

Rural Livelihoods in Zimbabwe: Heterogeneity, Diversification and Vulnerability

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe. Taking Moyo Musande as a case study, the study identifies and explores the livelihood strategies of households in the context of contemporary economic and political conditions. The empirical findings unpacked diverse livelihood activities and resources that villagers deploy to construct livelihoods. Contemporary livelihoods are not only located within natural resources and agrarian activities but also constitutes informality, civil society donations, social reciprocity, pensions and remittances. Livelihoods are often jeopardized by numerous challenges namely lack of credit, theft, unemployment and politics. Despite the challenges rural people negotiate and maneuver to secure household economic well being. The study demonstrated that given sound rural development policies, households are very much proficient of constructing their own fruitful sustainable livelihoods. These findings were projected through in-depth interviews which are a genre of qualitative methodology. Theoretically, the paper is underpinned by the Sustainable Livelihood Framework to examine the livelihoods strategies and the vulnerability context that complicates lives and livelihoods of rural people in Moyo Musande.

KEYWORDS: Livelihoods, Assets, Sustainable Livelihoods, Agriculture Intensification, Migration.

1 INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe has gone through a number of crises in the last two or so decades. The crisis was socially, economically and politically epitomized. The formation and character of the crisis though is hotly contested among scholars, with some scholars arguing that it is due to internal or domestic processes (notably state mismanagement by the ruling party) and others arguing that it is externally generated by imperialist forces. We do not intend to adopt any particular position of the crisis but rather we outline various events where there is agreement. The paper seeks to answer one critical question that is how do Zimbabwean rural poor survive? Through examining the nexus between the natural capital in form of land, paid and unpaid employment, the paper advances that the solution to the question is found in productive activities that rural poor engage in. The paper identifies and explains the sources of livelihood, diversification and vulnerability context.

This paper is structured as follows. The following section (section two) of the paper briefly tackles the events that contributed to the economic collapse of the Zimbabwean economy and how rural livelihoods were undercut. Following that section is section three; it offers the theoretical foundation that informs this paper. Sustainable livelihoods framework is briefly discussed and its analytical strength is offered too. Section four offers a brief description of research significance of this paper and later dwells on describing the research methodology and techniques. Following this section is section five which marks the beginning of empirical data discussion particularly paying attention to natural resource based livelihoods, rural informality, remittances, pensions, social reciprocity and civil society activities. Last section, section six describes the challenges that rural people face including lack of credit, theft, unemployment and politics.

2 ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS

In 1980 the Zimbabwean Government (GoZ) inherited a dualistic economic development policy. In a bid to redress the colonial legacies and imbalances, the GoZ took on board a socialistic road to economic development (including Growth with Equity of 1982 and the Transitional Development Plans). Amongst the challenges the government was facing included massive income differences along racial lines, rural poverty and the land question. As a result the government was entrenched in huge deficits as it sought to redress colonial blockages for instance infrastructural development, urban-rural divide [1]. Despite these challenges, the economy performed reasonably well in the 1990's. Indeed, this earned the country the name 'bread basket of sub Saharan Africa' although later it was turned into a 'basket case'. Notable progress was envisaged in education, health and agriculture.

A large body of crisis literature has arisen in the last decade. Most of the narratives of the crisis have been explanatory yet there are also some efforts by scholars to theorize the crisis. For instance this crisis has a range of names given to it including 'organic crisis' [2] this emanates from Gramsci's conceptual framework and 'the Zimbabwean crisis' [3]. The historical roots of the crisis have been differently situated within literature; with some arguing preconditions of the crisis were lodged in the early 1990's and late 1990's. As such there is a general agreement among scholars that the crisis arose in 1990 evolving around economics and politics. Amongst the events that were critical to the Zimbabwean down fall is on one hand, the structural adjustment programmes (locally known as economic structural adjustment programme-ESAP). Instead of this neoliberal informed programme to spur economic growth, eliminate inefficiency and increase Zimbabwe's 'competitive edge' on global markets as predicted by the Bretton Woods Institutions- International Monetary Fund and the World Bank the opposite has happened. Economy has contracted, foreign investment has not materialized and hunger has swept across rural and urban spaces.

Towards the close of the 1990's, a political crisis arose, civil societies, trade unions and the Movement of Democratic Change (MDC) questioned and challenged the legitimacy and hegemony of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party. Consequently, the ruling party, state and the GoZ was pressurized and was in a deep panic. Reference [4] insists that the state become increasingly authoritarian. To garner support of the citizens, the GoZ paid war veterans¹ a hefty of \$50 000 (Zimbabwean dollar by then) which was outside the state's budget. In February 2000, another major event happened, violent seizure of white commercial farms referred to as *jambanja* (locally meaning violence). In so far these two events (including the payment of gratuities to war veterans and the land reform) signified the "balance of class force within the ruling party was tipped in favour of radical nationalist solutions" [5] to agrarian and land reform. Besides the international cry over what they labeled as 'human rights violations' the state continued to safe guard the so called 'sovereignty' through preserving the gains of the *second chimurenga* (land being the primacy of it). The failure by the Fast Track Land Reform Programme to decongest the communal areas as reported by the Presidential Land Review Committee Report (popularly known as the Utete Report) of 2003 has had devastating effects.

This signified the wide spread condemnation of the state and increased isolation which was envisaged through economic sanctions. As the economic crisis loomed and intensified, living standards were greatly compromised, poverty and destitution become the order of the day within rural and urban households. Nevertheless, [6] argues that 'the absence of ESAP in and of itself would not have erased Zimbabwe's post-independence conundrum, although a strong state – which ESAP helped destroy – is necessary to surmount its "transitional" problems. The ESAP laid the preconditions to the crisis that later came, it did not cause these problems. Since 2005, the Zimbabwean economy has been characterized by a high inflation rate, shortage of foreign currency, inadequate investment, budget deficit and stagnating employment [4]. By March, 2007, inflation has reached 2,200 % [1] this threatened both urban and rural livelihoods.

As a result of the crisis, rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe today are characterized with heterogeneity in order to make a living in a country where rural-urban gap is so wide. The decline of smallholder African agriculture for most of the twentieth century was driven by racialized land dispossession and underdevelopment, in order to meet the labour demands of industrial capitalism [7], [8]. Opportunities for smallholder agriculture became undercut by chronic African unemployment amidst Zimbabwean crisis. The structural dynamics of urban-based, retrenchments have only intensified since 2000 causing

¹ A war veteran refers to the people mainly aligned to ZANU PF who took part in fighting the Rhodesian army in what is documented as Third Chimurenga.

an erosion of remittances. The 2011/12 Poverty Income and Consumption Survey (PICES) estimated the head count of poor rural households in Zimbabwe at 76% in 2011. Poverty in Zimbabwe is not only widespread and persistent it is disproportionately rural, the proportion of extremely poor rural households was 22.9%, this fell from 50.4% in 1995/6 and 42.3% in 2001 [1].

The problem of increasing and persistent poverty is one of exclusion rural inhabitants are extremely marginalized from the mainstream economy. The prospects for social mobility in rural areas is inhibited by persistent inequality (including gender) and continuing human development deficits, and the GoZ difficulties in addressing colonial legacies especially the rural-urban divide. Impoverished rural livelihoods are constituted within practices of mobility and migration that have long linked rural African households to urban opportunities and resources in Southern Africa [9]. Rural households might helpfully be viewed as stretched between urban and rural [10], this therefore depicts that households often engage in hybrid livelihoods across space. In this context of limited and declining employment opportunities, how do the rural residents survive and what problems do they face?

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The SLF helps to understand the particular livelihoods pursued by people in Moyo Musande which is a focus of this paper. The framework helps to describe what women and men actually do to support households and further understand the different social, economic and political factors and restrict their abilities. This approach builds on people's strengths and works for environmental, economic, social and institutional sustainability. Thus, a livelihoods framework is both a goal : that works to create new ways of living that enable people to meet their varied and interwoven needs without compromising the ecosystems that support them and their community; and an approach : that is rooted in particular people in specific places making decisions about sustaining themselves and their families [11].

A livelihood is defined as a varied way of making a living to meet individual and household needs [12]. Sustainable livelihood framework (SLF) starts with assets owned and controlled by a household. Moser a prominent writer on livelihoods insists that assets are a crucial element of the livelihood framework which enables individual, household or community to survive and further engage in labour markets and participate in reciprocal exchanges with other households [13]. Fundamentally, rural inhabitants of Moyo Musande make use of the natural, social, human, physical and social capitals to earn a living [14] and circumvent poverty. The SLF has been an appropriate and necessary diagnostic tool in relation to conceptualizing rural poverty of the developing countries. A number of livelihoods are adopted and employed by rural poor to make to make a living. These livelihoods can be short term (i.e. for consumption or coping with risk) and long term strategies for future generations. Livelihoods literature identifies three important livelihoods for the rural people including agricultural intensification/extensification, livelihood diversification and migration. Overall, the short and long term are designed to maintain the economic being and social security.

In light of the above the livelihood strategies are designed to cater for the constraints imposed by the market failures, state failures, social norms and exposures to universal risks [15]. Diversification is a contentious concept [16] argues that diversification as a strategy does not fit in a conventional picture since its many attributes defy the straitened notions of sectors, specialization and transition. Conversely, another prominent writer of livelihoods, [17] argues that the rural poor diversify sources of livelihoods in order to make a living in cases of risk and uncertainty. Various factors influence diversification, namely the need to improve livelihood choice [18] and external factors may include the need to survive.

Therefore, necessity and choice are significant as driving forces to diversification. Of importance are the structures and processes that affect livelihoods, they function at various scales and influence access, control to different capitals, certain livelihood strategies and decision making, the terms of exchange between different capitals [18]. Despite the structures and processes, livelihood strategies occurs in a threatening and vulnerable context that may requires livelihood resilience. Vulnerability refers to the insecurity or well-being of individuals or communities in face of changing environments in form of sudden shocks, long term trends or seasonal cycles [17]. An analysis of vulnerability context is significant as it focuses on the opportunities that are available to resist implications of uncertainty and vulnerability; this involves safety nets and a range of activities to supplement existing strategies [14].

4 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE, METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Numerous studies have been conducted in relation to livelihoods particularly in Africa and globally. In the case of Zimbabwe, there are a number of rural livelihoods studies focusing on different unit of analysis. In case of our research site (namely Moyo Musande) there is no existing study known to the researchers. Generally rural livelihood studies in Zimbabwe have focused on climate change and its effects on livelihoods [19], land reform and livelihoods. Such studies have turned

blind eye on the diversification of rural livelihoods apart only from land based livelihoods. An anomaly exists within these livelihoods based studies. Therefore this study is important for a number of reasons, it closes this lacuna and uncovers fresh literature, and in doing so it offers a ‘no gender biased’ examination (focuses on both female and male activities) and deploys the sustainable livelihoods framework in a manner which is sensitive to both structure and agency. Given the crises that Zimbabwe has undergone, the study views the rural villages not as passive victims of the socio-economic and political turmoil but as active agents seeking household economic stability.

The study identifies, explores and understands the rural livelihoods of the people in Moyo Musande community in Zimbabwe. Methodologically the research is framed within qualitative approach. According to [20] this kind of research “gives a more in-depth description and understanding of events or actions and this helps the researcher to gain insight into why and how these events or actions take place rather than just presenting a phenomenon”. The Moyo Musande community is fluid such that it is impossible to draw a random sample of a stable universe. Purposive non random sampling was utilized to identify participants for in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling is a valuable kind of sampling used in exploratory research. Similarly, [20] insists that non probability sampling gives the best chance to get ‘rich’ qualitative data. With respect to qualitative approach, in-depth interviews with ten respondents were conducted (five females and five males). In-depth interviews allow for greater flexibility in asking questions, therefore the researcher is able to explore the issues under study in a greater detail compared to quantitative approach (es). After the data collection the in-depth interviews were analyzed. In-depth interviews were conducted in the local language Shona² and emerging themes were noted. Data was thematically analyzed in such a way that contextual character remains undistorted.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section seeks to outline the empirical data in terms of how the marginalized rural livelihoods survive. The following themes came out: natural capital and agrarian activities, rural informality, social reciprocity, pensions, the role of civil society and remittances (cash and non cash).

5.1 NATURAL CAPITAL AND AGRARIAN ACTIVITIES

There is no doubt that the majority of the rural people still depend on the natural resources (primary source of livelihoods) to construct livelihoods. In-depth interviews carried out in Moyo Musande are reflective of this fact, almost 90% of the respondents reported to be relying on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. Natural capital assets (including water sources and forests) have been identified as important. Agriculture is the mainstay of rural communities and they take full responsibility in utilizing the natural resources to construct a living [12]. Trees play a significant role in the lives of rural people in developing world [21]. This concurs with the results of this study. Natural resources were used for different purposes in Moyo Musande community; land was used for agricultural purposes, forests for firewood and fencing of gardens, wild fruits and herbs for different ailments. The main source of energy was fuelwood mainly for heating and processing food due to the absence of electricity. However, the access and control of some of these natural resources were based on several factors including institutional control (i.e. village head locally known as *sabhuku* restrict cutting down of trees). One of the respondents reported the following

forests are in abundance, we can use it for fire wood, medicine and polls to build kraals for our cattle, but the problem is that the *sabhuku* does not allow us to cut some of the trees and if you are caught...liable to a fine and some hens (In-depth interview no 2, December 2011).

Despite such restrictions, a number of people were selling polls to other community households who were building new houses. Selling of poles derived from natural resources was another livelihood source of income despite that there was constant conflict with the village head.

Another respondent reiterated the following:

...the elders of this area are too restrictive, some of the land that we are still cultivating is old and it is our wish to clear the other land and start cultivating the new land and increase our yields...look this land has been used for the past 30 to 40

² Shona refers to a local language in Chilimanzi, a Bantu language spoken by Shona people

years and it is used now...we need new land but the chief and sabhuku's have agreed that giving people new land will only lead to destruction of forests for nothing (In-depth interview no 1, December 2011).

From the above, it is clear that sustainable livelihoods are hindered by institutional leaders and norms which restrict control and usage of natural resources. These layers of authority have compromised rural livelihoods. One of the most influential is the institution of the hereditary chieftaincy, which continues to exercise authority over large communal areas [22]. Residents of these areas are thus both citizens of formal, civic authority but also the subjects of traditional authorities [23]. This is a major problem in most rural communities particularly ones still controlled by patriarchy (chiefs and village heads). Nonetheless, land remains the primary source of the most rural inhabitants. Vast tracks of land were used to grow maize, millet, sorghum and ground nuts. Growing of these crops was mainly for consumption purposes while a surplus was sold especially in cases of emergency to gain income. One respondent reported the following

where else can I earn a living ...no employment, no what...land is the only resource that I have to make a living with my family, I depend on it for maize and other things like vegetables which I grow as relish to sadza (In-depth interview no 3, December 2011).

In sub Saharan Africa most of the rural communities rely on land for livelihoods and food security thereby circumventing poverty. Despite engaging in other livelihoods land remains the mainstay of rural livelihoods despite the lack of inputs to intensify production.

Natural resources in Moyo Musande, have been directly transformed into financial capital after being sold, this include the grass used for thatching, roofing pools and herbs for treating different ailments. This reflects rural people's ingenuity in transforming wild natural resources into financial capital especially in face of rising rural poverty to ensure household economic and social security. Fundamentally, the access to natural resources is gender based, particularly with regard to land. There is a disequilibrium in terms of access to land with this community, female residents of Moyo Musande claimed that land was only accessible through marriage and in cases of death of a husband some of the land is given up to another household to decongest the quest for land. Reference [18] argues that gender is a critical, integral and inseparable part of the rural livelihoods.

Water was another natural resource that was significant to the locals. A majority of women depended on gardening. Most of these gardens were located close to the river banks simply because of the water proximity while some were located at home. A variety of vegetables were grown by different individuals including spinach, covo, tomatoes, onions, carrots and cabbages to mention but a few. The growing of leafy vegetables such as (*spinach, covo and rugare*) was for the purpose of eating with sadza (cooked mealie meal) and these vegetables were treated as a substitute for meat which is expensive and unaffordable for most rural households. Gardening was done during the entire year although intensified during the rainy season. Gardening was primarily for home consumption while surplus was sold. Our in-depth interviews show that a reasonable amount of income was being generated through marketing of produce. A bundle of vegetables was being sold at R7.00 or US\$0.70 while a plate full of tomatoes was sold at US\$1 or R10. An estimated amount of R100 or US\$10 was generated monthly after selling of the produce. This money contributed towards buying other basic commodities like cooking oil, sugar and salt which were not home grown. Respondents were proud of gardening as it produced quick money to meet household needs and allowed to evade expensive prices of rural stores. Barter trading also occurred. For instance, one household would exchange a plate of tomatoes with a cup of salt or anything equivalent.

Despite gardening which was necessitated by the availability of water sources, fishing was also prevalent. This was mainly reported by male respondents in my sample. Fishing was both for household consumption and selling to other households. Fish price is comparably low than the meat price at Siyahokwe growth point. One of the male respondents aged thirty five reported the following:

I started fishing at a very young age...while herding cattle I could spend time fishing and this enabled me to get fish for consumption. Fishing has provided me with money, people flock to my house to buy fish because it is cheaper than meat...when there is a lot of water I catch more fish unlike in a dry season...this has enabled me to send my children to school, buy uniform and other basic commodities (In-depth interviews no 4, December 2011).

The availability of water bodies (as one of the components of natural capital) cannot be underestimated in ensuring food security and income generation. The availability of the natural capital has therefore enabled households and individuals to diversify natural based livelihoods. This has been confirmed by the results of this study. In addition, this concurs with [24] argued that many rural households subsist on a combination of agricultural and fishing activities, but, in most cases, agriculture is the primary strategy, fishing being a secondary or alternative activity. In short, rural livelihoods are mainly based on natural resources although rural inhabitants diversify their livelihood strategies to avoid vulnerability in cases where one livelihood strategy fails to provide sufficient income and security for the household or individual.

5.2 RURAL INFORMALITY

Besides the utilization of natural resource base as a form of livelihoods, rural areas are characterized by complex repertoires of economic activity. It is therefore important to understand rural livelihoods as composed of farm and non-farm activities, informal and formal economic activities. Informality refers to the marginal and low productivity activities that are outside regulatory procedures of the state and tax system [25]. In Zimbabwe informality is plays a pivotal role in providing a source of livelihood for both rural and urban sites although the income is relatively low. Over reliance on the informal sector is symbolic of lack of employment in both private and public sector.

Findings of this study reveal that informality is an integral part of rural livelihoods. One respondent reported that, lack of employment in rural areas has further pushed people to live through informality to supplement income and at times informality being the major source of income. One female respondent reported:

life is not easy in the rural areas...I have started hoarding basic commodities in Gweru [a nearby town in Midlands province] including sugar, salt, tea bags, washing power, second hand clothes and many other things that the rural people need...I have not opened a formal shop because of the rental charges that is why I choose to operate here at home...competition is less at home than the growth point (In-depth interview no 6, December 2011).

Through informality rural people have managed to make ends meet, this is not particularly to the owners only but to the customers as well. This is so because, spaza/tuckshop offer cheap commodities as compared to the well established retail shops at the growth point whose prices are far too expensive for the rural poor. There is a discernible link between informal sector and formal sector in Zimbabwe. This link is envisaged through the basic commodities, all the commodities sold in the informal sector originate from the formal economy. However, there are relatively little or no linkages following from informal sector to formal sector. Income generated through selling of basic commodities was invested in education of children, buying uniforms and some was budgeted for emergency particularly illness of a child.

Despite informality on basic commodities, livestock rearing played a pivotal role. Livestock is a productive asset with the potential of providing households with some resources in the short term (including milk) but greater returns in a long run such as more goats and cows which may yield meat, clothing and skins which can be used for trade or sale. One respondent, a beef producer reported to be selling beef meat and goat meat to the local butcheries and school teachers who had established a beef committee. Each beast costs US\$500 (by the time of this study) depending on the quality of meat either commercial or economy, while a goat ranges from US\$30 to US\$50 depending with the size. In addition the respondent did not wish to be well established to provide beef at a larger scale. Firstly, the provision of beef meat was inconsistent and only resumed when a need arises for instance in case of shortage of money to pay school fees. Secondly, establishing a beef enterprise was a mission impossible because of procedures in acquiring a license to operate.

Traditional beer brewing was another important informal activity employed by rural people. This is commonly prevalent among females. Beer brewing is not a new phenomenon in Shona culture but the rate of over reliance on it as a source of livelihood is highly questionable. Lack of recreational facilities and entertainment in rural sites is attributed to alcohol abuse by rural people. Hence, beer brewing business was never a 'fade away' activity as it provided quick income that will be used for immediate consumption. A greater number of males in the community preferred the local beer (locally known as *seven matanda*) because it was affordable unlike the Western kind of beers or what they called 'clear beer'. The same respondent indicated that competition is sometimes a constraint which suggests that this kind of business is relatively lucrative.

Apart from beer brewing, the respondent diversified too. The respondent responsible for beer brewing engaged into poultry too for meat and egg production. This activity was mainly prevalent during the festive seasons for instance Easter and Christmas holidays. A significant amount of money was gained; approximately a profit of US\$1200 (equivalent to R12000) was made when business was good. Although rural economy offered many opportunities for diversifying livelihoods, a majority of these offered little returns. Despite that, rural people have managed to engage in survivalist improvisation to escape rural poverty.

Other sources of income that were reported and observed in the Moyo Musande Community are shown in the table below.

Table 1. Other informal source of income

Informal source of income	ranking
Building	2
Piecework/hired labour	1
Craftwork	4
Ox cart hire	3
Begging	5

Field work December 2011

The activities on the above table can be referred to as minor strategies, villagers spent very little or no resources and also yielded little and often unreliable income. Respondents identified strategies such as begging, labour sale in the fields as returning very little. At times working in the fields was exchanged with a bar of soap or cooking oil all depending with the contract or terms of conditions. Reference [18] notes that this type of diversification sees household members undertaking casual and low productivity activities with poor prospects. Reference [26] refers to this as a last resort rather than an attractive alternative livelihood strategy.

5.3 SOCIAL RECIPROCITY

Apart from the natural capital based livelihoods and rural informality, social capital play a pivotal role in maintaining and securing rural livelihoods. Networking with other people therefore becomes significant in constructing livelihoods. One well known writer of social capital [27] describes social capital as an entity formed for the benefit of everyone in a community. Putnam further argues that essentiality of social capital is seen in its “capacity to facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” [27]. Declining kinship ties in rural communities have resulted in rural people seeking refuge in non kinship ties for survival. By doing so, rural people have managed to access resources such as food, information and opportunities (including hired labour in the fields). Through the mutual trust embedded within social groups, many villagers have resorted to rotational groups where they contribute a certain amount of money to each other. This system is commonly known as *marounds* (rotational savings group) which depended on relationships of trust between group members. This was commonly among women. Some villagers belonged to more than one group, as there are different kind of groups-including those formed in villages or church.

Contributions were in form of money monthly or in-kind (mainly groceries) contributions. Social groups have acted as ‘informal social protection’ [28]. One respondent made it clear that they were contributing differently every month depending on group member agreement. With respect to the monthly contributions, US\$15 was contributed per individual. Social savings group helped to cushion poverty however one common problem constrained the well functioning of these groups. Rural economy does not provide constant income hence some groups members at times failed to contribute to the group. Given the precariousness of the rural livelihoods, social groupings are important to circumvent vulnerability.

5.4 PENSIONS

Pensions were also reported to be another source of income in rural areas. Prior to the Zimbabwean crisis, rural and urban people relied on steady pension transfers particularly the old who have retired and retrenched from formal work. As the crisis loomed, hyperinflation reduced these transfers merely to nothing. Nonetheless due to the dollarization of the economy in 2009 a steady monthly income was received by all pensioners. Villagers who retired made it clear that the monthly transfers by companies that they once worked for were significant. Without the pension income the villagers claimed that their situation could be miserable. The following is a testimony:

if it was not for the pension I could have died long back...I am old now I can't work in the fields or do any sort of work...I heavily depend on my pension for my survival...I thank the NRZ [a company the old man used to work for] for keeping us alive...at least this money can help although it is not enough to sustain for the whole month. I can say it is better than getting nothing" (In-depth interview no 7, December 2011)

Similarly, another respondent once a headmaster for a primary school reiterated the following:

the ministry of education through the unions have been so supportive after my retirement...since the dollarization I have received all my pension income every month... the system is now efficient unlike during the days of Zimbabwean dollar the money was worthless...you would just withdraw money and before using it...inflation could swipe it away (In-depth interview, no 9 December 2011)

It is apparent that pensions are a source of livelihood for the old people who can no longer venture into other avenues of making a living. Broadly, Zimbabwean government unlike South Africa government has no sound social security system to cater for the older people, vulnerable children and many other groups (physically challenged people). These vulnerable groups of people continue to be marginalised in the main stream economy and this further exacerbates their poverty situation.

5.5 THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The role of civil society cannot be undervalued in as far as rural livelihoods are concerned. It seems scholars concur that the GoZ failed to provide for its citizens during the economic crisis. This amounted to humanitarian crisis, as most of the urban and rural people lived and some died of poverty. The civil society came to the rescue besides the fact that it was politically motivated to garner support for Movement for Democratic Change. Besides the politicisation of the food aid, food parcels distributed to communities were significantly important. This study reveals that people in Moyo Musande were recipients of food aid from different civil societies. Among the things they received was cooking oil, salt, sugar, clothes, maize meal, rice and many others. While resource wise, construction of boreholes for safe, clean drinking water and establishment of community projects like knitting, these helped the community to be self sufficient and fighting food insecurity. Reference [29] views NGOs as potentially critical catalysts for unlocking the energies and resources of the poor and voiceless in their endeavour to build pluralistic and democratic societies. Some of the operating NGOs in the community included World Vision, Care international, Oxfarm and USAID.

5.6 REMITTANCES: CASH AND COMMODITIES

There is no agreed upon definition of the word remittance, but generally speaking it denotes cash or in-kind transfers by workers who have left their area of origin on a short term or long term basis. Rural people have moved in hundreds of thousands over the past decade mainly as economic refugees in urban areas and they have remitted cash and commodities to their village of origin. From the in-depth interviews rural villagers in Moyo Musande community have at times been receipts of these remittances. Out of the sampled respondents it emerged that four of them received remittances from different people including family members (most their children). According to [30], rural to urban and regional to international migrants have contributed a lot to the livelihood and survival of the poor rural people in Zimbabwe. According to [31], in recent years remittance flows have increased due to the growing number of Zimbabwean migrants who transfer cash and goods through both formal (for example, EcoCash agencies and the Post Office) and informal (for instance, through carrying in person or sending with a friend, relative or co-worker) channels. Although, migrants have faced tougher problems in the host countries (South Africa, USA, UK and many other) they have made efforts to remit back home to their poor relatives. Cash transfers have played a significant in the lives of rural people. One of the recipients of remittances aged fifty-six reported:

our children in the diaspora have been kind enough to send money monthly. My daughter who is in Canada sends money every month approximately R2000 through the Western Union money transfer and this has helped me to buy my basic needs for my family. I have been able to establish a small poultry business to raise extra money to take care of my other relatives. I am very happy with the money she sends me...during agriculture season she even sends more money to buy fertilisers and seeds (In-depth interview no 10 December 2011).

In light of the above statement, remittances have enabled rural people to live above poverty line. However, some cash becomes an investment by being channelled directly into informal activities (poultry business) and purchase of commodities for re-sale. Remittances do make a contribution to household sustainability by mitigating the effects of the crisis in Zimbabwean and increasing the purchasing power as well as generating multiplier effects.

Despite the cash remittances from children and other relatives from different geographical spaces, the study revealed that remitters also remitted commodities particularly foodstuff including but not limited to the following maize-meal, sugar, salt, cooking oil, rice, dried fish and other assets (i.e. school uniforms). During the peak of the crisis, many urban people remitted foodstuff back to their village of origin as most growth points were out of stock. Retail shops with stock charged exorbitant prices that were far beyond the reach of the rural poor. Reference [30] adds that most non-cash remittances responded to the specific and immediate needs of their recipients. The non-cash remittances significance cannot be

estimated given the marginalisation of rural economy. As such many rural inhabitants have managed to survive through the non-cash remittances.

6 VULNERABILITY CONTEXT OF MOYO MUSANDE HOUSEHOLDS

Livelihood strategies as discussed above have played a pivotal role in proving a safety net for rural people however livelihoods are not without challenges. These challenges have greatly limited attainment of successful livelihoods and as a result a number of households have been 'in and out' of poverty. Notably among the challenges are lack of credit, theft, unemployment and politics.

6.1 LACK OF CREDIT

The economic downturn of the economy has contributed to limited capacity of the government and other private stakeholders to be supportive. The rural people acknowledge the importance of access to credit. Credit act as a means of increasing income through investing it into income generating activities and small business venture. Despite this, a majority does not have access to credit from banks and other formal credit providers. In Zimbabwe credit is mainly aimed at small to medium enterprises (SME's) and mere rural people such as those of Moyo Musande community are not considered. Banks and NGOs have targeted women as a social class but truly speaking the poor and marginalised rural women have not benefited. The valid reason that possibly limits access to credit is the lack of collateral security set by banks. As a result rural villagers face this obstacle. In addition they lack guarantor with long term and sufficient income to act as security for them and their irregular and unstable income is unacceptable to banks and other money lenders. The lack of credit contributed to limited livelihoods in Moyo Musande and limited accumulation of assets.

6.2 THEFT

Besides lack of credit, theft was noted as another limitation. Due to the lack of employment and increase in poverty theft has become rampant not only in rural areas but also in urban areas. During the year 2011 a number of theft cases were recorded ranging from household property and stock theft. This has contributed to low livelihoods particularly in cases where a productive asset has been stolen. One interviewee noted:

thieves are increasing in this area, some of the them are sons and daughters of our community members who have failed to secure work...this year [referring to 2011] I lost my plough and hoes.. luckily it was not ploughing season, if it was I could have been grounded...if it was not for the NGO that distributed ploughs to all those have high produce...I could be struggling right now (In-depth interview no 8 December 2011).

This sentiment clearly shows that theft was rampant in the area and for this particular interviewee things could have been tougher after losing productive assets. In turn it means the yields were to be greatly reduced.

Another respondent shared the same view:

...they do not even care [referring to thieves] either you are poor or not. I lost all my goats on the same night until now the police have not established the culprits...suspects were called in and were released. Whoever is responsible for this will pay for it? (In-depth interview no 4, December 2011).

This reflects again the inability of the police to deal with matters of theft. Without proper investigation thieves are left to commit other crimes in communities.

6.3 EMPLOYMENT

Rural economies are characterised by limited formal employment due to underdevelopment. This is so, because rural economies are not integrated in the main stream economy so as a result employment tends to be informal. Formal employment may be viable for some of the energetic members of Moyo Musande. However, the prospects of employment are exceedingly limited considering high unemployment rate pegged at 80% in Zimbabwe. The Government of National Unit failed to create jobs. In this regard, one married interviewee highlighted the following:

I was thinking things will get better since 2006 but there has been no change besides the dollarization which has eased things, we are still suffering...NO JOBS NO JOBS [interviewee emphasised] at least if our children get jobs they will be able to take care of us...without jobs our lives are miserable (In-depth interview no 10 December 2011).

The respondent reported that formal employment was better as it comes with stable and reliable income every month. This is despite the fact that formal employment is currently marked by low remuneration limited to cater for all household needs including rent and basic commodities.

6.4 POLITICS

The political climate which has characterised Zimbabwe in the last decades has contributed to vulnerability of rural people of Moyo Musande and the entire rural and urban areas. Political polarisation between ZANU PF and MDC the main oppositional party has compromised livelihoods construction in both rural and urban households. This study reveals that during campaigning days' time of engaging in various livelihoods to secure household security decrease as people involuntarily and voluntarily attend rallies- at times twice a week. Political violence, torture and destruction of shelter compounded with loss of assets to political opponents. This study results concurs with [19] study in Mudzi District which posits that political violence in the district has jeopardised local people's livelihoods.

7 CONCLUSION

This paper commenced by highlighting the critical events that contributed to the downfall of the Zimbabwean economy and it went on to discuss the sustainable livelihood approach that animates this paper. The paper identified and explored the various livelihood strategies employed by Moyo Musande villagers to secure household economic well being and preserve food security. Given the smaller sample of the study the results therefore are not representative of the entire rural livelihoods. Agriculture in rural areas remains the prime livelihood activity for the rural poor. This was pursued by utilising the natural capital in form of land. The crops grown were mainly for consumption with little being sold. Villagers also simultaneously diversified into other income generating activities to make a livelihood portfolio. The villagers encountered a series of problems in constructing their livelihoods, some relate to economic challenges while some relate to institutional systems-like village headman as such institutional influences have shaped livelihoods. Nonetheless, the villagers often responded to these challenges at best-coping mechanisms. Respondents have made significant contributions to their household income and food security but as a grouping they have reported that they were hanging in and hanging on in face of harrowing poverty. The paper has explained the vulnerability context of the Moyo Musande villagers (some relates to the Zimbabwean economy like unemployment).

The empirical findings have implications for development theory. Precisely a sustainable livelihood framework (SLF) is a substantial contrivance for evaluating rural livelihoods. Access and control to different capitals enhance successful livelihood strategies. In particular through the access to land, villagers have increased their food security. In addition through social capital people have managed to supplement their earning by engaging in rotational savings groups (locally known as *marounds*). The SLF therefore was of great theoretical value in terms of conceptualising and understanding the lives and livelihoods of Moyo Musande community. It was deployed in a manner which was sensitive not only to 'structure' but also 'agency' in recognising that although the community is not 'entrenched' in structures but negotiates and manoeuvre their way in and at times beyond structures.

The findings have implications for rural development policy. A supportive environment need to be created and players should acknowledge that short term and long term livelihood strategies make significant contribution to the livelihoods of the rural poor and therefore need not to be undervalued but reinforced. Wild natural resources need to be acknowledged as fundamental to rural livelihoods. Their importance is envisaged in housing, health care and fuelwood energy. Support for these natural resources should be part of poverty reduction and rural development. With respect to agriculture, sound extension services should be established this might include usage of inputs, harvesting and marketisation. Given importance of agriculture, government through Ministry of Lands and Agriculture should prioritise extension services to increase productivity and farming knowledge. With respect to barriers, there is need to minimise regulatory barriers particularly the role of traditional leaders. Access to land and forest must be equitable though sensitive to environmental degradation. Unnecessary barriers created by traditional leaders only lead to poverty stricken households

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