

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: RESULTS FROM ZIMBABWE, ZAMBIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Sustainable livelihood (SL)⁶ approaches provide a fresh optic in poverty analysis. This paper reports on work carried out with partners in Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa by Khanya – managing rural change and funded by the UK's Department for International Development. Paper 49 in this series addresses the conceptual issues and methodological learnings from this type of SL audit. This second paper summarises the key findings from the four case study countries/provinces' according to levels of support and action, types of organisation, policy issues and the process of managing change to promote SLs.

Policy conclusions

- The SL approach helps to identify the support required to assist the poor, through a holistic analysis of strengths and of micro-macro linkages.
- To provide such support, decentralised policies and action need to be strengthened, including fiscal decentralisation.
- The interface between micro-level understanding of clients and macro-level policies is best managed at district level, as also is the coordination of service delivery.
- However, new approaches are needed to village level service delivery and to linking community-based planning with local government. One option is to make the community worker concept the basis of much wider but more focused and locally accountable service delivery.
- Approaches to public sector reform need to consider not just improving efficiency but also effectiveness in eradicating poverty. This will require re-engineering service delivery in response to better client-orientation, improved cost-effectiveness and institutional pluralism.
- National strategies are needed on poverty, rural development, and local economic development, which are based on a real understanding of micro-level realities, and so accurately guide both implementation and spending decisions.
- Joint learning programmes are needed between southern African countries and donors to explore new answers to the challenge of poverty, and policies and structures in both may need significant change so that real impacts can be made.

Part A Introduction

Background

This report is the culmination of a series of four studies of the institutional issues in promoting a SL approach in southern Africa. These studies were carried out in Zambia, Zimbabwe and two provinces in South Africa during 1999, and aimed to draw on the development of policies and institutions in these countries over the last 20 years. The study used the SL framework to structure the analysis, using a vertical transect linking a case study village and district through meso-level to the centre. The focus was on the changes needed in policies, structures and processes to support a SL approach.

The SL approach focuses on the assets of poor people (physical, human, financial, natural, and social), and their vulnerabilities, preferred outcomes and livelihood strategies. Some of the implications of the approach are:

- it puts a holistic understanding of poor people at the centre
 - it recognises that policies and institutions condition the environment within which people operate
 - it recognises the importance of the links between (i) and (ii)
- In this study Khanya has considered institutions and institutional support to include:

- the organisations which influence people's lives
- the services they receive
- the policy environment
- the incentives available, whether overt such as grants, or covert such as unwritten power relations, e.g. between the centre and periphery
- the rules of the game which govern people's lives

South Africa is a federal system, with devolution to provincial governments, and with local government independent of provincial government. Each of the three spheres (national, provincial and local) has different areas of competence, some of which are shared. Provincial governments are responsible

for many of the common rural services.

Both Zimbabwe and Zambia have only two spheres of government, national and local, with the province acting as an outpost of central government. In Zimbabwe local government is being strengthened gradually, whereas in Zambia the decentralisation of the 1980s has given way to deconcentration, viz sectoral investment programmes with weak local government.

Part B Levels of support and action

Are rural people active and involved in managing their own development?

In all the places studied the way government interacts with people both at political and technical level had fostered high levels of dependency. Some systems to support local action, accountability and ownership are emerging, e.g. for water supply, health and education. However, there are no participatory planning systems which link people with local government and there is a significant democratic deficit. Examples were seen of how decentralised district systems can work and what support systems are needed. However, strong village-district links are a prerequisite for effective micro-macro links, and different ways should be piloted for replicable community-based planning systems.

Is there an active network of local service providers?

At village level, service provision is weak and generally includes only primary schools, sometimes clinics and veterinary services, and occasionally agricultural extension. Some small private sector traders are present, who often provide an important service in agri-processing but do not

supply more than minor grocery items. Major rethinking of public sector service delivery is required if it is to make a significant impact on the poor. To work through the community workers or facilitators used by many different departments (e.g. paravets, community health workers, etc.) could help to achieve this without major extra cost.

Are district services effective, coordinated and responsive?

In all three countries the role of the district is being strengthened, although in Zambia the situation has been stop-start since the beginning of the 1980s. In Zimbabwe the national Rural District Council (RDC) Capacity Building Programme is an exciting initiative (see Box 1), but the reality is that many programmes are in fact weakening rather than strengthening capacity at this level.

In Zambia the current focus is on deconcentration of central powers rather than devolution to local government. In South Africa a new shape of development-oriented local government is beginning to emerge, and the talk (but not yet action) is of likely devolution of provincial service delivery functions to local government. Provincial departments with significant local presence such as health and education have recognised the importance of district-level management and deconcentrated some powers to district levels.

In all cases fiscal decentralisation is still very limited. There are elements of a district planning process but the links between district and village are weak. Systems for monitoring and coordination of development at district level exist in Zimbabwe, in some parts of Zambia⁸ but not in South Africa. Nowhere was there a clear understanding of who the clients were, or their particular needs. Addressing these issues about decentralised service delivery is critical for effective and responsive service delivery and improved value for money.

Private sector and parastatal operators provide many of the key services at district level, e.g. agricultural inputs, marketing and agricultural finance. International non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including churches were particularly important in Zimbabwe and provide many basic services, but were not strongly evident elsewhere.

Does the meso-level support and supervise the districts?

In South Africa provincial governments constitute the meso-level and have significant autonomy. In Zimbabwe the provinces are being explicitly downscaled, as resources for support and supervision diminish and well-qualified people at provincial level leave government service. In Zambia the focus of deconcentration and Sector Investment Programmes (SIPs) has been on the district. In all cases little effort is being given to redefining the role of the meso-level under decentralisation.

Is the centre providing strategic direction, redistribution and oversight?

In South Africa these central functions are performed at provincial level as well as national, whereas in Zambia and

Zimbabwe they are found only at national level. If there is to be institutional support for SLs, the centre needs to have clear policies in place for poverty eradication, rural development, local economic development and public sector reform.

The first three of these are lacking in South Africa and Zimbabwe, which means that there is no guidance to sectoral departments on expenditure and investment, and minimal attention to redistribution. The main mechanism for redistribution of capital (as opposed to services) is land reform and the provision of housing subsidies. The latter has been pursued more vigorously than the former, except in Zimbabwe. In Zambia the main question is the strategy to implement and perhaps the will.

The approach to public sector reform in all three cases is currently efficiency-driven. In view of the need to help people to move out of poverty, and the finding that services at village level are very limited, it is important to find an approach which will increase the services available at zero or little extra cost. An emphasis on low-cost but widely dispersed village-level community workers would seem one of the key answers and such approaches should be piloted. In addition the follow-through on decentralisation would result in the freeing of support staff located at meso-levels for service delivery. Costs will remain high if current structures for sectoral services are retained under decentralisation.

Coordination at central level is always complex and difficult, and has not been successful in these case study countries. Current efforts include an Interdepartmental Management Committee in the Free State, and a Capacity Building Coordinating Committee in Zimbabwe, but in general sectoral pressures are much stronger than integrative ones. Evidence from Zimbabwe suggests that it is much easier to achieve coordination at district or meso levels.

Government's willingness to support decentralisation is dependent not only on an anticipation of better services, but also on whether it perceives that it is 'in control'. The strengthening of monitoring systems can help in this and should be part of a push for decentralised management systems and a culture of feedback rather than a top-down imposition.

Part C Types of organisation

Government

Newly-independent states in southern Africa saw the nation state and its government as the key agent for change and for rectifying the colonial legacy of under-development. They thus saw the key roles as 'provider', rather than the more enabling roles of facilitator, or state in partnership. In Zambia and Zimbabwe the role of the state as agent of change has become significantly diluted by of structural adjustment. The loss of state effectiveness as a provider points to the need to enhance impact, as discussed in the final section.

If the state is to adopt facilitation roles, then it needs to learn new skills. One element of facilitation is setting the rules of the game through policies and incentives. South Africa in particular has enacted many 21st century policies drawing on examples from the rest of the world. However its ability to implement them has been very limited, partly since macro policies have not been sufficiently linked to micro level understanding. One example is land reform where 30% of land was supposed to be transferred to new farmers within five years, but the reality is less than 1%.

The skills of public servants to operate in facilitation roles with their clients also need to be enhanced. The SL approach implies understanding the clients, and the key areas where the state can add value and either provide those services, facilitate their provision by others, or provide them in partnership.

Box 1 The Rural District Council Capacity Building Programme in Zimbabwe

This project aims to develop the capacity of all RDCs to plan, implement and manage on a sustainable basis their own district development programmes and to provide and maintain essential services to the rural population. It has three main components:

- Institutional Development Programme (IDP).
- Human Resources Development Programme (HRDP).
- Capital Development Programme.

The IDP also develops a national capacity to support RDCs, Provincial Support Teams and facilitators working with RDCs. The facilitators help to strengthen RDCs through a learning-by-doing approach.

Parastatals

One of the ways that all three governments have tried to promote the state as provider has been by the creation of parastatals, supposedly with a more 'can-do' culture. Under structural adjustment, many were privatised. Meanwhile new ones are being created as executive agencies to take over roles from government, e.g. in transport in South Africa and Roads Boards in Zimbabwe and Zambia. Past problems of efficiency and accountability need to be resolved if they are to have an important role in future.

Private sector

Agriculture is still the overwhelming employer in rural areas in all three countries. The private sector is also the dominant supplier of household and commercial inputs, although this was not previously the case in Zambia where state shops were ubiquitous and the private sector restricted. Liberalisation of agricultural marketing has had different impacts. In Zambia the removal of marketing subsidies resulted in a collapse of production in remote areas with the private sector only taking over adequately in central areas. In Zimbabwe, Marketing Boards competed with the private sector, and production has been maintained. South Africa has removed the extensive structures which supported white commercial farming but it has not put anything in place to support small-scale (black) commercial farming apart from land reform and new schemes of agricultural finance. The lack of domestic purchasing power is restricting the private sector in Zambia, and rural parts of South Africa, although less so in Zimbabwe, where small-farmer driven growth is occurring.

International NGOs

International NGOs including churches are very much in evidence in Zimbabwe and Zambia where they supply many basic services such as mission schools and hospitals. Their lack of local accountability at times arouses suspicion. They are much less strong in South Africa. There is a need to assess their performance against criteria such as:

- commitment to poor people and potential for creativity in service delivery
- potential competition with local NGOs and government for international aid funds
- potential for building capacity of local NGOs⁹
- ability to promote a momentum of change for development

Given their limited impact on policy, their influence on sustainable livelihoods is primarily as a provider, where they compete with government.

National/provincial NGOs

Zimbabwe and Eastern Cape in particular have a strong network of local NGOs. This contrasts with the Free State, which did not experience a major struggle against apartheid. In the Eastern Cape they are playing a very positive role, linking closely with government at strategic level and in service delivery. There is still need to work out mechanisms for outsourcing more services to them.

Community-based organisations (CBOs)

In all places there was evidence of a rich community life. In Zimbabwe and Zambia community-based structures were established to link village with government, although these were seen locally to have limited legitimacy as they competed with traditional authority and were often closely associated with the dominant political party. In South Africa in particular, many have been created to access finance. The Chivi project in Zimbabwe (Box 2) provides a good, but all too rare, example of service providers working to strengthen existing CBOs.

Traditional structures

Traditional structures are common in all the four areas except the Free State and are generally seen by villagers as more legitimate and responsive than local government. The involvement of traditional structures with colonial governments meant that after independence the new governments tried to sideline them, but without success. None have yet a clear way forward, although the Traditional Leaders Bill in Zimbabwe tries to amalgamate traditional structures with local government. It is yet to be seen whether this will work. The community-based planning system suggested earlier may create a legitimate 'bridge' between traditional authority and democratic citizenship.

Projects, programmes and donors

Donor-supported projects and programmes are institutions in their own right, and may become fully-fledged organisations, such as the Integrated Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme in Zimbabwe. There are examples of innovative programmes that are likely to make significant differences to sustainable livelihoods. However some programmes unwittingly cause weakening of local institutions. A study in Zimbabwe (DiP, 1998) found that at least six of 15 programmes were, or were likely to have, negative effects on support of district service delivery, and two out of six on district development planning.

Part D Policy issues

Poverty

All three countries have poverty policies or studies at national level. However, the quality of their implementation is highly variable. In Zimbabwe poverty is addressed through a separate programme rather than being mainstreamed across departments. In South Africa all departments are being asked to account for their contribution to poverty eradication, but with the exception of the Free State which has a Poverty Eradication Strategy, the programmes appear to be more of a shopping list than a coherent programme to eradicate poverty.

Rural development

None of the countries has an official rural development strategy, although South Africa has a National Rural Development Framework and now has a Presidential Initiative on Rural Development focusing on three provinces. The Free State has a provincial strategy, which is at the threshold of implementation. Outside these two strategies there is no guide for the relative priorities across departments, nor a higher vision to guide integration across departments.

Local economic development

Macro-economic management programmes are underway in all countries, but in Zimbabwe have been disrupted by difficult

Box 2 Chivi Project, Zimbabwe

The Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) and their Zimbabwe subsidiary, IT Zimbabwe, were looking for new ways to use technology as an enabler for empowerment. In the early 1990s they started a project in Chivi District, which worked with community groups to develop their capacity to use and manage technology for economic activities. They involved other stakeholders such as the agricultural extension service, Agritex. The capacity building was so successful that one group chairwoman rose to become national secretary of the women's wing of the Zimbabwe Farmers Union. The Chivi Project, together with the nearby GTZ-Contill Project, managed to involve Agritex staff to the point where the approach has become institutionalised within Agritex throughout Masvingo Province and is influencing the training of extension officers nationally.

relations with the IMF/World Bank. A coherent local economic development strategy is needed to complement and refine macro-economic programmes otherwise it is unlikely that there will be growth in incomes and employment in poor rural areas.

Decentralisation

Zambia has adopted a deconcentrated model transferring powers of sectoral departments down to district level¹⁰. South Africa is creating new larger, and development-focused local governments and there is debate about whether they should take on some provincial services. Zimbabwe has progressed farthest with the establishment of rural district councils, and the beginnings of devolution of certain line functions to districts. The RDCCBP (Box 1) is a good model of a learning approach to decentralisation. Coherent implementation programmes become more feasible where they can respond to a clear vision of what a decentralised district should look like.

Capacity-building and training

Despite some successes, there are areas that need strengthening including improved practice in the use of adult learning principles, increased investment in adult literacy and numeracy, and improved capacity-building as part of projects.

Part E Managing change to promote SLs

Prerequisites for promoting SLs include:

- strong and sustained political will
- clear understanding of the clients and their needs
- a very strong understanding of the external environment
- definition of a socio-economic strategy before structure
- a clear policy direction coupled with clear and effective implementation strategy
- a learning process approach, experimentation before routinising
- focused attention by dedicated teams on pilot approaches
- flexibility and responsiveness as the complexity of the change process throws up lessons
- the courage to rethink the organisation's processes
- the ability to use hard and soft authority effectively to enforce change
- a major investment in communication
- a change agent to facilitate the change process

Conclusions

Evidence suggests that the SL approach does help to structure analysis of the support required to assist the poor. Areas that are particularly important include:

- understanding of clients using a holistic analysis of strengths
- understanding of micro-macro linkages
- holistic approaches

For these to happen decentralised approaches are needed, in which the district level acts as the interface between micro-level understanding of clients, with macro-level policies, and provides the key intermediation in terms of matching poor people's preferred outcomes and strategies with appropriate service delivery. RDCCBP provides a positive example from Zimbabwe. At levels higher than district the complexity of achieving effective coordination and integration of services and programmes becomes too great.

There is a significant gap however in the linkages between district and village, and new approaches are needed to community-based planning linked to local government, and to village level service delivery. The community worker concept may well need to be the basis of much wider but more focused service delivery, that is also locally accountable.

National strategies are needed on poverty, rural

development, local economic development and decentralisation, whose design and implementation are based on a real understanding of micro-level realities. Approaches to public sector reform need to consider not just improving efficiency but also effectiveness in eradicating poverty. This will require re-engineering the approach to service delivery and rethinking what are still essentially colonially-derived institutions designed to address small numbers of people, which have been upscaled without being redesigned.

If poverty eradication is to be taken seriously, it is not business-as-usual either in southern Africa, or in donor countries and multilateral institutions. Current policy recipes may address growth but are not satisfactory in addressing poverty. What is needed are joint learning programmes to explore new answers to this challenge, and a willingness to sacrifice redundant policies and structures on both sides so that real impacts can be made.

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Endnotes

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- ² Ministry of Local Government and National Housing, Zimbabwe, the local partner.
- ³ Department of Social Welfare in the Free State, South Africa – the partner in the Free State.
- ⁴ Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, Eastern Cape, South Africa – the partner in the Eastern Cape.
- ⁵ MicroProjects Unit, Zambia. In Zambia the Ministry of Local Government and Housing and Ministry of Community Development and Social Services were the two partners.
- ⁶ Although the emphasis is on the rural context, for simplicity sustainable livelihoods (SL) is used throughout.
- ⁷ The report draws largely from the final report – Khanya (2000).
- ⁸ Where donors are funding programmes to district level.
- ⁹ Although they have a poor record here (see Edwards et al., 1999).
- ¹⁰ Although it is not clear how much fiscal decentralisation is happening.
- ¹¹ For references to case studies and final report, see NRP No. 49.

The authors are indebted to DFID for financial support, but the views expressed here are theirs alone.

ISSN: 1356–9228

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