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Rural development: Lessons never learnt

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Life is supposed to be a great teacher, but in the development field lessons have never been learnt because errors of decades ago continue being entrenched today, by more enlightened people. This paper deploys critical theories of rural development and community participation to explain why communities resist development projects. One such incident is community resistance to a donor-funded mega irrigation project in Nyangavi, Guruve, in Northern Zimbabwe. The community felt that the poverty alleviation project was imposed on them. The resilient 'modernisation' thinking countered by people-centred ideas of development in Guruve promotes active participation of rural communities as subjects rather than objects of development. Resistance in this paper is underscored to highlight the lack of fit between rural development policy and the actual implementation on the ground and underscores rural communities' agency as masters of their own destiny. National governments have explicit rural development policies that can help rural communities drive economies. However, these policies are ignored, for expedience purposes as officials futilely fast-track change that is meant to improve the standard of living of the poor. There appears to be selective use of community participation policies to suit certain conditions. This kind of development characterises most of Africa and development of billion-dollar projects throughout the world.

Key words: Community-based rural development, community, community leadership, decentralisation, development, engagement, human rights, irrigation, land reform, militant leaders, mobilise, modernisation, participation, policy, resistance, rural development.

INTRODUCTION

Life is a great teacher. The experiences that people go through are supposed to provide lessons for a better tomorrow. The way one responds to errors is very important, because mistakes must be treated as a learning curve to improve the future. To do that, it is necessary to re-examine past strategies and reasons for their failure. This will create a basis for articulating the

future for improving the standards of living of the poor in rural areas.

Today, good policies that encourage participation exist; some of these policies are novel and a marvel, governance institutions, vibrant civic organisations, and the rule of law are there, but poverty and hunger still hog the limelight more than 60 years after the official start of

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modern world development. Development efforts have generated volumes of experience. Lessons have been drawn from various past experiences; however, while remedies appear on paper, the reality on the ground is the same as more than six decades ago, more poverty and more hunger. Even the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) introduced in the late 1970s that was romanticised within the development community, as an ideal development approach based on past failures could not deliver the desired outcomes. Instead the IRDP further entrenched previous development errors. The failure to learn from past mistakes has contributed to an increase in resistance to development projects; at times the resistance is violent. Therefore, this paper tries to answer an observation by Blackshaw (2010), that few commentators have attempted to theorise the reasons for communities mobilising themselves against change.

African governments, such as the Zimbabwe government have people-centred development policies, but lack the will power to implement them, thereby creating reason for communities to mobilise against development. Societies worldwide are now highly interdependent as dynamics become more complex. People are more enlightened, and aware of the existence of policy and their rights; hence when communities mobilise against development they are demanding respect and autonomy.

Even though southern scholars have identified development gaps, there seems to be no courage within the academia to declare that the Emperor is naked; more so with an intellectually colonised establishment that tries to cover the nakedness of the emperor with transparent clothes. Change of terms will not help solve the problem of hunger and end poverty, because the truth never gets old. Policy on free, active and meaningful community participation must be adhered to, no matter the size of the project. South Africa's power utility, Eskom is an example of what happens when policy is not followed religiously. Officials admitted that months of load-shedding in 2008 and 2015 were due to non-adherence of company policy on servicing and maintenance of equipment and plants.

The irony is that education, which is part of the poverty and hunger eradication programme is forced down the throats of poor communities. Education as an empowerment tool is supposed to provide the poor communities with opportunities to make better choices for improved standard of living. However, the proponents of rural development make a mockery of the same education they encourage rural people to embrace. Valuable lessons from rural development experiences are well documented, however, the 'educated' development planners and implementers exhibit less enthusiasm to learn and implement the 'new' wisdom derived from these lessons. The thinking has always been that rural villagers with little or no education at all do not possess the ability to initiate and manage their own development. However,

the opposite is that the global development community with all their education, experience and sophisticated technology still has no solution to end hunger and reduce poverty.

DEVELOPMENT THEORIES AND APPROACHES

The second half of the twentieth century was called the era of development. Sachs (1992) describes this era.

Like a towering lighthouse guiding sailors towards the coast, 'development' stood as the idea, which oriented emerging countries in their journey through post-war history. No matter, whether democracies or dictatorships, the countries of the south proclaimed development as their primary aspiration, after being freed from colonial subordination.

Since the 1960s, rural development theories and approaches have focused on ending poverty and hunger. Suárez-Krabbe (2016) argues that poverty is the manifestation of exclusion and powerlessness. Development is conceived as a comprehensive, economic, social and political process, whose aim is the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals (Kamchedzera, 1992). While the general scope of 'development' has remained the same, the theories, approaches and policies have been reworded to suit the times and, to an extent, for funding purposes. Development theories, approaches and policies are more like recipes from a cooking book; however, unlike a recipe that must be followed religiously to produce a near perfect product, development theories and approaches whose policies hinges on popular participation, are never thoroughly implemented, resulting in half-cooked implementation of projects. The problem has always been sidestepping policies on popular participation for expedience purposes.

MODERN HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT

Rural 'development' came about as a way of trying to improve the living standards of the poor. The idea was to eliminate or reduce levels of poverty and hunger. Clarke (2012) observes that poverty is characterised by premature death, preventable illness, limited access to clean water and sanitation, economic insecurity and often illiteracy. Poverty is understood as a condition where a person's or group's human rights such as the right to food, participation, freedom of expression are unfulfilled (Suárez-Krabbe, 2016). Therefore, community participation in development today is regarded as the missing link of human rights. Key focus areas in the fight against poverty are increased food production, improved access to basic health, education, infrastructure development, the promotion of gender equality, and environmental conservation. While basic service

provisions are enshrined in constitutions as rights, however, the right of people to actively, freely and meaningfully participate in attaining these is missing in most constitutions, thereby, creating loopholes for development implementers who ignore active participation of recipient communities in their own development.

Spurred on by independence movements throughout Asia, Africa and the Caribbean Islands, as well as Cold War maneuvering, development assistance agencies and programmes were established during the 1950s (Burkey, 1993). During the periods of 1943 to 1955, aid was largely internal in developed countries. However, from 1955 the attention of the rich turned towards the Third World, the less developed countries (Preston, 1982). It was the pledge of a million US dollars by the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1954 to a UN aid programme in Egypt that prompted the United States of America (USA) to raise aid expenditure (Zeylstra, 1977). This offer from Moscow targeted Egypt's Aswan High Dam, after the US had withdrawn financial support (Preston, 1982). This probably marked the beginning of the "Look East Policy", an alternative source of aid with few or no conditions attached. This policy has been popularised in the 21st century, with many African countries revising their trading partners in favour of China.

The decade of the 1960s was declared the Development Decade by the United Nations. A goal of 6% annual growth rate was set as essential if the poverty-stricken countries were to be elevated to a decent standard of living (Dube, 1988). The 1970s were declared the Second Development Decade. However, despite all these "decades of development", the expectations of improved standards of living for millions of poor people were not fulfilled. Esteva and Prakash (1998) argue that the failure of the 'development decades' was widely recognised by scholars, politicians and practitioners; hence, many begun to cook up new development strategies. Suárez-Krabe (2016) comments that development function as institutionalised practices of implementing a death project, largely because development theories and approaches have not matched the reality on the ground. Often, implementation of development projects has been devoid of the spirit and letter of the designed policy. While development implementers push to meet project deadlines, they ignore finer details related to active participation of the beneficiaries.

One of the development approaches still visible today in economic policies and implementation is modernisation. The belief under the modernisation theory was that backwardness was the result of traditionalism with modernisation regarded as the solution. For modernisation to succeed, planners advocated for strong state intervention in the development of a country. Therefore, for developing countries to attain the developed status of the western world they had to

modernise their economies. Consequently, modernisation created the foundations of dual economies in most African countries, a modern capitalist sector (urban) with a backward subsistence rural sector (Ncube, 1991). The greater production theory under modernisation boasted the urban economy, but failed to change the face of rural economy. While, Haynes (2008), believes that problems of underdevelopment were regarded primarily as technical issues that could be resolved by trained administrators who, by producing the necessary policies and programmes and with an appropriate budget, would work to achieve the state's developmental goals. However, it was not so; issues of poverty run deep and requires a clear understanding of the social fabric that holds the community together.

The failed decades of development revealed that technology transfer and pouring more money into poor or less developed countries was not the answer. Development is first about people – the recipients, their willingness to embrace change and participate in the planning and implementation of that process. Modernisation was pursued in an authoritarian manner in the belief that transformation would produce results in a short period (Sivini, 2007). The modernisation approach to development failed to take cognisance of gender differences. The assumption was that all sectors of society would benefit from the trickle-down effect in the economy. However, this did not recognise that social structures that created and exacerbated inequalities would block the free flow [if any] of the trickle-down benefits (Willis, 2005).

Despite increased efforts in development, more than a billion of the world's population lives in poverty, struggling to afford a single decent meal a day. Since the era of modern development, the world has witnessed uneven development; unprecedented growth and prosperity has been experienced in some countries and regions, while others have stagnated or even gone backwards. With all the technology and advancement in crop production, there is still poverty and hunger amid plenty. The question then is "Why these huge disparities in development?" Peet and Hartwick (2009) point out that while there is general agreement on the need for a better life for all, there are broad disagreements on how to achieve this as well as how to improve the standard of living of poor people. Mainstream models of development and the policies based on them were challenged [and are still being challenged] for failing to address the question of mass poverty and sustainability (Friedmann, 1992). The development theories were for the most part top-down, ethnocentric and technocratic, treating people as abstract concepts (Escobar, 1985).

The disparities in the economies of the developed and those still developing have been made bare in this era of globalisation. The rich are getting richer, while the poor are becoming poorer. The revenue of a few rich nations is more than 82 times that of the poorest countries. At

one stage, the assets of three-wealthiest people in the world were equivalent to the combined GDP of the 48 poorest countries (Prabhakar, 2003). This also translates to uneven income distribution within countries, both rich and poor. Today, an annual national budget of a country such as Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi or Zimbabwe is equivalent to assets of about four richest Africans who appear on the Forbes magazine list of the richest people in the world. Globalisation policies have contributed to this increase in poverty and inequality between and within countries (Prabhakar, 2003).

Modernisation approach promoted the view that the state's role in development was to maintain law and order within which the market can operate effectively (Willis, 2005). The generally held belief was that only good policies and practices could help reduce poverty. As witnessed since the inception of development, however, practices associated with modernisation have accentuated inequalities (Pieterse, 2002). Modernisation implied abandoning knowledge that the people had acquired over time, and adopting production practices introduced from outside (Sivini, 2007). Moss (2011) provides an interesting summary of these failures.

Africa was initially thought to just lack infrastructure and capital. When providing these did not work, investing in education and health were added. When that strategy failed to generate growth, it was thought that bad policies were the problem. After some policies were corrected and the results were still disappointing, the next answer was governance and institutions.

With governance and 'modern' institutions now in place, with participation policies enshrined in rural development strategies the quest to improve the standard of living of the poor remains a pipe dream. Instead, these institutions and governance policies, intentionally or unintentionally, seem to have increased the gap between the rich and poor. The failure of some of these institutions has been manifested in the collapse of basic service delivery in most countries.

Despite the shortcomings of the development approaches, significant social progress was made in most of Africa. Life expectancy increased, while literacy levels rose (Lancaster 1999); however, the core agenda of development reducing poverty and hunger is still dominant. Subsequently, policymakers and scholars have since the late 1970s, been debating the relative importance of external and internal causes of Africa's problems (Berg and Whitaker, 1986).

Impact on women

Early development theories and approaches, as well as some recent ones, neglected the gender implications in development processes (Hunt, 2012). In the modernisation theory, Scott (1995) argues, that women were alternately invisible, treated paternalistically, or

used as a "litmus test" to determine the degree of backwardness of a country. The development projects ignored women and failed to understand the diverse roles that they played in social and economic life (Hunt, 2012). Consequently, some projects made life worse for women, depriving them of land, denying them access to technical assistance; while providing resources, training and education to men only, often knowingly or unknowingly adding to women's work burden (Dey, 1982; Rogers, 1980). Modernisation involved the subordination of tradition, nature and the feminine (Peet and Hartwick, 2009). It became imperative to place women at the centre of development theories and approaches. This required gender mainstreaming in all forms of development, political, and social processes. The World Bank (2010), believes that this meant assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels of development. In a comprehensive approach, human rights, gender mainstreaming and gender equality and empowerment, as approaches to development, are complementary. To achieve development, bringing the 'good life' to people, one must focus on a holistic approach that includes all these aspects. The absence of one would result in an ill-conceived product. Opening the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women marking Beijing +10, on 28th February 2005, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan noted, "...there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women" (United Nations, 2005). Simply put, development without women is not development.

Although gender inequality remains a feature of every region, it is more pronounced in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East (Hunt, 2012). Women are under-represented in decision-making positions in most countries, with only about 17% of all seats held by women in national parliaments across the world. In some countries, women earn about 70 to 90% less of male earnings for the same job in the formal employment sector. These inequalities make women more vulnerable to poverty than men.

IS AFRICA A SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT CASE?

Africa has had a long history of policies aimed at reducing poverty and improving the living conditions of its populations. Development planners have used the continent and the rest of the developing world as laboratories to test various theories manufactured from the west. The continent's development needs and solutions are well documented, but the problem has and will always be with implementing what is on paper to the reality on the ground and the actual role of communities in the development process.

On attaining independence, the priority of sub-Saharan

countries was to promote rapid economic growth. The newly independent governments were eager to close the development gap between their countries and advanced countries (Mongula, 1994). The 'fathers of independence' (Sivini, 2007) wanted to change the colonial conditions of exploitation. In a sense, they wanted to run where others walked. Primarily, the urgency was based on closing the gaps between the local population and colonialists and the local elites, who had benefitted from the colonial administration.

However, the development policies designed and the approaches used did little to bring the good life to millions of poor rural people. Narayan et al. (2000) contend that most poor people feel worse off and more insecure than in the past. Burkey (1993), while acknowledging that millions of person-hours of "expert" efforts have been put into rural development projects, argues that the results for hundreds of millions of poor men, women and children have been discouraging in the extreme. Many of these policies have shown a remarkable uniformity across the continent and over time, though their effects and impact have differed widely, ranging from no effect at all to the structural transformation of economies and societies. The major obstacle to development in Africa has always been trying to short-circuit or fast-track development. Policy makers demand that people or communities be flexible and accommodate their dogmatic policies, but fail to reciprocate the same flexibility in their own attitudes.

The failure of various development approaches in Africa has raised concerns about the effectiveness of aid in Africa. Of concern is why Africa has failed to develop despite billions of dollars being poured into the continent. Berg and Whitaker (1986) believe that aided activities in Africa perform less well than elsewhere; failure rates are higher, management problems are greater, and the social context is less well understood and not handled well. Mills (2010) points out that instead of waking up to the new realities, western leaders revert to the same basic formula when confronted with Africa's myriad problems: more money and more ambitious development targets. Lele (1975) raises some very important questions regarding the failure of previous development approaches that are particularly relevant in the 21st century:

What explains the very limited impact of past development programmes on the low-income rural populations in Africa? Why despite a great variety of approaches tried by donor and national agencies and despite a great amount of experience generated by these efforts, the problem of rural poverty remained acute?

The failure of development from 1960 right into the 21st century can be summed up thus: development failed to take off in the 1960s; the basic needs approach that brought IRDP in the 1970s was a glimmer of hope but poorly managed (Haynes, 2008); the economic structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s that brought reduced government expenditure eroded economic and social gains and deepened poverty. The few countries that continued with structural adjustment programmes

have succeeded in developing their major cities, while their rural background became poorer; the Washington Consensus and its revision the Post-Washington Consensus were a continuation of the carrot and stick approach. Today, confusion reigns in designing development policies, with countries one day flirting with market economy policies, and then wakes up the next morning with strong state intervention policies.

What the development theories and approaches failed to recognise was that rural life is a state of mind that is conditioned to survival modes; a culture and a way of life that revolves around community land, livestock and cereal production. Changing that mindset and culture cannot be achieved overnight; it requires patience, close understanding of the community and active participation of the community in development.

Having failed to achieve the desired results, countries are still searching for ways to cope with unfavourable world economic structures and exploring new ways to develop rural areas. This prompted Himmelstrand (1988) to declare "... development theory is in a state of bankruptcy ... development is in a state of ... insolvency". Gitonga (1994) agrees, adding that current theories purporting to describe, explain and predict the process of development, especially in Africa, are fatally flawed, defective and of little if any value for intellectual, practical and concrete purposes. Development officials within African governments and universities are 'intellectually colonised' to think outside the box and drive development that respond to people's need. Previous development theories, while acknowledging the centrality of people in development, failed to recognise the contributions of the same people from the conceptual to the implementation level, especially, in capital development projects.

Development in the 21st century has the same objectives as it did at the beginning of the era of development end poverty and reducing hunger, however, these are time oriented. Africa, because of its fragmentation, can exert little influence in pushing for a global development agenda that is community driven. Development projects are fast-tracked at the expense of active community participation. As Pieterse (2002) rightly puts it, all forms of development involve telling people what to do in the name of modernisation, nation building, progress, mobilisation, sustainable development, human rights, poverty alleviation and even empowerment and participation. However, Hydén (1983) argues that the best way to construct and reconstruct a new paradigm of development for rural communities is to understand the concrete conditions of the socio-economic processes taking place in Africa.

As leaders in the struggle for decolonisation, African governments believed that the rest of the population is indebted to them and demanded absolute loyalty (Suárez-Krabbe, 2016). The governance and development system are highly centralised, with strong state involvement in welfare services. Mongula (1994) contends

that the development policy followed was like the modernisation approach. In trying to 'fast-track' development, communities are ordered to implement projects planned from outside, as governments assumed the role of planners and enforcers of development. The feeling within the governments after independence was that 'we know what is best for you'. In the initial stages, people cooperated in government driven development programmes. However, when the promised 'fruits' of development were not fully realised, rural communities become reluctant to participate in imported development plans. Development as a nationalist project had failed, and fatigued communities started resenting development sloganised through memories of the liberation struggles. Consequently, schemes such as rural resettlement, irrigation or fishing cooperatives failed miserably (Mongula, 1994). People wanted to be consulted on development that directly affected them. The late President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere said, "At every stage of development people do know what their basic needs are. And just as they will produce their own food if they have land, so if they have sufficient freedom they can be relied upon to determine their own priorities of development and then to work for them" (Burkey 1993).

Former UNDP official Majid Rahnema contends that development has long been resisted at the grassroots level by the "suffering poverty-stricken peoples" that are being "helped by development," (Rahnema, 1997). The question is why do poverty-stricken rural people resist 'development' that is meant to help them? Bergdall (1993) points out that there is a strong tradition of centralised planning and administrative control, especially in capital project. To the extent, that 'decentralised' plans merely shifted authority to surrogate administrators in provinces and districts (Bergdall, 1993).

Next the paper looks at three case studies, the Nyangavi community in Guruve district, northern Zimbabwe who resisted a US\$250 million irrigation scheme; the 2007 resistance by the community of Mbizana in Mpondoland along the Wild Coast in South Africa who resisted attempts by a multi-national mining company from Australia to develop a mine along a 22-kilometre stretch of their coastline; the 2009, Amazon Indians' resistance in Peru; and the 2016, Dakota resistance in the United States. The common factor in these case studies, are people mobilising against top-down development that ignores empowering policies set by their respective governments. Despite the existence of policies on active, free and meaningful participation and decentralisation enshrined in different constitutions, governments still circumvent these policies to fast-track development.

CASE STUDIES

Rural development is supposed to be community-based,

a people centred development philosophy that addresses people's common concerns; and at the same time encouraging economic growth. Community based rural development is not a new concept. However, success of the community based development has been limited to small-scale projects. In capital project, success has been minimum and mostly fraught with resistance because of implementation policies that were not inclusive. Narayan et al. (2000) argues that exclusion of the poor from decision-making opportunities based on the social hierarchy contributes to resistance. While Blackshaw (2010) notes that if community development is not embedded in a community's culture, this makes development efforts difficult to establish and vulnerable to attack where it already exists.

Promoting and maintaining growth in community-based rural development environment calls for proper solutions to prominent issues of people's common development problems. One solution often neglected is adherence to policy on free, active and meaningful participation of rural communities in development; and in the process thus, listening to the voices of the 'experts' of poverty, who know what they want to get out of the situation in which they find themselves and improve their own standards of living. For example, in 2011 one rural farmer in Mpumalanga province, South Africa told a national government delegation assessing rural development that if the government could give them a permanent source of water, they would never bother them again. For that farmer, water was central to their economic well-being. They could use the water for domestic consumption, and venture into agricultural related activities. However, the farmer's plea fell on deaf ears. Often, simple solutions are ignored in preference for the failed old-aged mainstream development approaches and theories. The belief has always been that rural areas are backward and inefficient; therefore, modernisation must erase these long-held traditions. However, some of these traditions are valuable and can exist alongside modernity.

Despite well-crafted policies on decentralisation, with elaborate grassroots development structures that sought to empower communities at the lowest levels, central governments and the technocrats continue to dictate initiatives to lower levels of government and to communities in rural areas. Decentralisation should serve two purposes: first, it should allow local leaders to allocate services and facilities more effectively within their communities; and second, it should enable effective monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of development projects (Rondinelli, 1983). Ideally, decentralisation should create space where community members, groups and councils can exchange information, views through reasoned arguments on policy possibilities (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2006). This kind of participation helps to bridge the gap between expert knowledge and local experienced knowledge. The implementing agency comes with globalized expertise, while the local

community possesses the lived-experiences, which is the indigenous knowledge. However, because of urgency created out of tight deadlines, and fast-tracked development approaches, complementary knowledge approach to community-based development is ignored, and more often the results have been regrettable. Therefore, active participation as enshrined in decentralisation processes must not only remain on paper, but implemented to the letter, giving the beneficiary communities a voice in decisions that affect them.

Guruve irrigation scheme

In 1983, the governments of Zimbabwe and Germany entered into an agreement that would finance irrigation schemes through the German funding agency, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). The schemes were earmarked for Mashonaland Central province, in Mazowe and Guruve districts. The Mazowe project, the Kanhukamwe irrigation scheme, is operational but only after some initial resistance that included sabotage of equipment. However, the Guruve Irrigation Project never got off the ground as the community of Nyangavi, the intended centre of the project, resisted implementation of the scheme. The irrigation project was supposed to cover three wards and designed to benefit more than 2,000 households.

Because of the rich soils in Nyangavi, the Zimbabwe and German governments wanted to develop a US\$250 million irrigation scheme; whose primary purpose was to grow citrus fruits and mangoes, in what Dzingirai (2003) terms systematic modernisation of agriculture. The dam was to be constructed along the Dande River with canals supplying water to reservoirs in Nyangavi for irrigation. The dam was designed to irrigate 1,200 ha. Provincial agricultural officials said that because of gradient, the Guruve irrigation scheme was going to be the cheapest to run as water from the dam would have been pressurised to flow along the canals. The villagers were meant to consume 15% of the water from the dam.

According to the provincial lands officer, the objective of the irrigation scheme was to introduce all year-round cash crop farming, anchored on high value citrus crop production, with mangoes being the primary production for the export market. A fruit grading or sorting shed was also planned for Nyangavi. The project was expected to boost the economic status of Nyangavi, with possible establishment of agro-business industries.

The government's rural development strategy was aimed at alleviating poverty through the active participation of communities and the restructuring of the rural areas. This was done by introducing institutional, infrastructural and necessary production and service arrangements, and by promoting growth and development in all rural sectors (Makumbe, 1996). The government's rural development strategy called for development with,

rather than for the people. From policy statements, the government intended during the planning period of any development to undertake the establishment of broad-based planning machinery that was intended to facilitate plan formulation and plan implementation and, most importantly, to make possible direct involvement of the broad masses in the planning process (Government of Zimbabwe, 1983). The government's strategic paper, "Towards the Implementation of a National Rural Development Policy" made it clear that development programmes and projects initiated by the government were expected to actively solicit community participation at all possible levels (Government of Zimbabwe, 1983). Part of the document reads: People's participation is a prerequisite for rural development activities. It is therefore evident that a bottom-up planning approach is employed. The express needs of the rural population and grassroots-born development proposals must be brought to district and provincial levels, where they should be reconciled with the Central Government's views and possibilities (Government of Zimbabwe, 1983).

The aim of the government's community-based rural development strategy was to enhance the role of beneficiaries and reduce their dependence on state initiatives and handouts (Makumbe, 1996). This meant advocating for development planning with the community instead of planning for the community. The objective of such an ambitious decentralisation policy was meant to empower the poor rural communities, by removing the bottlenecks in decision-making and making the local authority accountable to their communities.

To enhance the capacity of local authorities in promoting community participation, a February 1984 directive from the office of the then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe created provincial councils (PC), provincial development councils (PDC), district councils (DC), district development councils (DDC), ward development committees (WADCO) and village development committees (VIDCO) (Mutizwa-Mangiza and Helmsing, 1991). This directive defined representative institutional structures; established channels of communication and effective instruments of consultation for people at grassroots level. The aim was to foster participation of all in development. Ideally, VIDCOs were meant to decentralise the political structure and promote equity, empowerment and economic development (Higgins and Mazula, 1993). In practice, however, the VIDCOs often served to ensure centralised party control rather than decentralised political power (Alexander, 1994). The empowering grassroots development structure was none existent in the actual planning of the Guruve irrigation scheme.

Community snubbed

Feasibility studies for the Guruve irrigation scheme were

conducted with soil testing in areas earmarked for the project. Villagers were surprised to see 'foreigners' taking soil samples from their fields, without their consent. From the resultant feasibility studies, about 1,200 ha of Class A soils were earmarked for irrigation. Two committees tasked with implementing the project were formed, the National Irrigation Executive Committee that met in Harare and the District Irrigation Executive Committee that met in Guruve. From Minutes of meetings held at district level, the Guruve Irrigation Executive Committee consisted of the District Administrator and his assistant, an irrigation specialist, consultants from the government, a private engineering company Price Waterhouse Cooper, District Agricultural Technical and Extension Services (Agritex) Officer; Ward Councillors, Council Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Officer for Council Administration, and the Chief. The affected communities were meant to be represented by their councillors and the member of parliament. However, there was no "broad masses in the planning process" as envisioned by the Prime Minister's directives.

Community members said that from nowhere, they would see 'white' men coming and going from their area; taking soil samples. Informal leaders tried to get an explanation from their VIDCO and WADCO officials and were told that the people taking the soil samples were surveyors, but the villagers were not told what the people were surveying. The frequent visits by the 'foreigners' created an atmosphere of panic and uncertainty. Attempts were made by informal leaders of the villagers to get councillors meet the people to explain the developments in the ward, but the sitting councillors were not forthcoming. Members of the VIDCO and secretary of the Nyangavi WADCO said that they were just as shocked as everyone else, with the frequent visits of the so-called 'surveyors'. Because of pressure from the community, the WADCO secretary, tried in vain to get the councillors and the MP to address the community regarding the development. The unexplained actions of the Germans caused alarm among the locals, and in the absence of information from their official representatives, the community requested the headmen and some influential people, who had now assumed the role of informal leaders to form a committee to express their displeasure at what was going on. Government officials later labelled the male dominated committee the 'resistance committee' because of its militant nature.

The bone of contention between the committee as representatives of the community and the government, especially the local government officials was the unexplained numerous visits of the Germans to their area. The villagers said that no-one from the district administrator's office, Agritex or their political leadership had warned them of the impending development. Nyangavi WADCO secretary tried without success to probe the councillor about the visits of 'foreigners'. The

villagers were supposed to accept and welcome the Germans without questions.

Leaders of the 'resistance committee' suspected that their representatives in the Guruve rural district council had misrepresented the people. They believed that the three councillors (who are all late) for Chimanikire, Nyangavi and Shinje wards entered into agreements on behalf of the people without their express approval. There was therefore, consensus within the community that the councillors for the three Wards did not consult their communities about the irrigation plan and acted out of greediness. Informal leaders claimed that the councillors, never held a single meeting with the people to discuss the proposed irrigation scheme. The claims made by the informal leaders were collaborated by VIDCO and WADCO officials who were responsible for organising and calling for village and ward meetings. Some women in Nyangavi said, "The project '*yakango nyukira mumakumbo*' emerged from nowhere", while their male counterparts observed that the government wanted to 'rape' the people in the name of development. What surprised the village and ward development officials was that in small projects there was clear partnership between the community and the government and/or non-governmental organisations; however, the multi-million-dollar Guruve irrigation scheme, superseded that partnership or collaboration between the people and their government.

There has been a decades old misnomer in development that successful community-based rural development projects should be replicated elsewhere spontaneously, (Rahman, 1984), because as an afterthought, community representatives were taken on a tour of a similar project in Chegutu, to appreciate the benefits of a citrus and mango irrigation scheme. However, on returning to Nyangavi the community leaders were more adamant than before. Aziz (1978) contends that while problems of poverty might be similar, communities have different political, social and economic circumstances. Therefore, no community can blindly replicate or reproduce another community's model of development in all its manifestations. Addressing poverty problems differs from community to community, not all communities would perceive a permanent source of water as a means to an end to their poverty status.

Against advice from the community, the government organised a ceremony at Chipangura primary school in Nyangavi ward to commission the US\$250 million irrigation project. The former Provincial Governor, Joyce Mujuru, government and German officials were in attendance. However, unknown to the delegation, the Nyangavi villagers had different plans. One villager said that in an act of defiance, the villagers displayed their traditional agricultural produce maize, beans and potatoes, for the delegates to see that those were the crops, they were prepared to grow. The committee representing the people, requested to address the

governor and her delegation. Initially, government officials refused; however, the villagers retorted that if they were not given a platform then no ceremony would take place. Permission to address the gathering was later granted and the government delegation was told that the proposed irrigation scheme was not going to be implemented in their area. The governor was told that officials who had ignored government's own policy on community participation were now forcing them to accept the project against their will. The people's committee also pointed out that the proposed land allocation under the irrigation project was going to reduce their acreage and would leave them with no dry land, and the committee was against proposals to relocate their elderly people to the uninhabitable, dry Dande Valley. The government delegation and the Germans were told that the community was not going to be oppressed and forced to do what they do not like in a free country. After the committee's presentation, the ground-breaking ceremony was cancelled. One villager said that the visibly angry governor left in a huff after the embarrassing encounter with the truth.

In Zimbabwe as in some other countries, it was and still considered normal practice not to involve the community in the feasibility studies of major multi-million-dollar projects such as the US\$250 million Guruve irrigation scheme. According to an official from the Guruve district administrator's office, if a project was of national importance, participation of locals was of little importance, because the project would come as a directive to the local authorities from national government. The sentiments of the district local government official were echoed by senior provincial government officials who observed that the monetary value of the development project determined the level of participation of rural communities and the stages at which communities are engaged. The provincial irrigation officer and the provincial lands officer said that in multi-million-dollar capital projects active, free and meaningful community participation was of secondary nature. The communities were only visible during the implementation stages. Thus, making rural development policy that encourages active participation of the community insignificant. In the case of large irrigation schemes, the state played the role of manager, deciding how, when and what was to be grown (Dzingirai, 2003).

Various reasons have been suggested to account for the Nyangavi community's mobilisation against the irrigation scheme; these include the view that the development initiative was imposed on the community (Villagers resist \$250 million project, 1995). People did not want to be relocated from their ancestral land where the graves of their relatives were situated; arguing that exhuming their bones was inhumane (\$250m Guruve Project Set to Begin, 1996). The community feared that the irrigation would disrupt their traditional way of life. The villagers wanted to stick to their long-held tracts of land,

rejecting the smaller plots proposed under the irrigation scheme (Teach Villagers Benefits of Dams, 1997). In addition, the community objected to being dictated to by "expatriates" on the type of crops to grow (Villagers resist \$250 million project, 1995). Because, the primary focus of the proposed irrigation scheme was to grow mangoes intended for the German market. The villagers' refusal to be dictated to is summarised in Pieterse's (2002) theory of anti-managerialism, that states that people do not want to be told what to do, how to do it or when to do it. However, leaders of a committee established to represent the community said that the primary reason why the community mobilised against the multi-million-dollar irrigation scheme was the approach used to introduce the project to the community, which was a departure from the government's policy on active, free and meaningful community participation.

In general, Zimbabwe government's policies regarding rural development have been largely pro-poor, with some projects, especially small-scale projects witnessing high levels of participation. However, an Executive Director with an NGO based in Guruve said that in most instances issues of partisan participation cannot be ruled out and at times participation was manipulated to create a sense of insecurity and patronage, making communities feel that they needed to be patriotic to be selected for participation in public works projects. In many instances both the government and NGOs took advantage of desperate situations in rural communities to tailor-make programmes, in the hope that these communities would accept them because of their circumstances. Like in the Guruve irrigation scheme development planners were quick to prescribe development remedies based on what they had observed, not on the pressing needs of the community.

Mbizana community in Mpondoland

In South Africa, the community of Mbizana in Mpondoland along the country's Wild Coast was at the centre of a struggle between residents, a multi-national mining company and the South African government (de Wet, 2012). In 2007, the community formed the AmaDiba Crisis Committee (ACC) in opposition to government supported proposal by Minerals Commodities Limited, an Australian company, to mine a valuable mineral along a 22-km stretch of the coastline. The ACC opposed the neo-liberal form of development, arguing that the mining company and the government had violated established democratic processes and undermined the local community's control over communal land (de Wet, 2012). Four interlinked issues informed the ACC resistance: the lack of consultation about development strategies, communal land rights, threats to livelihood strategies, and the lack of legitimacy of those ostensibly representing the community (de Wet, 2012). The Mpondo community has

had a long history of resisting development imposed from 'above'. In their public demonstrations against the mining proposal, they referred to the Mpondo Revolt of 1959 to 1960; resistance to the Mbizana sugar project of 1985 to 1986; and the Gum Tree rebellion of 1999 (de Wet, 2012).

Amazon Indians, Peru

In Peru, the Amazon Indians, an indigenous community, clashed with security forces over government plans to open the jungle to multinationals for development. According to Bernes-Lasserre (2009), the government of then President Alan Garcia planned to ease restrictions on mining, oil drilling, logging and farming in the Amazon region. The indigenous Indian community who lacked access to the same rich farming land felt that the development of the jungle was an assault on their way of life; worse still, they were not consulted about the impending development (Bernes-Lasserre, 2009). They saw the proposed development as leading to the dismantling of their long-held traditions. This resulted in clashes between the locals and security forces that killed more than 140 people including members of the security forces. President Garcia called the protesters "terrorists" and obstacles to economic development (Aquino, 2009). Such reactions to community resistance by politicians are common, with the ruling elite labeling communities who resist global capitalism and its so-called benefits enemies of the state and development. The Peruvian government, however, gave in and suspended the Amazon project indefinitely. Nevertheless, the incident forced the Prime Minister and some cabinet ministers to resign.

Dakota Access Pipeline, North Dakota

In 2016, there was the resistance against the implementation of the almost four billion-dollar Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota, United States. The 2000-km long pipeline was expected to transport between 75 and 90 million litres per day of light sweet crude oil to major refining markets in Illinois (Worland, 2016; Meyer, 2016). The indigenous Standing Rock Sioux Tribe started resisting implementation of the project since 2014. The tribe was joined in their resistance by many other indigenous groups, climate activists and landowners. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe claimed that the project threatened their rights; the tribe feared that accidental spillage could contaminate the Missouri River, their source of water; and tribal leaders were concerned that construction would destroy sacred and burial sites (Meyer, 2016). The tribe's court application for temporary injunction was rejected; however, despite the court ruling the then administration of President Barack Obama yielded to the voices of the people and invoked executive

powers to suspend work on the pipeline (Worland, 2016; Meyer, 2016). In halting construction, the Obama administration intended to invite the tribes around the country to discuss how to handle huge infrastructure projects that threaten people's resources and rights. The consultations were expected to result in possible amendments to the federal policy around development of national infrastructure projects such as the Dakota Access Pipeline (Meyer, 2016).

LESSONS LEARNT

The aforementioned examples are of communities who mobilised to protect their interests and to hold their governments accountable. The case studies coming from three different continents reveals how deep-rooted is lack of respect for community participation. The problem is not only peculiar to developing countries but also experienced in most developed countries. What is certain from these examples was that development cannot be engineered and imposed from outside, however, well-intentioned the development effort might be. Communities are therefore, liberating themselves from the dominant ideologies; fully immersed in their local struggles, these movements and initiatives reveal the diverse content and scope of grassroots endeavours, resisting or escaping the clutches of the 'Global project' (Esteva and Prakash, 1998).

In deciding to ease restrictions on Decree 1090, dubbed the "Law of the Jungle", the Peruvian government failed to include the Amazon Indians in the initial planning stages (Bernes-Lasserre, 2009; Aquino, 2009). It is not that these indigenous people did not want development; they wanted the fertile land being given to foreigners, proper sanitation, access to clean drinking water, and electricity that was to come with the massive development programme. However, they felt that the government did not respect them enough, and resisted violently, showing how much can be achieved through 'people's power'. Thus, development was controlled, lacked popular participation, with the state exercising dominance.

Consequently, rural communities such as those in Nyangavi are trapped in the dichotomy of modern versus traditional agricultural production. The benefits of growing citrus fruits and mangoes instead of the traditional crops were not adequately communicated to the community. The officials did not educate the community on the proposed initiative. The thinking among the technocrats was that by modernising agriculture through introducing mangoes as a cash crop for export, the development would rapidly transform the community from their traditional subsistence cropping system to a cash crop system. However, this poverty reduction initiative forgot to engage the community who were supposed to be the centerpiece of the development effort. By ignoring the involvement and participation of the target community as

prescribed by the government's rural development policy, modernity managed to marginalise the community's commitment, creativity and support of the initiative. In the process change was resisted because of the elements of uncertainty. Therefore, without adequate information development failed to achieve the desired results. Successful implementation of development requires the buy-in from all sections of the community, and that can only be achieved through sufficient and timely dissemination of information, education that paints the advantages and disadvantages of the project and more importantly, active, free and meaningful participation of the community. However, because of blue-prints and timed schedule for the project, development officials got approval from the elite the councilors who in turn tried to bulldoze the rest of the community into submission. No consideration was given to the actual needs of the community, who were treated as second class citizens, whose opinion to the proposed development was insignificant.

When a community resists a development project (modernity), it finds itself at the receiving end of government anger. In Nyangavi, the community was condemned as lazy, illiterate and [who] would die in poverty scratching lice; while the leaders of the resistance committee were accused of harboring political ambition. In Peru, when the indigenous Amazon Indians resisted government's plan to allow multinational companies to develop the jungle, they were labeled barbarians, terrorists and obstacles in the way of development. It is not that the Nyangavi community did not want water and the accompanying change; or the Amazon Indians did not want decent accommodation, electricity and running water coming with the development; what they were against was being ignored. The people of Nyangavi and Amazon Indians wanted to actively participate in the whole development process and not only be recognised at the implementation stage. In trying to force their way into Nyangavi, government and German officials failed to consider the recipient community as the focal point in the poverty reduction agenda.

Despite well documented policies on active community participation in development, especially rural development, national governments regularly circumvent these policies to make development partners happy or to meet set deadlines. Effective participation in the Nyangavi project was only left to a small group of technical, management personnel and councillors, the so-called people's representatives. Instead of encouraging mass participation that matched the magnitude of the project, officials were mainly concerned with how to control the amount and type of participation that could be permitted. Within the framework of capital-intensive and growth oriented development, participation was viewed as a potential threat to the success of development, consequently, lack of it bred resistance. This has been the case with large or multimillion dollar

development projects that came as directives from national governments, which the local authorities must implement. In Mpondoland along South Africa's Wild Coast, the Mbizana community mobilised against this neo-liberal form of development. Like in Nyangavi, lack of participation by the community in the project resulted in them mobilising against the Australian mining company. Execution of such projects becomes difficult because there is no engagement with the community and when the community is forced to participate, the project ultimately lacks ownership.

From the previous failure of global development, it was clear that the most important criterion for ensuring acceptance and success of development was participation. Community engagement for active participation should not be selective, as was the case in Nyangavi, where the community was not involved in the feasibility studies, a practice considered common by government officials. People watched as soil samples were taken from their fields without their approval and when the government eventually decided to involve the community in the thick of things it was too late.

Unfortunately, grassroots committees such as VIDCOs and WADCOs, established to promote community participation, were ignored in 'big' projects such as the Guruve irrigation scheme. The process of decentralisation failed the community, leading to increased inequalities, with the elite wielding more power than other members of the community. People's representatives in the local council worked against their constituencies. When the community approached their councillors to get clarity on what was happening, the answers were not forthcoming. Hence, there was a strong belief within the community that their representatives in the rural district council connived with government officials to force through the project. This created tensions between positional (elected councillors) and informal (reputational) leaders; with government officials being accused of using the divide and rule tactics to implement the project. Consequently, the community appointed reputational leaders among themselves to take over the mandate of the elected councillors; the same problem surfaced within the Mbizana community. The fundamental principle of elected representation is always to be on the side of the electorate. When differences arise between the elected representative and the constituency, and there is no compromise then the people have every right to 'recall' their representative.

The same reasons namely, lack of free, active and meaningful participation that led to the violent resistance of the multimillion dollar irrigation project in Nyangavi also caused Peru's 2009 Amazon violence that left 140 people dead. The same reasons are being pedalled in the resistance to the four-billion-US-dollar Dakota Access Pipeline in the United States, where the tribes also claim that they have not been given any meaningful role in the whole process. The administration of President Donald Trump that got into office in January 2017, has vowed to

pursue the project despite the resistance.

These resistances have similarities. The primary cause was people distraught over failure to follow through policies on community participation. Capital development is not inclusive, hence people who feel that their right to participate in development that affects them has been violated, resort to what Scott (2008) terms the only weapons for the weak-resistance, which at times could be fatal. Resistance to development is more of a cry from the communities for authorities to include them in the development process. The secondary causes to resistance in the aforementioned examples included loss of livelihoods, displacement of people and disturbing graves of their relatives. In these countries, development policies exist that encourages the active participation of people in development; however, the governments and the development agencies decided when, how and the level of community participation. What these examples represent are problems cascading from imposition.

Like all other well-intentioned development approaches, the Zimbabwean strategy for rural development was rich in theory, but lacked substance at the implementation level. The government developed an elaborate policy on community participation; however, this was superseded by time oriented approach to development; and in sharp contrast to the intentions and spirit of the Prime Minister's Directives of 1984 (Mutizwa-Mangiza and Helmsing, 1991), as well as to several other pieces of legislation. While the government's rural development strategy in general has helped reconstruct the rural areas and improve lives in some areas, the approach used has been "development for the people" and not "with the people".

The purpose of decentralising development was to ensure collaborative process in which both parties engage actively with one another until they reach consensus. Therefore, community participation should not be measured by the size or value of the proposed project. When development policy is conceptualised it does not specify which projects will require community participation. Government policy in Zimbabwe stipulates that community participation must be sought in all development and at every stage of the programme. However, as with most policies on community participation, the *how* and *when* part seem to be a challenge. In the case of Nyangavi, development consultants decided not to involve the community in feasibility studies. Attempts to involve the local people in the later stages of the project were spurned by the community, leading to the premature abandonment of the irrigation scheme.

REALIGNING APPROACH TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Lessons on the overall failure of development since the dawn of modern development have been learnt and are

known, making the development community more knowledgeable than before. However, we continue to ignore the disaster brought by development from 'above'. Prompting, Esteva and Prakash (1998) to comment that the 'social majorities' continue to resist the inroads of that modern world into their lives, to save their families and communities from the next fleet of bulldozers sent to make them orderly or clean. There seem to be an unwillingness to implement the corrections of past development errors; hence, the same development mistakes are continuously being repeated. The development path has been traversed before and the direction towards 'good life' for the poor is well-known. Instead of following the clearly laid-out roadmap, we still want to use shortcuts, fast-tracking our way to failure. The greatest drawback is failure to implement policy on paper to reality on the ground. There is lack of fit between policy on community participation and the actual practice on the ground. An approach such as the IRDP had popular participation of communities as a blue-print, however, despite much rhetoric about the need for community participation, the projects came preplanned, with communities expected to implement without objection.

The diversity in theories and approaches to development revealed miscellany in the meaning of 'development'. Apparently, the so-called leaders in development, the Bretton Woods institutions are guilty of this confusion, changing and renaming theories and approaches whenever it suited them. Hence, the confusion in understanding what 'development' stands for resulted in trial and error with the poor people's lives, thereby deepening their poverty, and in the process eroding their 'great expectation' of promises made through development. Consequently, people ended up mistrusting and at times resisting any effort associated with development, because it had failed to deliver on promises.

Since progress in alleviating poverty, especially in Africa, has been generally unsatisfactory, there is need to find ways to conduct international development in such a way as to further reduce poverty beyond the set deadline of 2030 and beyond. There is therefore, need to break the development stalemate and impasse. This calls for decision-making process, anchored in active, free and meaningful participation of people in development and based on negotiated outcomes. Rural development must have wide-ranging, integrated and long-term instead of short-term gains, with real active participation of rural communities as a precondition for success. The World Bank (2002) rightfully noted that Africa cannot move forward if her rural areas are left behind.

People are open to change if allowed to be part and parcel of that development. If active community participation works in small projects, like what the Nyangavi VIDCO and WADCO officials said, why does it fail or rather why do we make it fail in capital

development? Countries and development agencies need evolving policy framework that attempts to learn from experience. The World Commission on Dams (WCD, 2000) argues that early and resolute action to address issues arising from the past would go a long way towards building trust. Therefore, the solution might be in people centred policies: simple, unambiguous, and mutually inclusive policies derived from the grassroots. This would include the way the community envisions the work of their local authority. After all, decentralisation is meant to benefit local people; therefore, they should help craft the policies on decentralisation. The policies need to be localised to reflect the centrality of disadvantaged people/or communities in decision-making, because people who do not participate in development, do not have a say in their own future. The Zimbabwe government, and other like-minded governments have coined people centred policies, making people's participation in decision making top priority, however, these remain on paper; because in practice the government decides for the people, who are reduced to mere passive participants of their own development.

Participation of people in development should not only be policy but a human right, so that people can arise if they feel their rights are being violated. Most service delivery based development activities such as access to clean water, decent housing, education and health are enshrined in different constitutions as fundamental rights. Outside of human rights-based approach to development, participation is reduced to engagement with so-called people's representatives, the councillors, who on their own might pursue different development agenda to that of the community at large. Most councillors fall within the category of the 'elite' who want to protect certain interests at the expense of their constituencies. Where there is no consensus, the same councillors are used to pursue divide and rule approach because the development project must be accomplished at whatever cost. This calls for a political system that secures effective community participation. Therefore, a human rights-based approach to development protects the voiceless from being manipulated by the 'elite' of the community. As stated by Suárez-Krabbe (2016) development especially in rural areas is about the relative power of hegemony versus the subaltern. However, in a rights-based approach to development people of inferior rank have the constitution on their side against imposition and coloniality. Such an approach to development forestalls resistance against structures of oppression that are neither fixed nor unchangeably; not structurally, nor temporally nor epistemologically (Suárez-Krabbe, 2016). People are now sensitive to their rights and would oppose neo-liberal forms of development that violates or infringes their democratic right to participate in development.

While there is no consensus on strategies to promote development of the poor countries; there is growing belief that the best approach in each situation may be an

unconstrained dialogue with the poor, and learn from them what their priorities are. Dialogue would result in policy change. When the Obama administration stopped the Dakota Access Pipeline project, the objective was to open dialogue with the tribes; and come up with policy that would inform future billion-dollar development projects. This kind of participation in development can only be realised if development is approached as human rights, ensuring that people and their needs come first. In the absence of such a social contract, the rights of communities to decide what works for them would always be trampled upon. Because after all, development is about people making choices of the quality of life they want; and this would involve consultations, discussions and debate among and with the intended beneficiaries. The result would be development that brings positive change. However, the problems have been on trying to fast-track community participation, through coercion; and divide and rule tactics.

CREATING WIN-WIN DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT

Development is a give and take process, where flexibility should allow for sacrifices not manipulation. Rural communities are desperate for change that will bring them good life; and often agree to development because of the promises that are made. The ones 'above' the government and development agencies have access to funds to invest in development and the expertise; while the ones 'below' the rural communities possess localised experience that can make or break any development initiative. Where new courses of action are required, such as the growing of mangoes in Nyangavi, emphasis should be on mutual learning that results in consensus, creating a win-win situation for all involved. This means people's representatives at the lower levels such as village development committee, ward development committee and councillors must play a balancing act that favours both parties.

Local officials have both a responsibility to keep community members fully informed about local programmes, activities and giving them clear opportunities to play meaningful roles in determining and implementing local development, because the same people would maintain whatever infrastructure that has been developed. These decentralised structures must promote open and meaningful participation at all stages of development.

Empowering communities through decentralisation

The challenge today as we grapple with a new set of guided development agenda, Sustainable Development Goals and future development agendas, is to create effective leaders who can help shape the direction of

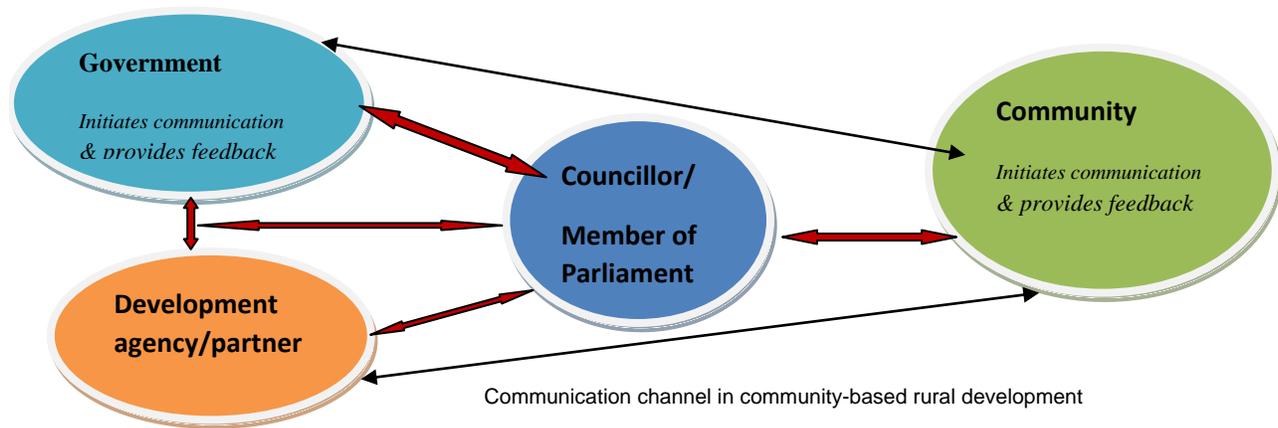


Figure 1. Communication channel in community-based rural development.

development. Effective leaders exert influence, not for selfish gains but out of care for the people, building relationships based on trust and respect. Government officials from the national, provincial to rural district councils are known as public servants. The primary role of a servant is to serve, listen and serve. Officials at all these levels of government need to be guided by some moral principles. There is therefore need for moral leadership and moral integrity among those responsible for development. Moral leadership starts at the top where decisions and policies are made and its positive or negative effects are felt and extended to the entire machinery of the government, public and private sectors. No amount of education and knowledge can substitute a well-nurtured relationship that is guided by moral principles. An effective leader in development becomes a servant of the people, a mentor who empowers others. Such a leader is in no hurry to produce results but instead desires to ensure that people are happy and willing participants in development. Only a localised policy environment can produce people-centred leaders. Therefore, to make decentralisation work, there is need for a shift from token participation to actively listening to the voices of the poor and seriously accept and make use of their contributions. People know what is good for them and how to move out of their present predicament. What people need is to be listened too; and decentralisation policy that actively encourages genuine community engagement and participation has the potential and capacity to tap into the voices of the poor.

Decentralisation is supposed to establish a system that results in a robust two-way communication process (Figure 1) with an elected councillor and/or member of parliament (MP) serving as a channel or medium that facilitates communication between the community and the government. Both the community and the government must be viewed as originators of communication and suppliers of prompt feedback. The diagram shows the two-way communication process with the people's

representative, being central in the process. The councillor and/or MP can make or break the process.

From Figure 1, community-based development is about people, their active participation in their own development. Social relations in a community are well-knit and follow a certain pattern, with some visible factions or groupings. There is one group led by a sitting councillor and/or MP, another by the elite of the community; there is one for disgruntled members of the community, who might also include members of an opposition political party and another made up of the poor of the community. Therefore, success of development comes from a well-negotiated agreement that instills confidence especially among all the groupings in a recipient community. The community or any group should not be excluded from any stage of development. Engagement with the community should start at the conceptual level, where the people can identify with the kind of development being proposed. This means including the community during the feasibility studies because people need to know whether the proposed project will benefit them or not. However, the problem is with the councillor, or MP who mostly serve own interests or those of the ruling clique at the expense of the electorate or constituency. Communities are then reduced to robots that are supposed to mechanically react positively to government initiatives. The attitude has always been 'rural communities are illiterate and the government knows what is best for them'.

The main obstacle to the Gुरुve irrigation scheme was that in conducting feasibility studies in the absence of the beneficiaries, the planners assumed the attitude of 'we know what is good for you', a misconception. The state tried to create a dependency situation that could be monopolised, 'without us (the state) you will never improve your standard of living'. One can understand why the Nyangavi community formed a resistance committee to mobilise people against the Gुरुve Irrigation Scheme. Rural communities should not be treated as passive subjects who accept anything shoved down their throats;

because, today epic grassroots initiatives are emerging to resist the oppressiveness of modernisation in whatever form. The Nyangavi community vowed that they would not be dictated too in an independent country. For them the process of imposed irrigation and especially, growing crops forced upon them was a reminder of white supremacy and development legitimised to maintain a semblance of coloniality. Challenging the status quo was a declaration that the “Emperor” was naked.

Development in rural areas, whether small or large scale, needs the consensus of the intended beneficiaries. Consent that is voluntary results in ownership of the development project by the community. Moreover, the consent can only be obtained through educating the community about the merits and demerits of the proposed project. The community acted on limited information, because of the unwillingness of officials to engage with the people from the onset.

Consensus among an influential group should never be mistaken as the voice of the community. In Nyangavi, the voice of the resistance committee over-rode any other voice even that of reason. It is not certain to what extent the committee represented the community or they were pushing their own agendas, because after the fiasco, one of the members of the resistance committee was elected into the local council, and even lobbied to participate in a parliamentary election, which he declined. Therefore, engagement with the community should not start and end with councillors; meetings should be held with all the intended beneficiaries to hear their views. A single person or a few individuals should not be allowed to make binding decisions that affect thousands of people. Inclusive engagement with the recipients, side-steps those bent on commandeering development in the community, and avoid distortions that could lead to gross misinformation. The acceptability of development and its success depends on the extent of participation by the community; and how well they have understood the advantages and disadvantages of the project. While a radical shift is necessary, the process must be cognisant that change takes time to become effective and affect people’s lives. Therefore, the focus in development should not only be on the positive impact change would bring; rather there must be a buy-in from the targeted recipients of development.

The problem with capital projects such as the Nyangavi irrigation scheme and the North Dakota Access pipeline is that project documents would mention the importance of people’s participation, but rarely followed. To make the proposed development project attractive the developers are quick to point to the short and long-term benefits that include job creation, new incomes and in the process, shifting focus from the real constraints and opportunities in a community. Summing up the importance of participation, Ayee (2002) points out that:

(1) A certain level of public participation improves the

chances of success of public policies and programmes. Consultation of stakeholders not only refines the policy proposals but also forestalls resistance from interest groups.

(2) Exclusive politics deprives the nation of expert contribution from outside the ruling party and government officials.

(3) “Policy space” is not only the preserve of political elites such as politicians and bureaucrats but also of civil society organisations and the populace.

This means that government and development planners and implementers should stop only seeing the poverty around rural communities and pretending to sympathise with them; instead they should start listening to their voices.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, from this study, two interlinked issues emerged to answer the observation by Blackshaw (2010) on why communities mobilise themselves against change. Failure to implement policy on active, free and meaningful participation of communities in development is one of the answers and out of that emerges lack of adequate information for people to act on. There is distinct lack of fit between policy and the actual practice on the ground. As witnessed in the Nyangavi irrigation scheme, the influence of decentralisation was weakened, as the policy on community participation was disregarded, leading to the resistance against the development project. The radical approach therefore, needs to ensure that policy on participation is followed to the letter. Development is more effectual when driven from the local level. However, the role of rural communities in development has been relegated to small projects. Radicalism dictates that people’s participation must extend to capital projects, as this will avoid delays and resistance. The local authority should be at the forefront promoting active, free and meaningful participation of communities in rural development. When people are not encouraged to participate in development the resultant resistance or protest comes because of misinformation. Where people are adequately engaged they make informed decisions. Another radical approach would be taking a human rights-based approach to development that will force governments to engage communities before implementing any form of development.

As the international community continues to struggle to end poverty and hunger amidst plenty, there is need to re-examine the way that development is conducted. Development is not about meeting deadlines, but about people. There seems to be lack of seriousness on the part of development planners and the implementers, who often work on the wrong assertion that global thinking is superior to local thinking. This is apparent in the way that

development is accelerated, ignoring policy that underpins that same development.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) failed, with most countries failing to attain more than one of the eight development goals. One of the reasons for the failure was poor community participation in efforts to attain the goals. However, commitment to ending poverty and hunger is always high on the agenda whenever heads of state and government meet for the annual September United Nations General Assembly, at the Group of 8 most industrialised countries (G8) renamed G7 after expulsion of Russia, Group of 20 most industrialised countries (G20), the African Union (AU) or other such international summits. It is disappointing to see what leaders commit to when seated in air-conditioned summit halls, creating 'great expectations' for the world's poor, but failing to follow through on these commitments on returning home. Their enthusiasm wanes, only to be resuscitated in yet another 'coffee talk show'. If leaders fail to display the same enthusiasm and commitment at home, the proposed 2030 deadline for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals and the Africa-focused Agenda 2063 will all slip by unmarked by success.

At an African Union summit held in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2003, African leaders committed themselves to allocate 10% of their national budgets to agriculture to reduce hunger and poverty. This turned out to be just another empty commitment. The will power to follow through commitments and policies must start from the top filtering down to officials at lower levels. If we continue to ignore policy on free, active and meaningful participation of communities in rural development, then the architects of development will probably meet again in 2025 or so to revise and alter the SDGs, renaming them and setting yet another deadline.

Rural communities are ready to lead the way out of poverty and hunger, but need to be listened to and have their contributions taken seriously. Development policies anchored on active, free and meaningful community participation must fulfill that mandate. Development of whatever magnitude should be inclusive. Decentralisation of development structures must be empowered to serve the communities together with the elected formal representatives of the people. Implementing flexible policy on free, active and meaningful community participation could be the antidote to reducing poverty and ending hunger. Lessons have been learnt that can bring the good life to millions of poor rural people. The solutions are stark clear; to stride ahead one needs to know the path that has been traversed avoiding previous pitfalls.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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