

The Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in Rural Livelihood Development: the case of Hwange East in Matabeleland North Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the improvement of human livelihoods has been a subject for debate in many developing countries, particularly with regards their contribution towards rural livelihood development. The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of selected NGOs in Hwange east in Matabeleland North Province of Zimbabwe on rural livelihoods with emphasis to food and nutrition, income generating projects and sanitation. The study being guided by the research questions and Scoones's Sustainable Livelihoods Approach theoretical framework adopted the Case Study Research Design under the qualitative research paradigm. The researchers used purposive sampling technique to sample 54 (N=54) households who fall under the vulnerable households category in terms of their challenges to food provision, poverty and general way of life. These households have been receiving humanitarian assistance from the three NGOs under study, namely, World Vision, Caritas Hwange and Intengwe for Community Development. Self-administered questionnaires were preferred and used to solicit for information from selected respondents. The study revealed that NGOs are concentrating more on small projects such as relief food distribution which have little impact to the rural livelihoods of Hwange east needy households. Little is being done by the NGOs to empower the families to produce adequate food for their families. Income generating projects are nonexistent in the ward while some households are yet to have sanitation facilities. The study recommended that the NGOs should also engage in rural projects with monetary benefits as beneficiaries need money for other purposes. In addition, the NGOs should concentrate more on giving the needy households the means to improve their general livelihood strategies.

Keywords: rural livelihoods, rural development, non-governmental organisation, community projects.

INTRODUCTION

Rural poverty in developing countries including Zimbabwe is a major cause for concern to all community development stakeholders considering that the majority of such countries' population is predominantly rural. Amongst those that have made rural development their concern in Zimbabwe are Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), without of course mentioning the responsible government ministry. According to the World Bank Report [1]:

A non-governmental organization (NGO), sometimes called civil societies, is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local (community), national or international level. It is task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, hence, is a citizen-based group that functions

independently of government and performs a variety of service and humanitarian functions.

Noting that rural people's livelihoods are largely anchored on natural resources and assets such as land and water available to them, the NGOs in rural communities claim to enhance the rural dwellers' capacity to maximize their benefits from these natural endowments. Through their programs, NGOs seek to provide the rural people with choices of livelihoods as a result of their projects aimed at different livelihood enhancers such as food security, income generation and infrastructure development. Most of the services provided by the NGOs are often those promised by the government to the citizens and these include support in agriculture, education, health and sanitation, environment, development projects, good governance, emergency relief among other programs.

Background to the study

The attainment of independence in Zimbabwe in 1980 saw the emergence of Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) whose main focus was on rural development. Most of these NGOs' thrust was to bring socio-economic sanity to the countryside that had been ravaged by the liberation war and generally to improve the people's livelihoods. Through the NGOs intervention, the people envisaged their lives improving in different aspects as the NGOs churned out different developmental and humanitarian programs. While various NGOs claim to have recorded remarkable success through their projects, a reality check on the ground reveals a different picture. Thus, more than thirty years after the NGOs commenced operations in various rural communities around the country, many people still face numerous livelihood challenges.

Chitongo [2] says that NGOs have always been advocates of rural development and that Zimbabwean NGOs are playing an important role in addressing the needs of communities which are not received by official development programs. And yet, there are those that feel that the increase in the activities of NGOs in Africa has not seen commensurate development in the socio-economic growth of the continent. For example, in spite of the presence of NGOs, food is still a major challenge as most African families either have less than three meals a day or eat poor quality meals. The quality of most rural people's lives is still low with hardships due to low or poor disposable income as well as limited economic resources. Infrastructure development remains a challenge as, for example, seen from poor housing and the absence or shortage of toilets leading to some rural dwellers using the bush system for toilets. In Zimbabwe, the NGOs operating under the Private Voluntary Organization Act (PVO Act) are compelled to draw and implement programs that should benefit societies or communities that they operate in to further their developmental goals.

Hwange East; which is an area under the jurisdiction of Hwange District in Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe, also has its share of NGOs. The Zim Vac Rural Households Livelihoods Survey [3] holds that the area under study falls within the national region V; which has one of the highest concentrations of food insecure people. Generally, the area is arid and not suitable for cropping activities except drought resistant varieties. The area is also characterized by inadequate infrastructure, low income and economic activities which makes it a favourable destination for humanitarian NGOs [4]. It is a political constituency as is demarcated by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's election boundaries and is a typical rural area which is Nambya tribe dominated and has four

Nambya chiefdoms, namely, Nekatambe, Nelukoba, Whange and Shana respectively.

Due to erratic rainfall received as well as poor water collection systems, boreholes are the major source of water as well as few dotted dams and seasonal rivers. Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency [4] further asserts that the majority of the households in this area use pit latrine and blair toilets as well as the bush system. While electricity power lines criss-cross the area, the majority of the households use candles and paraffin for lighting as well as firewood for cooking. According to the Parliament of Zimbabwe [5], the area is further characterized by few secondary and primary schools with no tertiary institutions. Other sources of income for the area include fishing from the nearby Mighty Zambezi River and curio curving from the hard woods found in the adjacent forestry areas.

While Hwange east has eight NGOs in operation, only three which are World Vision, Intengwe for Community Development and Caritas Hwange (which is part of Caritas Zimbabwe) were the focus of this study with emphasis on their programs with regards to Food and Nutrition, Income Generating Projects and Sanitation. Various projects sponsored by these NGOs are on-going in the study area. According to the Department of Social Welfare 2016, World Vision commenced operations in the study area on 18 August 2006, Intengwe on 09 February 2007 and Caritas Hwange on 01 January 2012 respectively which is enough time to assess the impact of their programs. Apart from food and nutrition, income generating projects and sanitation, the three NGOs' operations in the area under study also covers such facets as agriculture, water provision, disaster management, HIV and AIDS, humanitarian assistance and programs aimed at vulnerable people. It is against this backdrop that the current study sought to investigate whether through their programs, the NGOs are effective in the improvement of rural livelihoods in the area of study.

Statement of the problem

More than thirty years after the NGOs commenced operations in Zimbabwe, the majority of rural communities still face numerous livelihood challenges. They still have to contend with problems such as critical food shortages, malnutrition, low levels of income leading them to abject poverty and poor sanitation. Diseases related to poor sanitation such as diarrhea are prevalent in most rural areas as people are still using the bush system for toiletry. Therefore, the study sought to investigate whether the NGOs operating in Zimbabwe with particular reference to rural Hwange east focusing on food and nutrition, income generating projects and sanitation are implementing projects that are relevant and effective to the improvement of the rural people's livelihoods.

Purpose and Objectives of the study

The purpose of the study was to highlight the effectiveness of NGOs in the improvement of rural livelihoods in the area under study. The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To establish the nature of the food items from the NGOs and whether the quantities are enough to meet basic nutritional and dietary requirements.
- To establish types of projects being implemented by NGOs and assess whether they are generating enough to meet the people's basic needs.
- To measure the accessibility of households to proper sanitation and evaluate NGOs contributions
- To evaluate the general effectiveness of the specific NGOs in the improvement of rural livelihoods in the area under study

Significance of the study

Findings from this study are expected to aid in educating residence of the area under study in particular and the country at large as communities will become enlightened in their dealings with NGOs. The government as the policy maker and regulator of NGOs operations in the country is expected to benefit from the study as government structures such as the Provincial Administrators and District Administrators will have a better and enlightened position on how to engage and regulate NGOs to the best advantage of the rural communities. From appreciating the results, the NGOs will also look up to their interventions that need revisiting and up-scaling so that the people in the area of their operations effectively benefit.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical framework

The study adopted the Scoones Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) theoretical framework as the unit of analysis. Fundamentally, Scoones [6] posits that the concept of 'human sustainable livelihood' is increasingly becoming central to the debate about rural development, poverty reduction and environmental management. According to Scoones [6], five livelihood assets are important to rural communities and the rural people and these are natural, social, human, physical and financial; which are also vulnerable to shocks and trends such as drought or floods.

Culture, laws, strategies and government policies determine how the assets are utilized by the rural folks. Through these assets and strategies, rural people aim at achieving various livelihood outcomes which include improved income, increased food security and well-being among others. Scoones [6] further says that livelihood perspectives are now central to rural development thinking and practice. The concept of livelihoods is about individuals, households or countries making a living attempting to meet various

consumption and economic households, coping with materials and responding to new opportunities. Thus, through utilizing Scoones' Sustainable Livelihood Approach, the current study sought to answer the study problem in question.

Nongovernmental organizations characteristics and roles

Apart from being non-profit as given by the operational definition, NGOs should also be non-political or partisan with a total dedication to changing the world and make it a better place for the poor, marginalized and disadvantaged. However, African governments have often accused most NGOs of being political and partisan, operating for somewhat profitable reasons and with little dedication to the concerned beneficiaries and yet their existence is underlined by volunteering and charity. Shivji [7] explains that NGOs are meant to benefit their targets (the potential beneficiaries) through the outcomes which could either be more income to beneficiaries, increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security, sustainable use of the natural resource base and so on. In Uganda, Kadiyala and Rawar [8] found out that NGOs whose intervention focus on food provision are critical in that food access and diet quality independently predict nutritional status among vulnerable people including individuals living with HIV and AIDS.

The structures of NGOs vary considerably. They can be global; with a relatively central authority such as World Vision (WV) or alternatively be based in a single country and operate transnational like the Environment Africa (EA). Some are national while others are only found within districts. According to Farrington and Gill [9], NGOs have a diversity of origins and philosophy. Some were formed by professionals in opposition to the politics of the host country; some are faith based while others are broadly humanitarian. The objectives of NGOs reveal the range of their goals, ideals, programs and activities. Their objectives are broad based and cover a wide spectrum of activities such as socio-economic development, empowerment, advocacy awareness and environmental protection.

Livelihoods and their contributions to rural development

According to Ellis [25], livelihoods comprise of capabilities, material and social resources and activities required for a means of living which also takes into account the role played by policies and processes influencing the choice of livelihood strategies by the rural people. Banks and Hulme [10] say that NGOs play important roles in impoverished rural communities with regards livelihood development. Thus, motivated by a desire for caring and

development, NGOs establish and are involved in interventions such as education, health, welfare, sport, economic empowerment and nutrition mainly focusing on vulnerable populations. NGOs have also been involved in pioneering new approaches to meeting needs and solving problems in underdeveloped societies. They have been at the center of renewed searches for sustainable processes of social, political, economic and environmental development as well as acting on such issues as peace, democracy, gender equity and human rights among several others [10].

Describing the way of life of the rural poor, Farrington and Gill [9] postulate that rural poor people always face vulnerability to exclusion from social, economic, administrative and political processes. Dekker [11] notes that the increasing prevalence of drought in rural Zimbabwe has had a devastating impact on people's livelihoods particularly in arid and semi-arid parts of the country and these include Matabeleland North where the study site is situated. However, different interventions by NGOs particularly in developing communities have been considered as one of the alternative strategies for rural skills development, employment and livelihood development among vulnerable people [12].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the basic plan that guides data collection and analysis of the study [13]. This encompasses the research design, target population, sample, research instruments, data collection procedures, data presentation and analysis procedures. This study adopted the case study design under the qualitative research approach. Mack *et al* [14] notes that qualitative research is specifically effective in obtaining culturally specific information about values, opinions, behaviours and social contexts of particular populations. In particular, Zainal [16] explains that the case study method enables a researchers to closely examine the data within a specific context as it selects a small geographical area or a limited number of individuals as the subjects of the study. The case study research method according to Johnson [15] becomes prominent when community issues such as human are raised such as was the case in this study.

The population for the current study comprised members of vulnerable households in the area under study. Burns and Grove [17] describe research population as all the individuals or elements that have certain characteristics and are of interest to the researcher. A sample is taken from the target population being researched on. According to Cohen and Manion [18], a sample is the group of cases selected from all the cases of interest in a particular research project. The sample has to be unbiased and representative of the population. If the sample is adequate, it will have the

same characteristics of the population. For this research, 54 respondents (N=54) of the total 543 households were used as the sample. Purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of respondents. Palys [19] explains that purposive sampling is a non- probability technique where by the researchers uses own judgment to select from the population members felt will give the desired or accurate information. Thus, in the case of this study, the researchers targeted a particular group of people whose background expertise relates to the objective of the study.

The researchers were the main research instrument whose role was to engage the respondents and control the entire exercise. This is in consistence with Cresswell [20] who contends that a qualitative research relies on the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Self-administered questionnaires were used in the study to solicit information from selected households members. According to Gillham [21], questionnaires carry advantages of being cost effective where data has to be collected from respondents far apart geographically as was the case in this research. Moyo *et al* [22] note that the other advantage with questionnaires is that they can be used to explore potentially sensitive areas more easily than other methods. They also reduce bias as there are no verbal clues that may influence the respondent and are easy to analyze. The questionnaires were structured in both English and vernacular (i.e. Nambya) languages for easier understanding by the local people.

STUDY FINDINGS

Descriptive data analysis technique was used to analyze and give an interpretation to the processed data. A total 54 questionnaires were handed out to the selected respondents and 52 were accounted for giving a 96% response rate which surpassed the generally set 95% acceptable response rate. Two questionnaires could not be accounted for as respondents were away from their homestead and had possibly locked the questionnaires for safe keeping. The data collected revealed that 42 (80%) of the 52 respondents were males compared to 10 (20%) of their female counterparts. The reason for females' reluctance to participate could be on social and traditional basis in the local Nambya tribe cultures where only males as the head of the households should be the spokespersons of their families, notwithstanding the fact that women are the vanguards of their households and would know better on issues to do with the household way of life.

The respondents' age dimension was between the ages of 20 to 64. However, for ages between 20 and 26, there were 12 (23%) and for ages between 27 and 36 there were 11 (21%). Ages between 37 and 43 had 9 (17%), ages 44 to 51 had 13 (25%) while age range 52

to 64 had 7 (14%). Most of the households in the study area are headed by people of the ages between 44 to 51 years which could explain the high frequency of this age range. At this age, most of them have bigger families to take care of and are quick to participate in events that they feel may have beneficial end results. However, the age range in the research is still active and able bodied and instead of being given food or other materials, it would be effective if these people were given the means to do it for themselves.

Results on educational level of respondents showed that 35 (68%) of the respondents ended at primary level while 10 (19%) have secondary education. 7 (13%) acquired various skills through vocational education. The study area being of rural set up still suffers from lack of enough schools for both primary and secondary levels let alone tertiary and vocational colleges that are non-existent. Typical of rural areas in Zimbabwe, most of the middle aged adults of between 45 to 64 years never managed to go through secondary school level mainly due to financial problems, lack of education facilities as well as the bottle-neck system that characterised colonial education in the then Rhodesia.

Data from the selected respondents show that three NGOs are distributing food relief to the respondents though the coverage differs among the three NGOs. Of the three NGOs providing the food relief, World Vision is the most active with 34 (65%) beneficiary households, followed by Caritas Zimbabwe with 13 (25%) respectively. Only 5 (10%) of the respondents indicated that they were receiving relief food from Intengwe. The prominence of World vision is explained by the fact that of the three NGOs, the organization started its programs in the area in 2006, earlier than the other two. On the other hand, World vision is an international NGO with more resources at its disposal as compared to Intengwe and Caritas Zimbabwe which are locally established and faith based respectively.

Results of the study indicated that food items being distributed by the three NGOs cover maize, sorghum, millet, beans, cowpeas and cooking oil. The most distributed food item by all the three NGOs is sorghum 18 (35%). In essence, sorghum is the traditional food for the study area as it is a dry and arid conditioned food crop which is most cultivated and used to prepare sadza (staple food) by the locals, a fact that was most likely considered by the three NGOs. Also fairly distributed by the NGOs is maize 10 (19%). Although the conditions in the study area are not conducive for maize, the food crop is somewhat popular with the locals as it is also used to prepare sadza. Millet follows in the order of distribution ranking 9 (17%) and is distributed by the NGOs as like Sorghum. It is

popular with locals who pound it to powder and cook sadza. The least distributed food items are beans 7 (13%), cowpeas 5 (10%) and cooking oil 3 (6%). These food items are least distributed because they are considered as relish items and, thus, are not a high priority for the NGOs.

The study also revealed rating of NGOs' food items by the respondents. 17 (32%) rated the food handouts as good, thus, the quality meets their expected quality level. However, 34 (65%) of the respondents indicated that the quality of the food being distributed is satisfactory, indicating that there are times they have reservations. Only 1 (2%) rated the food quality as bad.

The study also sought to find out the type of income generating projects being implemented in the study area. A total 39 (75%) of the respondents indicated that there are World Vision irrigation gardening projects in their areas while 13 (25%) indicated there is a goat breeding project by Caritas Zimbabwe in their respective areas. The gardening projects are watered by borehole water provided by World Vision. Caritas Hwange provided male goats which are being circulated for breeding purposes by the concerned households. With the study area being arid and having little or no grazing grass in some places, goats by their nature are the most conducive livestock in the area.

Sustainability of both projects is high considering the fact that all what the beneficiaries need to contribute to kick start these projects is their labour. The beneficiaries put up the physical structures using locally available materials and continue to offer their free labour for the running of these projects. Gardening is a sustainable intervention given that with water available, the households have always practiced gardening on their own. Goats are easier to rear and multiply faster than other domestic animals like sheep and cattle. In this drought and arid area, goat rearing is, therefore, the best for the vulnerable families.

The two types of projects being implemented by the respective NGOs have got no primary intention of raising money for the beneficiaries. While monetary proceeds can be realized at a later stage, the goat breeding exercise is meant to boost goat rearing for meat and its rich milk resource. The gardening projects are meant to boost the nutritional intake by the beneficiaries. Thus, these two running community projects are basically aimed at satisfying beneficiaries' food and nutritional needs. This is the greatest challenge of sustainability of these projects as households basically need money and projects without financial benefits to them no matter how good or noble they are, they may at the end lack support and following. Men at the end relegate these projects for

women and children as they search for money making projects. Threats for the gardening projects may come in the form of challenges in accessing pesticides and seeds of vegetables whose seed cannot be circulated or retained. These items may not be available locally and maybe expensive considering that the projects are not making money as they are basically for the provision of food and nutrition.

Information was solicited from respondents on the contribution of the NGOs in improving the households' way of life. A total 33 (63%) of the respondents indicated that the projects have not improved their lives as their way of life is still as it was before the introduction of the projects. However 19 (37%) respondents indicated that they had witnessed a positive change in their way of life due to the projects. The priority difference between the two explains the difference of opinions as one group prioritizes monetary benefits while the other is satisfied with the basic food and nutritional benefits. Researchers deduced from study findings that the way of life of rural people is not only improved by availability of food as money is needed for other essential services like education for their children or accessing health facilities. Thus, with the projects only producing for consumption, their contributions to the improvement of lives become minimum from the perspective of some rural dwellers.

NGOs have not been very active in the sanitation projects in the study area as only 6 (12%) indicated that they had their sanitation facilities built by an NGO. All the six Blair toilets were constructed under the Caritas Hwange sanitation provision program. However, 35 (67%) of the respondent households revealed that they used personal resources to build their sanitation facilities while a total of 11 (21%) respondents are without sanitation facilities. The study found out that those who built their own sanitation facilities had all built the pit latrine type. The ventilated pit Blair toilet would be the most ideal type for all these families as it offers many advantages than the pit latrine. The pit latrine has got no ventilation system to control the smell that comes from the pit and they usually fill up quickly because the holes dug are usually small.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research was aimed at assessing the effectiveness of selected NGOs' intervention programs to rural livelihoods outcomes in Hwange east in Zimbabwe. The findings showed that NGOs are doing very little to provide their beneficiaries in the area under study with relevant and adequate means to be able to sustain their lives. The vulnerable households are failing to sustain their lives because the World Vision, Caritas Hwange and Intengwe programs are generally not very effective. On the other hand, the

effectiveness of the NGOs seems to be concentrated on the provision of food and nutrition which comes mainly in grain.

Meaningful projects are being shied away from by the NGOs most likely because they demand technical and monetary resources as compared to food distribution. If the NGOs are going to make meaningful contribution towards provision of rural livelihoods in Hwange east, they should spread their operations to effectively cover all possible livelihoods outcomes that are relevant to a particular area. Although the interventions being implemented by the NGOs are relevant to the area under study, it is noted that they are making little positive impact to the way of life of the targeted beneficiaries and the impoverished community in general.

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the researchers recommended that:

- Beneficiaries are not content with food and nutritional provisions because they need to produce money that can make them access other important services for quality life. The NGOs, therefore, need to consider making the projects on the ground produce financial benefits or to introduce projects that will realize financial benefits for beneficiaries.
- The NGOs should take census of what vocational skills are common among the targeted beneficiaries and come up with projects that can utilize these skills.
- The NGOs should look into locally available raw materials and structure or plan projects along that basis. The study area is rich with several types of hard and furniture woods, hence, projects structured by the NGOs have got to utilize these locally available natural resources
- Major projects like small dam construction will go a long way in increasing the capacity of NGO projects. More water means that beneficiaries can expand their nutritional gardens into commercial agricultural gardens
- The NGOs should consider implementing food for work programs which target specific programs such as sanitation provision.
- The NGOs need to come up with community projects that are gender sensitive which are suitable for either male or female beneficiaries so that both sexes effectively benefit. This recommendation is buttressed by Magadza [24] echoed by Mutanana and Gasva [23] findings that women in rural communities are generally less empowered to deal with life issues that confront them in their day to day activities because of poor socio-economic backgrounds, less education, lack of knowledge over the various legal instruments that should protect them and so on.

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