

Impact of Non-Governmental Organisations' Income Generating Projects: A Case of Rural Poverty Alleviation in a Selected Small Scale Dairy Projects in Chikomba District

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ABSTRACT This paper investigates the impact of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in rural poverty alleviation in Chikomba District in Zimbabwe. A triangulated research method was employed and data was collected from forty (40) individuals. The findings of the study reveal that although NGO small scale dairy projects have been in the community for long, rural poverty alleviation is still a far cry. The study also proved that despite NGO support, most small scale dairy projects are not sustained because of lack of funds and credits, skills, efficient transport system and veterinary services for the dairy cattle. In addition, monthly income that is received from these projects is still paltry and cannot alone sustain the lives of the people in Chikomba District. Gender and all age groups conceded that unemployment rate is still high in the District. Hence, there is need to articulate these NGO programs in ways that addresses unemployment. However, the continued political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe necessitates the continued crucial role of NGO income generating projects so as to address the inherent incidence of poverty in the country.

INTRODUCTION

The incessant failure of the government of Zimbabwe to deliver adequate social services and to create employment saw the escalation of poverty rates beginning in the 1990's. It is against this backdrop that NGOs that focus on poverty alleviation began to increasingly play a crucial role in the fight against poverty in Zimbabwe. The government of Zimbabwe implemented socio-economic policies such as the ESAP and PAAP in an attempt to address the ever upward spiralling poverty but these policies have proved to be counterproductive and retrogressive; they rather exacerbated poverty rates in the country. According to Venema and Breemer (1995) the failure of the Government of Zimbabwe to provide basic services to the people and the increased incidence of poverty from the early 1990's onwards saw the increased involvement of NGO's in the provision of basic services such as education, health care, and the improvement of the livelihood of farmers in the Communal areas. This saw the sprouting of NGOs in the

country with poverty alleviation as their critical concern. International Donors began to transfer more funds to NGOs in Zimbabwe so that they would engage in more pro-poor projects and programs that would bridge inequalities and alleviate poverty that had subsequently been exacerbated by ESAP programs (Mamdani 2009). There was an understanding that NGOs impact more significantly on social needs of the people and also that they are more effective in terms of projects that target poor people. However, although it is arguable that NGOs play a significant role in development and poverty alleviation in Zimbabwe, the situation of underdevelopment and abject poverty in the country has remained ironic (Moyo and Chambati 2013).

Despite several income generating projects that are being implemented by some NGOs the problem of poverty seems to persist in Chikomba District. What draws skepticism from scholars is that these NGOs have been working for a long period of time in those same districts and villages but poverty remains a challenge to rural development. According to a Poverty Assess-

ment Study Survey Summary that was done in 2003 Chikomba District has high levels of poverty which ranges from sixty-five percent (65%) (Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (2006); Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (MPSLSW) (Zimbabwe) 2017). Such alarming rates of poverty were recorded at the wake of some NGO income generating projects that are being implemented in the area. For instance, there are 10 both local and International NGOs that focuses on empowerment and income generating projects (most of which started) in the early 1990s to focus on this trajectory of poverty alleviation (Randell and German 2009). Therefore, the most critical question is, are the NGOs interventions not effective? Or is it the local people who are not embracing positive change? This study aims to answer such types of questions by assessing the impact of NGO interventions on poverty in the District.

Objective of the Study

To investigate the impact of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in rural poverty alleviation in Chikomba District in Zimbabwe.

Research Question

What is the impact of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in rural poverty alleviation in Chikomba District in Zimbabwe?

Problem Statement

Despite the fact that NGO small scale dairy projects have been in the community for long, rural poverty alleviation is still a far cry in Zimbabwe, particularly in the Chikomba District. In spite of NGO support, most small scale dairy projects do not sustain because of the following: lack of funds and credits, lack of skills, gender inequality, insufficient transport system and veterinary services for the dairy cattle. Realistically, monthly income that is received from these projects is still worthless and valueless; in fact, it cannot alone sustain the lives of the people in Chikomba District. These identified challenges have contributed to high unemployment rate in the District.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Sustainable Livelihoods Theory

The theoretical framework that is going to underpin this research study is the Sustainable Livelihood Approach to rural development. How NGO small scale dairy projects can impact positively on rural poverty can be best understood using this approach. Sustainable livelihood approach is contextualized in this research study since it aims to place poor people in the rural areas at the core of a web of inter-connected activities and influences that affect how these people generate a livelihood for themselves and their households (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) 2008).

NGOs and Poverty Alleviation

This section focused on studies carried in Zimbabwe and other parts of the world on the impact of NGOs on rural poverty. Evidence that came out of recent studies reveals that NGOs particularly community based ones can play a significant role in undertaking some programs and projects that are targeted at the poor both in urban as well as remote rural areas of many African countries. In the present day poverty alleviation and finally its eradication has become one of the top priorities on the agendas of various governmental, Non-Governmental Organizations, Intergovernmental Organizations, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and so on. The failure of most developing states to provide adequate social services and alleviate poverty has seen the increasing importance of NGOs in the accomplishment of development objectives.

In Zimbabwe, NGOs are filling a gap left by a government that has numerous pressures on its budget (Duffy 2002). In the post 2000 fast track land reform era NGOs defended land beneficiaries facing eviction and few NGOs advocated for the distribution of remaining large landholdings. While NGO advocacy during the first decade of independence (1980-1990) was restricted to community welfare issues, by 2008 it had expanded to include topical issues such as land allocation, land rights, land rights, gender rights, water rights and human rights (Zhou 2013). NGO land advocacy suffered challenges such as a

highly polarized environment, mutual mistrust between state and NGOs, indistinct lines of authority, some discrepancies in the conceptualization of land reform issues and reluctance by donors to provide funds for land advocacy. However, donors and some NGOs were consolidating their market-oriented aid schemes for input support for only communal areas in collaboration with older farmers unions (Cliffe et al. 2013).

Recent literature suggests that there is more evidence of NGOs being more strongly involved in the provision of welfare or relief and there is less evidence of their achievement in income and employment generation activities (Farrington et al. 1993). It is true that many NGOs face challenges in assisting the rising population of very poor people who do not own assets through income generation projects. Edwards and Hulme (2013) carried out a study on sixteen projects in Zimbabwe, Uganda, India and Bangladesh and they sought to investigate the economic aspect of these projects. All the projects were based in rural areas and they focused on income generation, skills training, technical assistance and credit. They employed an in-depth and participatory approach to assess the effectiveness of these projects. The study found out that 12 out of the 16 projects managed to achieve their aims and objectives and positively impacted the rural poverty alleviation. However, the evaluation findings reflected that although there were marked economic and social benefits to the poor, majority of the projects did not positively impact the poorest of the poor. Also, of the four projects men dominated leadership and hence, accrued more benefits than women. There is need for participation in project initiative and implementation by poorest people in most remote regions so that they can come up with local indigenous projects that they are able to manage and benefit from. The accomplishment of project objectives in a certain region is dependent upon the competence and quality of the NGO leadership, local conditions, how the local people respond to the project and many other factors (Mukherji and Sengpta 2004).

Ullah and Routray (2007) carried out a study that sought to evaluate the current poverty situation and efforts of the NGOs to alleviate poverty in Bangladesh with emphasis on the impacts of two NGO programs in two villages of Barisal district. A sample of two NGOs (BRAC

and Proshika) were selected for the study and the research used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data, however, show that income from NGO related activities were significantly lower than income from other sources. Clearly, about ninety-seven percent of the households earned Tk20,000 per year from NGO related activities, whilst about three percent had yearly income between Tk20,001 and 40,000 (Ullah and Routray 2007). The study has revealed that about seventy-three percent of the NGO member households were still below the poverty datum line, which was a higher percentage as compared to the government and the World Bank estimates, which were forty-seven percent and fifty-one percent, respectively. According to this study Interventions by the two major NGOs in Bangladesh, in these two study villages did not register any vital impact on the indicators of economic well-being of the beneficiary households. The majority of the people in these two villages remained below the poverty line. The role of NGOs in development and rural poverty alleviation has remained rhetoric in most developing countries. However, it's worthy to note that in Africa some NGOs have demonstrated to be far better than some government institutions in the provision of services to the poor people in the urban areas and some poor communities in the rural areas. Rajasekhar (2004) acknowledged that some NGOs in the northern region of Ghana (the most impoverished region in the country) have had relative success in the construction of water supply and sanitation facilities in this area.

It can be argued that although several NGO failures can be pointed, these organizations are better than governmental organizations when it comes to innovativeness in assisting the poor people in the rural areas. This is chiefly because NGOs work closely with the poor who are likely to put forward new ways in which they can acclimatize to new and innovative ideas to fight poverty. Many NGO projects have failed due to factors that are related to economics such as insufficient funding, poor people are required to comply with too many things before they can be assisted, funding of inadequate plans, incomplete information to the poor concerning loans, lack of proper monitoring of projects, insufficient explanations concerning mutual obligations, improper training and giving responsibility of financial management to incompetent people (Julia 1999). Some NGOs lack expert staff that

can give credible entrepreneurial and managerial advice to micro-entrepreneurs hence some projects lack sustainability. Islam (2007) noted that NGOs were failing to cooperate with banks in their lending programs not because of banks' resistance to work with NGOs per se but also because in some circumstances NGOs were unwilling to give up control of these projects to banks.

Relationship between NGOs and the State in Zimbabwe

The relationship between NGOs and the state has been traditionally branded by benevolent negligence and outright resentment. Most NGOs are perceived by national governments as representing a risk threat to their power in their respective countries. According to Edwards and Hulme (1996: 16), there are two factors which govern the relations between NGOs and the state which are the regime type and the function served by NGOs. In Zimbabwe, the government has put some laws and regulations that restrict NGO rights and operations and hence their efforts in fighting poverty are being restricted by the excessively regulated environment. The government of Zimbabwe passed the Private Voluntary Organizations Act (PVOA) of 1995 which gave the mandate to the ministry of Public Service, labour and Social Welfare to register and de-register NGOs and this saw increased tension between the two organizations. The NGO Bill of 2004 stipulates a host of regulations for the operations of NGOs. As such for NGOs to operate in certain areas they have to seek permission and approval from government authorities but due to bureaucracies this takes a long process before projects can be implemented. According to Moyo and Chambati (2013), the 2004 NGO bill stipulates that government should have increased representation in the NGO council and requires NGOs to re-apply on annual basis. The bill also prohibits foreign NGOs from registering in Zimbabwe and also deters local NGOs that are involved in governance issues from getting funding from foreign donors. This bill is criticized by scholars that it is putting too many restrictions on NGO operations hence affecting their fight against poverty.

METHODOLOGY

This study used both qualitative and quantitative methodology. Chikomba is a rural dis-

trict that is located in Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe and it is about 200km South East of Harare. It is located in agro-ecological region III. Hence, the district has mainly semi-arid climatic conditions and it has high levels of poverty. Chikomba District has a total of 28 NGOs and of these, 10 are into empowerment and income generating programs, 8 are into aid and relief programs, 6 are into human rights program and other 6 are into Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) awareness campaign programs (Randell and German 2009). NGOs began to increasingly focus on income generating projects in this district in the early 1990s supporting communal farmers, poultry, piggery and cattle projects. The study targeted ten (10) female youths, ten (10) male youths, ten (10) male adults and ten (10) female adults from the dairy projects in Chikomba district. Purposive or judgemental sampling was used to reach the youths and adults that fall within the age range. A questionnaire was used to elicit data from the respondents. Qualitative data was collected from the participants through face-to-face interview. It was transcribed and analysed thematically. Quantitative data gathered was analysed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) method.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of this study. Firstly quantitative data was presented and analysed followed by qualitative data which was analysed according to the merging themes.

NGO Small Scale Dairy Projects as the Main Source of Livelihood in the Community

The findings reveal the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement, "*NGO small scale dairy projects are the main source of livelihood in your community.*" More females (13/20 agreed and 2/20 strongly agreed) than males had the perception that small scale dairy projects are the main source of their livelihood. The result clearly demonstrates that majority of males (12/20 agreed and 1/20 strongly agreed) and females (13/20 agreed and 2/20) had the perception that indeed these projects are the main source of livelihood in their community. A minority of 6/20 males disagreed and

1/20 strongly disagreed and 2/20 females had the perception that these projects are not improving their livelihood. 3/20 females were undecided. Generally, it is concluded that majority of participants relied on small scale dairy projects as the main source of their livelihood; as indicated by the majority seventy-five percent of females and sixty-five percent of male respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that NGO small scale dairy projects are the main source of livelihood in their community.

NGO Small Scale Dairy Projects as a Means of Improving the Majority of People's Lives in the Community

The finding of the study shows the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement, "*NGO small scale projects are improving the majority of people's lives in your community.*" The finding shows that, slightly a majority of the males (9/20) disagreed and 2/20 strongly disagreed) compared to females (8/20 disagreed). A slight majority of males (6/20 agreed and 2/20 strongly agreed) had the perception that these projects are improving people's lives than females (6/20 agreed and 1/20 strongly agreed). 1/20 males and 5/20 females which when added constitute 6/40 (15%) of the total participants, were undecided. Therefore, based on these statistics it can be concluded that NGO small scale dairy projects are not significantly improving the people's lives in the community as indicated by the majority fifty-five percent of males and a substantial forty percent of male respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that NGO small scale dairy projects were improving the majority of people's lives in their community.

Unemployment in the Community is Declining Due to These Projects

The finding reveals the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement, "*Unemployment in your community is declining due to these projects.*" The findings show that most of females (12/20 disagreed and 2/20 strongly disagreed) than males (7/20 disagreed and 4/20 strongly disagreed) had the perception that unemployment is not declining in their community. More males (3/20 agreed and

1/20 strongly disagreed) than females (1/20 agreed and 2/20 strongly agreed) had the perception that unemployment in their community was declining due to these projects. 5/20 males and 3/20 females were undecided. A minority 1/20 males and 2/20 which constitutes 7.5 percent of the total sample strongly agreed. 5/20 males and 3/20 females which constitute twenty percent of the total sample were undecided. Therefore, based on these statistical analysis it can generally be concluded that unemployment is still high in Chikomba district as indicated by the majority seventy percent of females and fifty-five percent of male participants who either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view unemployment in their community is declining due to these projects.

Ages of the Beneficiaries and NGO Small Scale Dairy Projects as the Main Source of Livelihood in the Community

The finding shows that majority ninety-five percent (95%) of respondents in the age range of 18-22 years agreed to the statement. This means that the majority of respondents in this age range had the perception that NGO small scale dairy projects are the main source of livelihood in their community. In the age range of 22-25 years, three percent (3%) of respondents disagreed. In the age range of 25-35 years, two percent (2%) of the respondents were undecided.

NGO Small Scale Dairy Projects are Improving the Majority of People's Lives in the Community

The finding reveals that the NGO small scale projects are not improving the majority 62.5 percent of lives of people in the age groups of 18-22 years. Similarly, NGO small scale projects are improving the lives in the age range of 22-25 years as indicated by a substantial 32.5 percent. The remaining five percent (5%) of the age group 25-35 years of the respondents were undecided with the view that NGO small scale dairy projects were improving majority of people's lives in their community.

Unemployment in the Community is Declining Due to These Projects

The finding reveals that the age group of 18-22 years did not see unemployment declining in

their community as result of these projects as indicated by thirty-eight percent (38%). Fifty percent (50%) in the age range of 22-25 years agreed that unemployment in the community is declining due to these projects; and eight percent (8%) of the age group of 25-35 years were undecided with the statement that unemployment in their community was declining due to these projects.

Monthly Income from Dairy Projects

The findings eloquently illustrate that fifty-five percent (55%) of the respondents had US\$0 and US\$0-\$10 from the dairy projects. These are the respondents whose dairy projects had closed down, close to closing down or operating on constant losses due to lack of funding, lack of transport, power outages and poor markets. Only a 12.5 percent are getting US\$10-20, twenty percent are getting US\$20-50 and also 12.5 percent are getting US\$50+. The above analysis clearly shows that for the majority of respondents there is less or no income coming from the NGO income generating projects. In light of that it can be concluded that NGO small scale dairy projects are not significantly alleviating poverty in the community.

Source of Household Income

16/40 (40%) of the participants have the small scale dairies as the main source of their incomes. 20/40 (50%) of the participants are unemployed and mainly depended on subsistence farming for their paltry incomes since they were forced to close down their dairy projects due to lack of funding and poor markets. 4/40 (10%) of the participants were employed in the local small scale businesses and government offices since they had closed their dairy projects due to insolvency. These statistics clearly show that most of the dairy projects have collapsed due to lack of funding. Therefore, this saw majority of the small scale dairy projects collapsing and as such spawning more poverty since there is no any other viable form of employment.

Significance of NGO Small Scale Dairy Projects in Improving Lives

The NGO small scale dairy projects are meant to improve the lives of people in Chikomba Dis-

trict therefore, the researchers asked whether the projects were improving the lives of participants. Some of the informants said;

"Yes it is improving our lives since the Swedish Cooperative Centre gave us dairy cows and we can now produce milk for our consumption and also for sale."

"It is not improving our lives because they started these projects and left us without any support hence there is no production at all."

"The project is down because we have lost most of our dairy cows to diseases. Since we are not receiving any form of support it is difficult to access vaccines and stock feeds."

Most of these participants stated that in terms of assets, they were given some exotic dairy cows by their sponsor NGO (Sweedish Cooperative Centre) when they started the dairy projects in the mid 1990's. This shows that these projects are at least improving the lives of some people although the majority are not benefiting. The dairy cows they were given by the Swedish Cooperative Centre enabled the minority poor people to produce milk for consumption as well as for sale thereby increasing their income. The production of milk has therefore enhanced their meals. These dairy projects are, however, improving the lives of a minority group. The majority of participants did not see their lives being improved by these dairy projects. The fact that most of these projects are not receiving support has seen most of them going on their knees. The dairy projects cannot sustain the lives of people without support. Mzumara (2014) noted that the lack of support has immensely affected the viability of the pro-poor projects in Zimbabwe. The above analysis clearly shows that most of these NGO small scale dairy projects lack sustainability and continuity since the participants receive help in starting the project and will not receive any other form of support to sustain the projects.

Assistance to the Dairy Projects

Assistance in form of finance, loans and assets is crucial for these projects to sustainably improve the lives of people. The researchers asked the participants for any form of finance that they receive and some of their responses were as follows:

"NGOs such as Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) help us with some finance and stock feeds."

"We get loans from the banks under the Indigenization program."

"We don't get any form of support and these loans accessed under the Indigenisation program are politicised and hence are given to known ZANU PF supporters."

"Our projects are down because there is no support for us to access vaccines, feed stocks and the markets."

"We have to work manual jobs and use that paltry income to support our dairy projects."

The minority of the participants emphasised that they get financial assistance to run their small scale dairy projects. These participants said they got assistance in form of donations from other Non-Governmental Organization such as Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) and also government loans under the indigenization program. However, this vital support is only coming to a minority group and the majority of participants are struggling to sustain their dairy. Therefore, many of the participants said that they do not receive any assistance. They reported that they had to work manual jobs in the District Development Fund projects and borrowing from relatives so as to fund their small scale dairy projects. The fact that the majority of the small scale dairy producers are not receiving any form of support results in most of the projects failing to sustain themselves. According to Mzumara (2014), more than decade long economic recession in Zimbabwe has spawned dwindling financial support to small scale projects and this saw the increased incidences of poverty.

In term of getting loans, most of the participants clearly said that they could not get loans from the government Indigenization Program since it was over politicised and it was only those Zanu PF members who were in the higher ranks in the local administration who were the main beneficiaries. This shows how politics have been retrogressive to the development of small scale projects in Zimbabwe. Moyo and Cham-bati (2013) noted that politicisation of resources in Zimbabwe is affecting pro-poor projects and generally the development of the country.

CONCLUSION

Generally, the Non-Governmental Organization small scale dairy projects are benefiting only a minority of people in Chikomba District. Anal-

ysis of data from the participants' shows that it is mostly those who are occupying higher ranks in the local administration and those who are politically connected that benefits more from these NGO small scale dairies. In terms of gender it clearly shown that it is mostly women than men who are deriving some benefits from these NGO small scale dairies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for more work shops where they can be imparted more entrepreneurial skills. The study also suggested that NGOs and government should help by supplying vaccines, stock feeds at the local level so that they are easily accessible. The government should assist them by building roads and generally improve the transport system so that they can easily transport their milk to the markets. The government should give people more land for pastures and for use as collateral security to get loans and credits from banks and other financial institutions. Of concern also was that government should stop political interferences in these NGO projects.

Generally, the researchers recommend that NGOs should be take participatory and inclusive approaches in the formulation and implementation of their strategies. They should take into account the views and interests of the poor so as to come up with the best strategies of poverty alleviation. This is because during the study, some participants reported that they preferred poultry projects to dairy projects because they were easier to manage and sustain and had better markets in their locality.

The NGOs should prioritize equipping the rural people with entrepreneurial skills and generally expertise on how to run a dairy project. Most of the participants and respondents demonstrated that they lack entrepreneurial skills and generally expertise on dairy projects. NGOs should regularly conduct workshops that focus on imparting rural people with knowledge on how to run a business, different diseases that infect dairy cows and how they can be inoculated against these diseases, how to increase the yields and improve the quality of milk. Hence, the researchers strongly recommend that the government can complement NGO efforts by advising small scale dairy farmers through Agricultural Extension Services (AGRITEX).

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