESPONSES		
	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
1. MC benefits all members in many ways.	50	0	0
2. MC is not a threat to the natural environment	47	0	3
3. MC is facing financial problems to keep the project going i.e. to buy seeds, farm implements etc.	50	0	0
4. Besides the assistance MC received from USAID in 2007, it has never received any other assistance from the same organization or the government..	50	0	0
5. MC is gaining moral support from Rural District Council (RDC), District Administration Office (DAO) and Environmental Management Agency (EMA).	40	5	5
6. MC work hand in hand with Agricultural Extension Officers (Agritex Officers) in the area.	49	0	1
7. MC members practice crop rotation and grow different crops throughout the year.	50	0	0
8. MC should be stopped from operating.	0	50	0
9. The major problem MC is facing is that of water given that their pump is broken and they draw water using their heads from the nearby Sote River.	50	0	0
10. The government and NGOs should assist such initiatives as the MC to promote economic growth and eradicate poverty in the rural communities.	50	0	0

Discussion of results based on the research findings

The results in Table 2 show perceptions of the Mukonoweshuro cooperative members/representatives on the value they attach to the cooperative and challenges members were facing in executing cooperative activities. It was revealed that majority (100 %) of the respondents confirmed that the cooperative was centrally important to their lives as they all benefitted in ways numerous to mention. This concurs with the FAO (2012: 2) report which notes that numerous success stories around the world have shown that rural institutions like producer organizations and cooperatives contribute to food security by helping small farmers, fisher folk, livestock keepers, forest holders and other producers to access the information, tools and services they need. This means that the government and non-governmental organizations should promote such initiatives as

cooperatives in rural areas in order to increase food security and alleviate or eradicate poverty in the rural communities. This is contrary to what is happening with the Mukonoweshuro cooperative which since it received some assistance from USAID in 2009 no other form of assistance was received from either the same organization or the government.

On whether MC's gardening activities are not a threat to the natural environment, majority (94 %) agreed. My observations of the MC activities also confirmed the same perception. I observed that MC used wire mesh instead of tree branches (as commonly done in the rural areas) to construct their garden. This was positive given that such kind of fencing does not promote deforestation. Besides, the ecosystem around the garden was flourishing perhaps because the plants and other biodiversity also benefit from the moisture in the garden (as the garden is constantly watered) - I could see green all over the time I visited the cooperative. As such, majority (100 %), agreed that MC should keep on thriving as besides being environmentally friendly, it is the source of livelihood for majority in the area.

There were mixed perception on whether MC receives moral support from local government arms such as RDC. For those who thought RDC morally support (80 %) based on the fact that when MEC had a ceremony to celebrate the success of their cooperative in 2011, the Councilor, Chiefs, and members from EMA and DAO also participated. The 10 % who disagreed might have been absent when the ceremony was held given that some of the respondents for this study were school pupils. The same can be said of the 10 % who were uncertain. As such, they had all reasons to think that RDC, for example, though has as its one of the duties to promote development in the rural areas, it does not only do that financially but also morally.

On whether the government and non-governmental organizations should promote initiatives in the rural areas such as those by MC, majority (100 %) agreed. In fact most of the respondents were bitter with the way their government treats them. They felt they

were playing a fundamental role in assisting the government to ensure economic growth and eradicate poverty from the rural communities, but unfortunately their efforts seemed unrealized. Neither did they receive any form of assistance, especially financial, from the government. Even though there were government Agritex Officers who can teach them good farming methods such as crop rotation, majority (100 %) of the MC members still believed that the government and NGOs should do more to keep their project going. Besides knowledge they received from the Agritex Officers, they still need money to buy fertilizers, chemicals, farm implements and seeds to boost their production, and to expand their project. Such problems as facing MC were noted by FAO (2012: 3):

most small producers in developing countries face numerous difficulties. They are often far removed from what happens on national and international markets. For them to benefit, higher food prices would need to be transmitted through the entire value chain all the way to the small producer.....Farmers also face difficulties accessing high-quality inputs.

The results obtained from this research as discussed above clearly show that a lot more is desired to be done in Mukonoweshuro to ensure food security in this semi-arid area and alleviate/eradicate poverty. The next section of this study focuses on recommendations that might be useful for both the MC, the government of Zimbabwe and non-governmental organizations that operate in the country in the areas of poverty alleviation.

On poverty eradication: Some recommendations

The discussion of results obtained from this study has indicated that MC is making considerable progress in as far as rural poverty and food security measures are concerned. However, the cooperative is facing a number of challenges such as lack of capital and lack of motivation from the government. These problems require serious and immediate action if poverty (whether relative or extreme poverty) in rural areas is to be eradicated. In fact it was clear that the ward 19 people of Gutu are hardworking and innovative though they lacked financial assistance from the government to meet all their objectives and totally eradicate poverty from their community. Yet such an initiative to uplift the entire community and mitigate poverty can only be taken by concerted efforts of the local

community members, the government and donor agencies such as NGOs. Such concerted efforts will go a long way to eradicate poverty in rural communities. These concerted efforts are critically important as it is now generally believed that most integrated projects fail chiefly because they are too complex and try to do too much too quickly as well as based on very little knowledge of the precise constraints the poor households face (Lele and Adu-Nyako 1991). This means that conscious participation of the local community members (in this case of MC members) in projects that directly affect their lives and community is necessary if sustainable development is to be attained and poverty totally eradicated.

Second, there is need to improve infrastructure in ward 19 and establish an efficient marketing environment to enhance agricultural growth by the MC and other such projects that might follow suit. As Lele and Adu-Nyako (1991) noted rural infrastructure development needs to be accorded top priority. For the duo and indeed so, rehabilitation and maintenance of rural roads are essential for transporting the expected surplus to markets; incidents of agricultural produce rotting in remote parts of a country for lack of roads or because the roads are impassable are common in Africa. My observations were that the gravel road that leads to the MC garden was more of a foot path with numerous pot holes and lacking maintenance. This is to say that as long as there is poor infrastructure (as I observed in ward 19 during this research), then even if production by MC is boosted, it will remain difficult to market produces and maximize returns to the rural producers. Yet, improving the human capital of the rural poor will help create productive employment opportunities that outpace high population growth rates and therefore alleviate or eradicate their rural poverty in totality.

Lastly, I should make it clear that while the recommendations suggested above have the potential to eradicate poverty and induce growth in the national economy, it is still possible for any benefits directed to projects such as MC to bypass the targeted group, the MC for example. In an environment such as that of Zimbabwe, this can be accounted for by factors such volatile political milieu and corruption, among others. In terms of

corruption, for example, Zimbabwe is one such country whose corruption levels have become alarming high especially in the past two decades. As revealed by Transparency International (TI) (see The Standard Newspaper 2012):

Transparency International (TI) launched the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2012 on December 5 2012... For the year 2012 however, TI updated the methodology for the CPI 2012. CPI is now presented on a scale from 0 [highly corrupt] to 100 (very clean)....Zimbabwe, being one of the countries assessed, scored 20 on the CPI score and out of the 176 countries it was ranked number 163. In 2011 Zimbabwe had a CPI score of 2,2 an overall rank of 154 out of 182 countries assessed. This year's score therefore reveals that corruption is on the increase in Zimbabwe.

As stressed by TI, corruption in Zimbabwe is on the rise. What is most worrying is that corruption in Zimbabwe is precipitated by politics. In fact, the increasing levels of corruption in the country are a symptom of bad governance and structural weaknesses within the government's law enforcing institutions. Such bad governance and structural weaknesses have the potential to undermine Zimbabwe, especially the rural innovative minds' efforts to eradicate poverty and promote national economic development. This means that if the suggested recommendations are to be successfully implemented and ruinous consequences prevented, there is need for bold steps and tangible political commitment by the government to eradicate corruption. Yet to achieve this would also require the government to significantly increase its accountability and efficiency by passing new laws and establishing viable institutions (like empowering the existing anti-corruption programs) aimed at stamping out corruption. Once these are in place, it becomes possible to indiscriminately prosecute trespassers who divert and facilitate leakages of subsidies, and to promote the eradication of poverty in the rural areas.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated the coping strategies by some rural people in Zimbabwe as they try to cope with politico-economic and global environmental changes that Zimbabwe has experienced especially since the turn of the new millennium. It has been argued that poverty as experienced by Zimbabwe's rural communities is not unique but resonant of many developing countries in Africa and beyond. However, poor

infrastructure, high levels of corruption, lack of government support, and bad governance in many African countries such as Zimbabwe have been revealed as counterproductive and undermining efforts by rural communities themselves to tackle the problem of poverty. In view of this observation and the results obtained from the study, it has been recommended that the Government of Zimbabwe and donor agencies should make concerted effort to stamp out corruption, improve infrastructure in rural communities and support (both financially and morally) efforts by rural communities in fighting poverty and ensuring food security.

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